

(Writing as a Mindfulness Practice)

During this time, writing became part of my mindfulness practice. I had been engaged in many kinds of professional writing for 20 years. In the midst of the first year of these personal challenges, I was granted a sabbatical to pursue a research and professional development project. At that time, I joined a writing group — eight women colleagues who met monthly to read one another's writing and to offer feedback and suggestions. A structure emerged over time. We took turns hosting monthly meetings in our homes. The first hour was for a potluck meal and conversation. This was followed by three hours to discuss writing, giving our full attention to one piece, one writer at a time. Over time, the genres of shared writing diversified. There were drafts of book chapters, journal articles, conference proposals, reports, and books. Later, there were also poems, personal memoir pieces, and reflections. Our writing group became a safe place where we could share with one another from the heart through our writing, knowing our readers would hold the space and honor the writer, as well as the writing.

I began to write privately about some of my deep wounds from my youth as a way to hold and acknowledge these between my therapy sessions. I pieced together revised understandings about my family, connecting people and events from the long family narrative. As I actively cultivated my own presence with my daughters, parents, students, and

others, I began to witness powerful, unexpected responses and very real moments of authentic connection. I often felt compelled to get these stories down, to document what seemed like profound shifts in my way of being in my life.

Eventually, I decided to share some of my personal writing reflections with my writing group. Writing group became a place where more of my real self could come out. I could present stories of my vulnerability. My personal writing pieces allowed me to invite key others to bear witness to these parts of myself, and to my story as well. The first time I shared a piece of writing that engaged with deeply shameful, painful psychic content, it was received with loving attention and reverence. The next day, I wrote to my writing sisters, acknowledging how they impacted my writing practice.

“...Had I not been a member of this writing group, I would not have been writing at all about my experiences through this difficult period. So, while you may think you were not with me, or supportive of me through these dark months, of course you were. You were the ones who modeled and encouraged and taught me, that whatever life brings, “You could write about it.” Each time I sat here at my computer or pulled my pen and notebook from my bag at the coffee shop, to feel, to think, to wonder — confused or scared or angry or sobbing — you were all right there, whispering, “Write about it.”

The act of writing slowed me down. I could look deeply at what was presenting inside, to feel what arose, and stay with the experience. I would often re-read my pieces, to reconnect with my tender heart, to witness bodily sensations, and to practice my way back to feeling as a way of knowing. In my writing group, I continue to experience first-hand how our shared texts create a context for presence, for risk taking, for deep listening, and for true connection.