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Trigger Warning

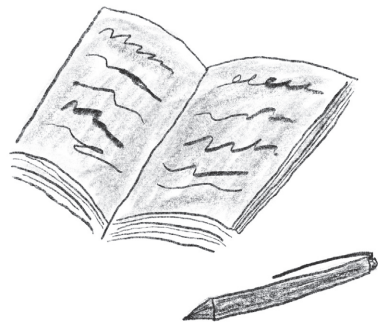
This book might contain contents that you may find upsetting or distressing. If any of the themes or subject matters do trigger you, ask for help. And please do – asking for help is the best thing I ever did (and still do!). At the back of the book you'll find some resources to support you if you need them.

It should go without saying, but sometimes you do have to state the obvious: everybody is different, every day is different, every circumstance is different. So although writing works for me, it may not work for you, and that is OK! There could be something else that clicks and helps you connect with yourself. So don't take it to heart or be frustrated with yourself if this isn't for you or you don't get the results you wanted. It's my loss but your gain if you go off to find that painting, baking, boxing or learning an instrument does the trick. Whatever works. Do it.

Hello

I have written this book to show you how writing can help with your well-being. I believe writing can improve your mood, give you that fuzzy feeling inside, help you think clearly, calm you down, pleasantly distract you from a bad feeling, showcase your joy, boost your energy or simply give you a reason to hold on. To be proud. To seize the day.

Inside this book are writing exercises that invite you to use memory and emotion as prompts for creating your own material. They are simply invitations. They are doors that you do not have to walk through. You do not have to do anything that makes you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or icky. These exercises are to promote well-being, not impact you negatively. Quite simply, if you are not enjoying the book, put it down. I mean it. It's OK to stop reading if it becomes a chore. A pain or pressure. Or annoying. No thank you. Bye.



Introduction

My name is Laura, hi, and I have written since I was able to wrap my chubby baby hand round a pencil. I'm not the best at writing. I don't have an impressive vocabulary. I'm not great at spelling and grammar; I get my words in a twist and a tangle. I'm not brilliant at building plots or developing characters – and yet I can't imagine a life without writing. In fact, I feel anxious and weird if I don't write. Like a part of me is missing, unanchored . . . like without it I could come undone. Writing is my touchstone, a family home I keep returning to, like a comfort food, a cosy bed, a base. Writing makes me feel safe.

Writing makes me feel like me.

And I think it could help you feel like you, too. When you and everything around you is changing, and different people want you to be different things at different times, it can be hard to remember who you are. What it feels like to be you, and what it means. It's great to try out different ways of being, but to keep hold of yourself sometimes needs some magic. Writing can be one of those magic tricks, a way of keeping yourself close, a way to remind yourself of who you are and to get to know yourself better – and to love that person too.



That's why I picked up a pen as a child: to process life stuff. To write about how life feels and try to understand it. When my parents broke up. When my heart broke. When my grandma died. When I was scared of moving house. When my feelings felt too big to digest. Writing is a map. A thermometer.

As a child I kept booklets. I was an early riser and would fill my mornings writing and drawing. My dad would handmake notebooks for me before I knew

what a notebook even was. They were simple – paper sheets stapled or hole-punched and put together with treasury tags. In these books I would scribble, doodle and scrapbook. I would draw. Collage. Make comics and create stories. Write poems and letters.

As I got older, the notebooks became more ‘serious’ and personal. Graphs of my growing pains in the form of terrible poetry, and lyrics for my imaginary punk-grunge-rock band that didn’t exist (and yet I was the lead singer, of course, even though I couldn’t sing. Guys, I would write raps. Can you believe it? Actual RAPS. I mean, what kind of band was this and who did I think I was? Please. Raps that I would read DOWN THE PHONE to the boy I fancied. Raps that would go on for MINUTES. To zero beat). I didn’t play football, I couldn’t play an instrument, I didn’t have the balance for gymnastics, I wasn’t into computer games . . . so I wrote: pages and pages of poems, scripts, comics, doodles, letters, scrawls about anything and everything. Let me show you . . .



You're sitting in class. At home your parents are fighting constantly, your bedroom is a mess and you don't have any pocket money. You have outgrown your clothes and you don't have the money to buy the clothes you want to buy to look cool. You fancy someone who doesn't love you back and isn't quite, unsurprisingly, ready to run away and have babies with you yet. Which is perfect for you because you still haven't kissed anyone and that's terrifying for you also. Your best friend has been sitting next to somebody else at lunchtime, and you've heard they're going to the cinema this weekend and they haven't invited you because the film is rated 18 and you're a goody-goody two shoes and so you just won't get it. The feeling makes your belly lurch. Makes your hairs stand up. Stings and prickles your cheeks like you've been slapped. Slapped round the heart. School's not for you. Maybe you don't get what the teacher is even on about right now. It's all going over your head. You feel stupid. You feel alone. You see adverts with other kids your age in them and they are glossy and smiley and happy and eating crunchy cereal and going off to school with a bright red backpack. Why can't you be like that? What is wrong with you? You cringe at the past; you're scared of the future. You worry about your existence. About death. You're unhappy with your body. And it's changing. Gross.

You're like a time bomb, waiting to explode. You're unhappy with your hair. Why is it always greasy? You hate your dumpy school shoes. You took the risk of scuffing them up in the hope your parents would notice and agree to buy you a fresh pair that you can actually stand but they don't, and now you've got ugly AND scuffed-up shoes. And you're dreading exams and the long walk where you're scared of seeing the mean kids from that other school again who once threw chips at you and laughed at you all the way home. Home, where there aren't even any good snacks.

What do you do? You write about it. You write. You write until your fingers hurt. Until the paper burns. Write until your eyes blur and your words spin and the stories fly. You write your heart into a new rhythm. You write to the time of your pulse. You write your belly into butterflies. You write yourself to sleep.

I would often fall asleep mid-writing, with notebooks at the end of my bed like a frenzied FBI agent trying to solve a mystery. I was trying to crack a case. What was this all about? Why was I even here?

(Spoiler alert: the case is still unsolved.)

But you don't stop, you never stop; you write yourself into tomorrow. Until the next day and the day after that.

Look, you might not see yourself as a great writer – you might not even think of yourself as a writer at all! But I still think this book is for you. You might have picked this book up because you love to write. Me too. You might have picked this book up because you love to read – well, me too. You might just love words. The way they sound. The way they look on the page. You might not have any reason at all for opening up this book and yet here we are. You might have been given this book from a friend. Or maybe your old Nana Doris got it for you for Christmas. Oh, hey, Nana Doris, who didn't know what else to get you and you're like, oh, cheers, great, thanks a lot. I would have preferred the socks. You might be like, you don't know me at all. Thanks but no thanks – writing is NOT for me. Books are for losers, man. Stories are dry.

Even though you yourself are a story.

You might have picked up this book because you've been working on a piece of writing in your spare time, a massive epic adventure story, and want to flex. Maybe you're trying to brush up on your writing techniques? Maybe you've always wanted to write? Or maybe it's your story? Maybe you feel like your mood has been a bit flat recently and you don't know why; you want to take care of yourself and are trying new things? Maybe you need to let

it all out, express yourself? Find clarity? Maybe it's the opposite – you want to take your mind off it all, and just have fun and play. Maybe you're just looking for ways to busy yourself and find a hobby? Maybe you're thinking of starting a journal or diary? Maybe you're just exploring your creativity? Maybe you just . . . want to write? To pick a pen up like you did when you were a child? Before you cared what people thought. Maybe you want to tell a story and don't know how or where to begin? Maybe you're just thinking . . . why not?

Maybe you feel like a bottle of fizzy drink about to explode? You need to release. Maybe you haven't listened to yourself for a long time and that chat is long overdue? Maybe you're in pieces, or going through something tough. Maybe somebody you love is. Maybe you've always lived alongside something difficult or are apprehensive about something ahead? Maybe you're trying to unpick a knot in your mind?

Maybe you're trying to write yourself out of something hard?

Well, if you are, for that I am sorry.

But the really good news is that there are things you can do to comfort yourself along the way.

And if you're going that way anyway . . . you may as well write about it, right?

apply the tools to something else, like art or music. It's your ride.

And yes, I know, it's quite audacious to write a book on writing. Especially as I don't have all the answers. You might be dubious, I get that. In case you're worried that I'm some fraudster con artist: as well as writing for myself, I have taught creative writing for over ten years in various forms to all ages, in and out of the UK. That said, through teaching I have learned A LOT more than I've taught. And I'm still learning too. However, some things, like writing, you cannot simply teach – but you can hold spaces for it to happen and you can hold hands along the way too. You can't hear or see me saying the words next to you, but know that I am here! And I am not the 'teacher'. We are doing this side by side.

Anybody is welcome to use this book. (Well, everybody except the negative voice of self-criticism who – sorry, you aren't welcome here, mate, access denied.) If you're young, EVEN BETTER – you will have a head start to a healthy head! You are helping yourself by beginning.



One
WHY WRITE?

'I write because it helps me to understand
the world and myself a little better.'

NIKESH SHUKLA



We all have our own reasons for writing. Have you ever thought about why you write? Or are thinking about writing? Maybe it's an invisible pull that you can't even put into words. Writing can help us express ourselves, process our thoughts, break down big feelings, communicate, connect, digest and make sense of ourselves and others. That doesn't mean the writing itself has to make sense. Maybe you don't know the reason you want to write, and you really don't need one either. What is important is that you write for you.

Other than writing for a career, here are some reasons people might pick up a pen:

Connection.

Acceptance.

Fun.

Growth.

Freedom.

Change.

Activism.

Exploration.

To entertain.

Discovery.

Escape.

Understanding.

Silence.

To be heard.

Release.

Driven by an

Peace.

emotion or feeling.

Praise.

Avoidance.

Proof they exist.

Desire.

Curiosity.

Urge.

Ambition.	To problem-solve.
Relief.	To process.
Forgiveness.	To digest.
Spirituality.	To push boundaries.
Meditation.	To challenge.
Expression.	To cleanse.
Distraction.	Reinvention.
Boredom.	Role play.
Comfort.	To tell the truth.
Company.	To feel better.

Author Clover Stroud says she creates things that help her **‘communicate what life feels like’**.

Novelist Haruki Murakami says, **‘I have only one reason to write novels, and that is to bring the dignity of the individual soul to the surface and shine a light upon it.’**

Poet and novelist Salena Godden says when she began her novel *Mrs Death Misses Death* she was **‘in a very dark place and looking for the light’**.

Poet Lemn Sissay says that **‘Poetry is the voice at the back of the mind. I write to express and interpret the world around me through that voice.’**



This sounds like the ‘writers’ of the world are doing it for us. But, look, Hilary Mantel describes writing as **‘running in the imagination’**, which I just love. I’d quite like to get breathless on the page. I’d like to see where my words take me. It makes writing feel alive. In the same way that fancying a jog around the park doesn’t mean you have to enter the Olympics, journaling before bed doesn’t mean you have to write 100,000 words and go on to win the Booker Prize.

You can just do this for you. Quiet. Cosy. In your own place at your own pace.

Nobody has to know, ever.

Writing is NOT a competitive sport.

I was setting myself free. I learned that trying to run from the unknown only made me more afraid of it. I learned to lean into the unknown; I practised making myself comfortable in the discomfort. And so I wrote. It didn't have to be good and it didn't have to make sense.

I write to remind myself of me

My writing voice is my friend. I know it might sound silly, but to neglect her means I'm not listening to myself. My writing is that girl who pops her head round the door and says 'Guess what?' She holds my hand, tells me jokes and stories. She holds me close and says, 'Together we can do this. I'm with you, as I always have been. You are not alone.'

I write to release feelings

When I was going through a difficult time, there were lots of things I felt I couldn't or shouldn't say out loud. And yet on the page, on my phone or typed up, I felt I could get everything off my chest and that made me feel better. On the page I could tell the truth, repeat myself as many times as I needed, swear, rant and rage! I also felt that after writing I was better to be around – lighter – and that I had the capacity to be there for my loved ones because I had done something for myself.

I write to remember things

Writing is also INCREDIBLE for memory. When I was revising for exams at school (hmmm, not that often, but when it did happen) information went into my brain quicker and clearer if I wrote down what I was learning. Writing can help us locate memories, process events and make some sense of the messy blur of life.

I write down MY version of the story

Writing my truth down about the bad things that happened felt like mining my way through the pain to tunnel myself out of the darkness. Writing was evidence. It gave me a clearer understanding, a narrative that put my events in order. Perspective. And eventually that was very powerful; it helped me draw a line, accept and make peace with the past.

I write to escape

Writing was a welcome escape. We can't always drop everything and run away to a remote beach (even if we could afford to). But with a pen, even just for fifteen minutes, I was able to escape and distract myself. I was boundless and free. Writing can be a welcome distraction.

And please don't fret that writing here will use your writing energies up. Creativity doesn't get used up like a jar of peanut butter and sorry all shops have run out of peanut butter for ever and the factory is closed. Creativity breeds creativity. If anything, to create creates more.

When you create, you can feel it. Others will too. Once you begin making, you will be noticeably zingy, electric, bright, light and sparky to hang around with. You will have a glow.



So why do I write?

As you know, I have never not written. I don't know a life without writing. I have written for fun. For my job. For expression. For freedom. For joy.

Until that pen of mine became more than just ink – it became a life jacket . . .

Whatever your difficult stuff is – and I will explain mine in a bit – it is only by living it that we can begin to understand it. I am not saying that writing about difficult stuff will overnight magic you better or fix a situation. And I am definitely not saying that writing or creativity is medicine by itself. But writing about it *alongside* it, for me, became the only option. I wrote like my life depended on it, boy. And when I wrote, I felt like

To work through an issue

Even just the very act of writing made me feel like I was doing something to actively problem-solve, to at least try to feel better. It also allowed me to track my feelings and see how far I'd come so I could look back at my recovery. This gave me agency, control and even a tiny particle of power. I saw writing like de-knotting a bunch of tangled-up fairy lights that have been stored in the dusty attic of my head.

One day I would be able to plug myself in and – AHHHHHHH!!! – now we have light.



To connect

Storytelling is all about connection. It is an agreement between the teller and the listener – even if that listener is simply the paper you are writing on, the walls of your bedroom that look on as you write, your cat snoozing by your feet or the almighty wind. It is still a contract, a promise of some kind, saying, 'I care and I'll always be here'. It is about trust.

Listening is so important. In fact, it's something I'm still trying to get better at; it is a skill. Listen, listen, listen. And to listen well, actively, is a gift! And it takes practice. But one of the things that really helped me get better was sharing: sharing my story and listening to others'.

Listening to other people's stories inspired me to do the same, encouraged me to tell my experience, allowed me to talk. Helped me to know that I wasn't alone.

I feel connected, empathetic, kinder, more patient, more understanding and understood. And without story, without experience, what is life?

And so, writing made me see that I am grateful for my difficult experiences. It has changed me for the better.

Sur-thrive-al

Us humans are designed to survive. It's our instinct. It's our calling. It's our sole purpose: to exist.

SURVIVE, kid, that's all you have to do. And when you are experiencing something challenging or difficult all you WANT to do, all you maybe CAN do, is drag your animal body through it. All you want is to eat again, sleep again, be yourself again . . .

When you overcome something challenging or difficult, phew, you've got two options.

Option One: you can go on with your life and move forward. That's great, absolutely WELL DONE YOU!

Or Option Two: you can USE all that stuff. All that pain and heartbreak, all that loss, sadness, upset and grief, the confusion and complication – to your advantage; you can learn from it, grow from it, thrive from it. Make it YOURS. OWN it, celebrate yourself and what you've done. You can talk about it,

write about it, help others with it and throw yourself into the light. (This does not mean you have to share it.)

A word on mindfulness

A lot of this might sound like or remind you of ‘mindfulness’. A lot of the writing process is mindfulness, naturally. You write to clear your head; it can be calming and relaxing, cathartic and cleansing. But sometimes it is **HEAVY, HARD WORK**. Something that is mentally and physically exhausting. I sometimes find writing to be quite aerobic! I mean it, sometimes I actually sweat (more on that, oh don’t you worry).

I struggle with the word ‘mindfulness’. I find prescriptive mindfulness does the opposite for me. It feels unnatural to be sitting there in silence, being still with my thoughts bumbling their way around my head, boxing my brains in. Forcing myself to lie down quietly when I felt I should be doing something, being somewhere. Sometimes, when I was in recovery, mindfulness felt like being locked in on a private candlelit dinner date with my mental illness – oh, cooey, no thank you.

So writing, for me, is a perfect way of combining mindfulness with doing – rather than sitting and waiting to get better I was processing while writing. When I wrote, I felt like I was filing my thoughts and

feelings. I was basically becoming my own therapist, talking it through, hashing it out, throwing it around.

Writing it to death, basically.

Mindfulness simply means being in the present, in the moment, doing something for you that is beneficial to your well-being. And writing is just that.

So why should you write?

Everybody can write. EVERYBODY. You don't need writing experience. You don't need qualifications, an elaborate vocabulary, A-star grammar or a fancy desk. All you need is a brain and a heart to write the guts out of something. And it doesn't have to be perfect. But it has to be you.

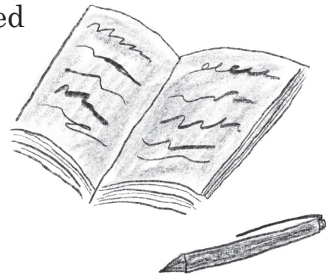
Here are some truths about writing and why it is the most perfect hobby to take up.

The time is now

You can never be too young or too old to begin.

You don't need anything to get started

You don't need a ridiculous feathered quill or a brand-new shiny MacBook or even a brand-new expensive notebook (although that is a nice feeling). You don't need excuses. You don't need peace and quiet or a break-the-bank fancy chair. You just need your brain and your heart.



It's free

Writing costs nothing. Financially it can be pencil-and-notebook cheap if you want it to be. The only thing writing potentially costs is your time, and there are worse ways to spend your precious time. If you aren't quite in the headspace to get that mammoth twelve-part fantasy draft down just yet, there are exercises in this book as short as a minute. Even five minutes a day is enough to improve your writing muscles, reboot your flow and recharge you.

You can pick it up and put it down

Writing works around you. You can pick it up at any point in your life and then put it back down again – it flows in that way. You don't have to prepare anything. It is a jack-in-a-box art form that springs to life on your command. Leave it for a while and it's like riding a bike: you'll always remember how to do it. Write every day, however, and it's your secret superpower, your gift.

You can take it with you anywhere

I've got nothing against the double bass or a surfboard, but could you imagine carting those things around the world? Writing is the most lightweight, compact hobby that can live in your pocket if you choose.



You don't have to prove yourself

You don't need a cover letter listing a thousand reasons why you should begin writing. Writing has no grade system. You don't have to audition. You just show up.

You don't even need to have anything to write about

This is not a trauma contest! You don't need a gritty subject matter or to have experienced something dark and harrowing. This can be light and easy-breezy too. See what comes and there is beauty and wonder to be found in the everyday and in our imaginations.

It hurts nobody

Writing is not a bloodsport.

It is a conversation but . . . with yourself.

It is a form of communication but . . . it is silent.

It is a form of communion but . . . nobody else has to be there.

You can be loud on the page. You can shout.

You can scream. You can swear.

You are working, you are sharing and you are healing, and you are doing it all from the inside out in the privacy of your own space. You never have to show your work to a single soul. It belongs completely to you. You hold the pen.



It belongs to you

We touch on sharing and ownership of work later on, but know that all your writing belongs to you. It is YOURS. This is really important. When you're young it's not always easy to find anything that is sacred. When I was growing up I shared a bedroom with my sister – once she was tired the light had to go off, so that stopped my writing! If I wanted to sit in a library to write I'd have to ask permission from my parents. If I wanted to sit in a cafe, I had to ask for money from my parents for a cup of tea. Growing up is full of compromise, conditions, repercussions, sharing and asking – but not here on the page. No, this is yours, so let the page be your home – and you can decorate it how you like.

It can help

Writing wasn't the only thing that got me well, but it was a big one. I returned to the page how a yogi does a yoga mat. My writing book became my sanctuary. Telling my story unzipped my armour and allowed me to be myself.

You don't need to worry about . . .

Spelling and grammar. Word count. Deadlines or what anybody will think. Don't even worry about the quality of the writing itself, please. This not about being judgemental, competitive, self-critical

or a martyr – that’s unhelpful and gets in the way. This is about being kind to ourselves. This is about holding ourselves close. Getting a feeling across, not a spelling test. YUCK.

You can do as much or as little as you like. The exercises in this book are only prompts to get you going, so do with them as you wish! This is not an exam. This is unjudgemental, free-spirited, boundless, unadulterated, triumphant real talk!

What you might need

For your headspace, privacy and clarity, you might want to get yourself a notebook (nothing fancy) or folder (an actual physical folder or on your desktop) to keep everything together. Keep it somewhere safe and close and easy to find.

You can write by hand or on a device and on or with anything. I actually wrote my memoir (more about this later) on my phone! You don’t get marked down for not writing your love poems on a typewriter. If you don’t have access to writing material or are unable to write manually, you can record your voice, write in your mind, whisper your words or bloody sing them from the rooftops. You could wear a pair of satin pyjamas and ask your little brother to type them up for you as you recite your wordy descriptions from a velvet chaise longue while eating a box of truffles. I don’t care how, just **Get. It. Done.**

If you find writing about yourself as yourself too uncomfortable or gross or weird or upsetting, there are exercises in this book in which you can disguise, conceal and ribbon your personal thoughts and feelings. Trust me, it's how most writers write.

What happened to me

How could I expect you to feel safe writing your experience without sharing mine? I'll let you in on why I can truly say that writing down what happened to me saved my life.

In 2018 I was hit with a severe and rare mental illness called post-partum psychosis. The illness was triggered by the birth of my son – yes, the most natural thing in the world, childbirth. I had experienced a healthy ‘normal’ pregnancy and have no history of mental illness. I had no idea anybody could get so mentally unwell after something as primal as having a baby.

The illness's symptoms came on hard and fast and were cruel and extreme. I experienced delusions, insomnia, racing thoughts, paranoia, mania, intrusive thoughts, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. (Sounds dreamy, right?)

I mean, I couldn't even eat! And I can always eat. As you can imagine, it wasn't what I pictured

having my first baby would look like. It's just not something they show in the movies and books when you're meant to be the 'happiest' you've ever felt.

The illness left me scared. Confused. Alone. Desperate. Stalked by shame and guilt and totally heartbroken. Completely lost and out of my depth. Rock-bottom. With self-esteem below zero. Every day felt like weightlifting, climbing a mountain, fighting a fire. I believed I would never recover, that the illness would swallow me whole, that I'd never make it out alive. That I would never live to tell the tale . . .

And then I did the best thing I could have possibly done. I asked for help. This is the bit I'm most proud of. Because it takes a lot of courage to say you can't cope, that you can't manage, that you're scared of something nobody else can see or hear or feel or know or understand.

It got worse before it got better, but asking for help got me on my path of recovery. And for the first time I felt relief. I began to see a faint light at the end of the dark tunnel.



My recovery wasn't linear – it was bumpy, boy. I was like a moth at a light bulb, trying, hoping that each day I'd wake up and feel a little better.

I wanted to draw a line under it all and pretend it had never happened. The last thing I wanted to do was relive it. I didn't want to think about it or talk about it. I didn't want it to define me, shape me, bruise me; I didn't want it to change me. I wanted my personality back. I wanted to feel happy. To be able to eat my dinner in peace. To laugh like I used to. I just wanted to wear my nice clothes and do lovely things – play with my little boy, go back to writing stories, see my friends, read a book, dance to music, cook yummy food. To say 'I'm good' and actually mean it. To feel 'normal'.

I felt that writing it all down would be like kicking a wasps' nest.

Whereas I used to believe my imagination was my superpower, I was now afraid of it because it had turned on me and stabbed me in the back. I no longer trusted my mind – it wasn't that safe space I ran off to dream in; it was no longer my escape. It was an enemy. My psychosis knew all my weak spots and had used them against me! Plus, I felt like a zombie too. I had no energy and couldn't concentrate I truly believed that my mental illness had robbed my creativity, inspiration and instinct.

I painted a smile on and said out loud that I was ‘doing great’. But it was a lie. I threw away the clothes I had worn when I was sick, moved the furniture around. End of story. Goodbye. But hard stuff and painful memories and experience don’t always work like that. You can’t run or hide from them. They always get you in the end . . .

What could I do?

One day, a bit like prodding a sore ulcer with my tongue, I found my story was bubbling to the surface, erupting, like an overflowing pan of boiling pasta. I couldn’t keep this inside for ever. And so I began to write. But very slowly and very gently, bit by bit. I tried to jot down just a little about what had happened, a few words here and there. There was no secret – I just began to write.

Where did I start? The beginning, I suppose.

And then I’d stop . . . and check for the monster. Is it coming back?

The words added up into sentences, into lines, into pages . . . and once I started I couldn’t stop. I ended up writing 275,000 words in just three months. With a newborn on my chest.

And afterwards . . . well, I felt a hell of a lot better to be honest.

For the first time in months I felt like I could breathe. Like I had removed about seventeen layers of unwanted clothing. I felt free. I felt liberated.

I felt really brave. I felt really, truly proud of myself. These were also feelings I hadn't felt in a very long time. And then I started to see the illness differently. My perspective had changed because I had processed it and altered my view; I saw what I had overcome and felt MORE proud.

But even better than that: I was no longer afraid. I felt in control. I had insight. I realised I was a warrior (just wearing an oversized pink jumper and my sister's cupcake socks instead of armour). And the monster seemed to not dissolve exactly, but fall asleep next to me. In fact, the monster almost began to protect me. It reminded me how far I'd come. I began to accept that monster of mine.

And then that gave me the courage to share my writing and that was even better. Because then guess what happened? Other stories came back to me. And hearing and sharing stories only helped to colour in my recovery even more. Then I felt part of something greater – something universal. And that reassured me and comforted me. I felt like I had written myself out of something difficult. And that empowered me.

Every time I get a positive reaction from my experience, I feel lifted. I feel less scared of my illness. I feel like the experience gets filed in my brain under 'NOT SO GREAT BUT IT WAS MANAGEABLE' rather than 'ARGHHHHHHH!'

THAT WAS AWFUL'. And that, for me, means I am more likely to move forward with my life without the fear of it coming back.

I realised that I'd always written myself out of difficult challenges. That I'd always transformed my pain and joy into my work. That my pen has always been my friend. My passport. My therapy. My holiday. My medicine. My adventure. My time-travelling machine. My filing cabinet. My identity. My diary. My home. My heart.