



Family Caregivers
of British Columbia

— Let us help —

KEEPING A CAREGIVING DIARY: THE BENEFIT OF JOURNALING

By Rick Lauber, author of *The Caregiver's Guide for Canadians*
and *The Successful Caregiver's Guide*

A beautiful thing about writing is that it is meant to be enjoyable. Free writing can be a wonderful exercise to get you started. Sit down and write about whatever comes to mind.

Ask any family caregiver about his/her experiences and you'll likely hear these defined as "stressful", "demanding", and even "unbearable". With helping my own aging parents, you won't hear any argument from me that assuming new responsibilities, finding balance, and facing a loved one's physical/mental decline can easily add up to become too much to handle. But what is the answer? Finding a means to cope.



While many different coping strategies exist, my solution was to journal. I have long enjoyed writing and this struck me as a logical option as my parents aged and my caregiving responsibilities began to weigh more heavily. Writing about my thoughts, feelings, and experiences proved to be a good choice as a safe and effective means to help me better manage.

If you are drawn to writing (or would like to experiment with it), here are a few recommendations to get you started and keep you on track:

RESIST WRITING THE WHOLE STORY:

Opening the floodgates completely about your caregiving role is both unnecessary and unwise. Instead, focus on just one event, memory, or feeling instead to not become overwhelmed. Personally, I have written about a family Christmas dinner, my participation in a bereavement group, and my father's favourite hiking hat. Discussing only one topic, rather than many, is easier for both the writer and the reader. What you say will be far more important than how much you say.



OVERCOME WRITER'S BLOCK:

Writers, at all levels, can struggle with facing a blank page. If you don't know where to begin or what to write next, don't force the issue. A beautiful thing about writing is that it is meant to be enjoyable. Free writing can be a wonderful exercise to get you started. Sit down and write about whatever comes to mind. Don't edit. This doesn't have to be grammatical correct or even make sense ... it will often stir up other ideas.

Another answer may be distraction. I like to walk. Breathing in fresh air and getting some exercise can often generate writing ideas. Yet another method is to ask yourself the journalistic "5 W's" (who, what, where, when, why, and how) to get started. Prompting questions could be, "What did you do with Mom/Dad today?" "Who helped you the most today to provide care?" or "How did you feel during your visit with Mom/Dad?"

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This program was invaluable. It really brought me back from the brink emotionally; I was feeling like I was headed for a crash. I'm so grateful! Thank you.

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DECIDE TO SHARE - OR NOT TO SHARE:

What you choose to write is entirely your choice – as is what you choose to do with your writing. Keeping your personal thoughts (and, perhaps, uncomfortable caregiving matters) private is understandable, but I would urge you to share. After starting with personal journaling, I realized that what I had experienced and learned from could help many others as prospective, new, or even current caregivers. Nervously, I chose to submit my stories for publication in a local senior's newspaper. These stories became more frequent and developed as the platforms for my two

published caregiver's guidebooks! Going public with what you write is not obligatory but doing so can raise awareness of caregiving issues and help others better help you.

Grab a pen and notebook (or your laptop computer)! Writing it out – or typing it out – can be enjoyable, therapeutic, and valuable to your own mental health.

Rick Lauber has written two books, *Caregiver's Guide for Canadians* and *The Successful Caregiver's Guide* as valuable resources for prospective, new, and current caregivers. He has also served as a voluntary Board of Directors member for Caregivers Alberta. www.ricklauber.com.



The Intensive Journal Workshop for Caregivers is offered at various times throughout the year.

Testimonials from past participants:

"I always left each week's workshop with a sense of peace and empowerment, as though I could deal with my circumstances in a positive and constructive way."

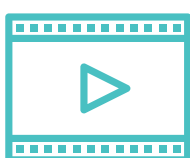
"Amazing workshop, with a great and well-experienced facilitator, it will help to improve insight into ourselves and build inner resilience to become more engaged caregiver."

For information about this workshop, go to [this page](#), or contact Lycia at cgsupport@familycaregiversbc.ca

FURTHER RESOURCES:



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