



THERAPEUTIC WRITINGS

Patient stories and experiences shared in the unifying belief that we are not alone in our healing journey.

VOLUME 2
MAY 2026

THE THERAPEUTIC WRITINGS PROJECT

A group of patients facilitated by a provider regularly write about and review their experiences with the benefit of reflection and support from the group. The process of writing, revising, discussing and presenting individual experiences and personal reflection during group is part of an evidence-based therapeutic process and is intended to augment each patient's course of treatment. Some patients participating in this work may choose to submit their writings to share publicly.

PCHC has approved the request to publish content generated from this group, in accordance with legal requirements for publishing protected patient information and within established guiding principles.

Disclaimer

The content in these writings includes language suitable for an 18+ audience. Content described in these writings may be sensitive in nature and could include information that triggers or reminds the reader of a difficult personal experience. Please proceed with this in mind, taking care of your individual needs.

What topic or cause ignites a fire in you?

I did comment in jest of the smoldering death, but in death we can no longer plead for help.

There isn't another phone call to be made, no more texts to a friend to be sent. You are without the freedom to ask your mom for a hug. Suicide is the end.

When I was in high school, Suicide, and mental health hit our five-town district with catastrophic effect. In my 4 years, we lost 5 kids. Yes, they were my peers at the time, all of us of differing ages, but I think it's important to say; they were kids. Teenagers, without the tools or know how to get the help they so desperately needed. It started with one, and not unlike a sickness it spread. "Oh hey, he did it, and everyone noticed; I can do it too." So, it continued, year after year. A pandemic of rampant suicide, and the awareness still wasn't there. Yes, we cried, yes, we mourned, yet nothing more than a, "Please reach out to your councilors" was really given. Sure, we received a pamphlet, a stand-alone lesson in health class, but still the awareness wasn't enough.

It got so bad the FBI came to investigate. Yet this was still some taboo, dark secret. How naive of us all. Scream it from the rooftops, be the wall that stops each and every one of the seven hundred children and asks, "Hey, how are you, let's take a little walk." Ask the fifteen-year-old whose head is always in a book, "Any plans after school today?"

Witness the frown and be present.

I lost friends in high school. Later in life, I would lose family.

No words known to me can accurately describe to you the sound my aunt made when she grasped my mom, her sister, when Megan died. Her daughter had taken her own life, and her wails to this day echo on my mind. It is an ever-imprinted sound that I will never forget.

Today might seem daunting, but it is never as daunting as no tomorrow. Tomorrow you can wake up, you can try again. Be aware, know yourself. If that bottle of pills is looking at you like a good idea, create a barrier. No matter how small that barrier might seem, make it harder. Put them in your glovebox in your car. Barriers work, lock boxes work.

My promise today is to ask a friend, "Hey, are you okay?" Because the difference is in our hearts, our relationships with other people, other human beings. Accidents happen, words are spoken in anger and heavy emotions; but tomorrow is an easy apology as long as tomorrow can happen.

I beg and plead of you. Don't let tomorrow be The End.

Are gut decisions to be trusted or not

That sick little feeling at the tip of my tongue, bringing chills up my spine to the top of my skull. I know this is a bad situation, but how? It's because I've developed a keen sense of self, I know when energy feels helpful and healthy, and when it does not.

I once had the misfortune of meeting a Bad Man, later to find out his crimes. Horrific, senseless, cruel, depraved, I can't put into words the atrocities he committed because I don't want to speak them from my lips. I knew NONE of this when we met for a date.

Alone with a psychopath you pick up on things. The way his gaze doesn't quite meet yours despite looking directly into your eyes, his hollow laugh. But all the same the way he speaks of women and love seems tempting. It's all too..... Normal. Average. Hiding in plain sight is how they live. But underneath, there it always is: Rage. It's like I can sense it bubbling up from beneath the surface, feel the heat of it hidden under that handsome smile.

I asked him to leave eventually. No love from me on this date tonight, and I will ALWAYS be grateful I listened. My gut told me what my mind didn't know yet: you're in the presence of Evil.

I listened to my gut, and it saved possibly my life. If I had just gone with the evening like it was going, who knows where I would be or if I would be alive.

In short: yes, gut feelings are to be trusted. It's your subconscious telling you something that it's figured out before the conscious mind has. We get distracted by facts or manners or trying to be polite. But when you know, you know. It's up to you to listen.

It's a skill just like balance or meditation, to be practiced and honed. But once you have it, you have it. It's hard to not pick up on energies and intentions once you start to pay attention. The gut feeling is just a path to self-assuredness, and listening to it can save your life in more ways than one.

What affirmations, quotes or song lyrics inspire you?

FIND OUT

What makes you kinder
What opens you up and
Brings out the most loving
Generous and unafraid
Version of you
And go after those things
As if nothing
Else matters
Because actually nothing does.

I found this quote on Pinterest. I have a whole board on Pinterest just for quotes. I love this quote because it makes me look within myself.

It makes me reflect on whom I am besides all the trauma.

I think people want to be a better version of themselves but those of us with trauma, we get stuck. We feel less than most people, like bottom feeders. At least I do. I'm not trying to be rude to any of you.

I want to figure out who am I besides a mom and wife? Who am I at the core of my existence?

I've always put everyone else's needs and wants above my own. I don't make myself a priority.

With this major neck surgery, recovery has been both amazing and frustrating. I have had a lot of sit time. My mind has had extra time to think. Simple and major things I could do before now I have to patiently retrain my nerve signals.

I've graduated from PT which I did - myself.

I will have OT for a while as we retrain my nerve signals from my neck to my hands. Even writing is difficult. Fine motor skills in my hands suck. I need breaks often. It's a battle of putting my physical needs first.

For once this quote reminds me, I need to put me first for once. My physical health and recovery are dependent on me prioritizing myself. The most unafraid thing I've done is this neck surgery and having all the secondary bones taken out. Bone shaved out so my nerves aren't squished. It is extremely frustrating but I'm doing it. I'm determined to figure out who I am. How I can be a better version of myself.

Therapy with Emily helps me figure this out.

I am important for myself. This quote is a good reminder of that and to keep looking at it even on my most depressed and frustrating days. It helps remind me I have worth for me, myself.

Describe your current emotion as a place

Imagine if you will a lively suburban street. Kids are playing, dogs are barking, and a neighbor is barbecuing in the backyard. There's a children's park at the very center of town, bold and bright glistening in the sun.

While everyone laughs and smiles along, no one even notices as they pass right by the oatmeal beige and 90's sky blue house quietly still for sale in the corner. And quietly still, period. What must've once been a starting families dream home has slowly become out of date, unwanted and abandoned. The unkempt walkway is scattered with leaves and sticks, there are weeds growing in the once inviting garden beds. Below the windows, color chips off in huge, ghastly pieces, as if even the paint objects to being near such a house. The passing children's laughter echoes off the large empty garage, hollow, and far away. This house hasn't felt laughter in its own halls in years, maybe decades. Soft squishy carpet lines the main rooms. They must have soaked up every dinner, every fight, every first everything is captured in the fibers of this thick shaggy blue carpet.

The stairs, now dusty and dull once had such purpose and daily use, how they must have been gleaming. Now as they sit, they don't even remember their purpose. In the dining room, there's an unfinished dinner, the table is set, napkins folded, and what remains of the food is dried to the bottom of the plates forever unfinished and untouched. A family did live here once but it seems something caused them to stop eating mid meal and then they just never tried to finish it ever again. The plates show 2 adult portion sizes and one small, lonely plate with very little served. Much like Goldilocks, in this house clearly Papa bear gets most Mama bear gets some and Baby bear, well, they just get whatever was left.

The TV static crunches in the background, causing a fright. Walking from the dining room towards the living room it becomes clear the TV has remained on all these years...maybe in the hopes all three of the family would one day find themselves wandering altogether, and gather in front of the glow, enjoying it as a family once more. But it looks like that never happened. The station doesn't even exist anymore so the static rings, dull and constant filling the room with an anxious and awaiting energy.

The fireplace is damp. Fire would be hard, near impossible. All warmth here needs to be earned and worked hard for. It does not come naturally here.

This place is lost to history and stuck in time and oddly empty. It certainly has potential with a determined and creative eye, but as it sat waiting for action, it's rotted, withered, collapsed under its own pressure. rebuild is possible but when it will happen? Meanwhile the world around continues, people laugh walking by never once paying any mind to this time locked rotten house.

Do you have trouble asking for help? Why or Why not?

All of my life I have been the type of person to do everything on my own no matter the level of strain or difficulty. I think that part of my experience had been that when you truly needed someone the most, they always let you down. I learned very early that at the end of the day, the only one who would truly be there for you unconditionally, was you. When it's 3:00am and you're sitting in the tub as the shower continuously sprays on you, holding your knees to your chest, trying to hold onto anything as you're flooded with tears and falling apart, no one is going to come into that bathroom and save you. It was in those moments that I learned I would have to save myself. I had to be there for me. I had to be the me that I needed.

I'm extremely stubborn and wouldn't ask for help no matter the cost to myself. Asking for help to me was always a sign of weakness, almost an affirmation that I couldn't do it and I could never accept that. I could and I would.

After my accident I had no choice because I physically could not. As much as my mind wanted to my body would betray me every time.

I remember being in the ICU, a nurse on each side of me. A male on my left and a female on my right. They were bathing me with washcloths and warm water because I was unable to do it myself. The man on my left was trying to be so discreet, so kind and gentle and yet I remember throwing my Johnny open and saying "It's fine, just do it, it doesn't matter anymore anyway." I turned my head towards the female nurse and closed my eyes as the tears fell down my face. I couldn't bear the sight of watering eyes from the both of them as they did the best they could to make me as comfortable as possible. I couldn't handle the pain in their eyes and the screaming pain inside of myself at the same time. I was so angry, so defeated, so exposed and vulnerable from the start that being discreet just didn't seem to matter anymore. But I was angry. I was angry that I needed that level of care, that level of help. I was angry that I couldn't do it on my own.

I am a little better with asking for help now but this is year 6 so I've had a lot of time to work on it and work through it in therapy. I am still stubborn, so even 6 years later I still push my limits, and I'll ask for help if I absolutely can't do it. I have a PSS now that comes in my home and helps me every morning for a few hours with things I need help with like housekeeping, laundry, getting dressed, etc. There was a time where over my dead body I'd let someone help me, but I've learned it's okay to ask for help. Asking is indeed a sign of strength, not weakness. Sadly, there are still many times where it's very difficult to change the programming in my brain that tells me asking for help is not okay and means I'm weak.

So yes, I do struggle asking for help at times, I've come a long way and I'm still learning but that's okay with me. The goal is to always be better and wiser tomorrow than I am today.

Sunnie C. Hall-Howe

Favorite button to push?

When I was little, I would play secretary with an old unplugged ergonomic keyboard and a three-ring binder filled with a printed out manual for some Adobe program my dad was going to throw away. I gathered highlighters, pens, paper clips, Post-it notes, especially Post-it notes, the mini ones to be exact were always necessary. I had a headset with a microphone, and I would set up my reception by my front door. Clacking loudly on that warm, toned cream colored keyboard was the height of imagination and excitement for me. I would spend hours typing up “reports,” whatever those were. My favorite part was really punching down the space bar with a bit of an attitude. (I was a sassy secretary.) and the satisfying click it made was an addiction. Modern keyboards lack the heavy thick plastic keys like my old 2001 model had, they just don’t click clack like they used to.

As I grew, my favorite buttons became those on my first cell phone. The T9 texting meant every button would be essential. I would triple click click double click click so fast and efficient, I did it without looking. I wasn’t lucky enough for a razor phone, but that didn’t even matter. I was thrilled just to be able to talk to my best friend in the dead of the night while quickly clicking away speedily under my covers almost like ASMR.

As I reflect on adulthood I’m hit with a sudden realization: buttons are no longer in my daily life. The use of the touchscreen across most technologies have left little left to push. What was once click clacking is now a silent sweep, but there’s still one joyous moment of satisfaction left in this modern age: the push to start car.

It’s a simple passing moment, but plunging the button with one finger in one strong satisfying movement gives me that same serotonin boost as that loud clack keyboard did. Hearing the car rumble to life and listen to your commands, it feels a little empowering. Maybe that new driver novelty hasn’t worn off yet, but I can’t deny the independence and glee I feel with that click of a button.

Technology may have changed maybe most in my lifetime, but one thing will always remain true. I love a good button press. I can’t wait to learn what my new favorite button will be in middle age. Maybe I won’t even know about its existence until then and I can’t wait.

What do you keep telling yourself you'll do someday?

When I first heard this prompt, I assumed it would be easy, but like most self-reflection it's proving much more difficult and thought provoking than I thought.

There's so much I put into the category of "someday" or "when things settle down," travel being just one. I once mapped out an entire cross-country road trip following every major and minor roadside attraction and curiosity. From where it all started at my local jumbo-sized Coke can all the way to the world's largest ball of string ending somewhere near the giant red woods of California. I wanted to stop in these all tiny, small town America towns, eat a meal, see the locals and really immerse myself in these random places just for a moment. I have the maps, the list of attractions, restaurants I needed to visit while in each location, in a folder all quietly tucked away in a closet or drawer now...I don't even remember. Life happened and my once sworn travel companion turned out to be a monster in disguise and left. My life was in ruins... I gave up on the fantasy that I could just ride off and have this grand adventure. I stopped believing that I could ever even be that happy again, that hopeful. The version of me that wrote that list doesn't even exist anymore. but maybe I'm right SHE never could have gone on that trip. But ME? Now that sounds like something I could do. After everything I've survived, maybe it was all just preparing me.

I've put off yoga for 4 years despite it being a passion of mine since I was 14. I call myself an artist, but I haven't even touched paint for over a year. I've stopped a lot of things saying, "I'll get back to it when things get better," but that day never comes and the way to make things better is by doing the things in the first place.

I've put off so many big things in my life, but I also push away the small things as well. Small, insignificant things like the "good" chocolate I'm saving for a better time, that expensive French perfume I impulse bought that I refused to wear casually, the fancy (and pricey) face cream I bought to raise my confidence, but honestly, I'm too scared to use or "waste" it.

I was reminded of this one day and if you spend time online, you'll be familiar with the "lavender soap theory." It's the idea that if you're waiting for "the perfect moment" to use something that day might unknowingly pass you by and soon it might be too late. So, choose now and choose to make it a perfect moment, instead.

Describe your current emotion as if it were a place. Where would it be?

When I think of my current emotion I think of the ocean. Currently my emotion is overwhelmed, but it changes frequently like the waves of the ocean. When the tide goes out, I picture that as me feeling scared and it's like I'm running from something or someone. As the tide comes in, I'm relaxed and content. The creatures of the ocean that can harm you represent fear for me. They represent the fear of the unknown, the fear of what's already happened, or the fear of what could happen. The sand of the beach represents buried emotions that I have buried deep down inside myself, hoping that they never resurface. The lifeguard stations represent calmness because as we know lifeguards are there to help you and even save your life should the need arise. Calmness is something I very rarely feel. It makes me wonder if I should have more lifeguard type people in my life. Finding sea glass on the beach represents happiness for me. It's always awesome to find stuff, especially when you can turn that sea glass into beautiful jewelry or some other craft. The huge rocks found at the beach that everyone likes to climb on represents my attitude and how I believe that having a positive gets you a lot further in life than a negative one. As one of my college professors once said, "It's better to be a positive Polly than a negative Nelly."

Written by R.N.

Who are you today?

I wake up, sleep in my eyes and dreams still behind my eyelids. I peek one open to see sunshine filling the room with the day ahead. I stretch, feel each muscle tense and relax along each limb and then my back.

I'm just forming thoughts and feelings about the day. Who will I be? How will I be?

I try to choose happy. I want to be a happy person today. Will I get up and get dressed? I don't know. But I know I will be a happy person today.

My little feline creature companion slinks her way over to me and kisses my forehead lightly. She is happy. Good.

I decide to be someone who gets dressed and puts on makeup today. Even a spritz of perfume, for extra measure. Today I will be put together even if I don't feel like it on the inside.

Am I someone who will eat today? Not yet. I can't face that demon just yet, so I brew a cup of ole' reliable. Sipping, I feel its warmth spreading into my system, waking up every nerve ending and filling them with caramel and cream.

I go about my daily chores, same as always. But who am I today?

Mother to little critters. After the bunnies are fed and cat is treated, and the seed is dispersed, I sit. Alone. Who am I today?

I smoke. A lot. I've already figured out who I am so many times today, it's exhausting. I need a break from the performance.

So, I smoke. And I smoke.

Cloudy, hazy, streams of smoke gather around my being. Watching it swirl in the sunshine creating shapes in the 4D and intricate little mushroom plumes. Who am I today?

I am me. All these parts equal the whole. Humans are rarely one person even day to day, hour to hour.

I need to be a granddaughter next, check on my grandmother. Then I will be a friend and check on the few who call themselves such.

As I talk to a beautiful woman I try to be interesting, someone worth knowing. When I talk to an aggressive man I am not to be messed with, someone you don't want to know.

I am so many people, but they all equal me. Each is used when needed and then tucked away for later.

I am all these things and more.

Today, and the next day, I will still always be Me.

When do you need to be or when have you been the bravest?

From the age of 4 on I spent my entire life burying all of the pain and trauma in my life. I buried my dark passenger not necessarily by choice but because I had no other option. In my family, as children, we were to be seen and not heard.

Crying wasn't allowed or we would get the famous "if you wanna cry, I'll give you something to cry about." As we aged and were able to do more, it was programmed into us that women were here only to serve men. The saying "pregnant and barefoot in the kitchen" was a real scenario in my family. Women were to prep and cook the meal and set the table. Men were to be served first and during the meal women were not allowed to speak unless they were spoken to. When everyone had finished then the women cleared the table and did all of the cleaning. As women in my family, we were not allowed to have opinions or thoughts and if you did, God help you if you ever spoke of them out loud.

Punishment in my family didn't always just come off the tongues of the people who meant most to you. Often, punishment came at the end of 2x4s, sticks and large belt buckles that would leave a temporary tattoo on your body of whatever design was printed on the buckle. Sometimes that punishment came in the form of fists and in the terror of child sexual abuse. Sadly, that punishment didn't only come from Uncles, Grandfathers or close male friends of the family. Sometimes that punishment came from Fathers too.

You may be thinking that in all those horrific moments, inside the tears I wasn't allowed to cry or the physical and emotional trauma I endured, that must have been when I was the most brave but that would not be accurate.

I was the most brave years later when I started counseling and instead of hiding and burying all the secrets of my family and my trauma, I was silent no more. I had to open the door, step inside, take one box off the shelf, open it just enough to pull out one excruciating moment and sit with it. I had to dissect it, feel the hurt, all of the pain, and speak of it out loud. I found my voice and it didn't happen all at once, but one by one I took the boxes off the shelf and confronted them. I yelled, screamed and cried out loud for the first time in my life and then I healed from all the moments that had tried and almost destroyed me.

Numbing myself is easy, over time it became habit, but my bravest moment was feeling all the things I spent my lifetime numbing and burying. My bravest moment was finding the courage to heal from pain and trauma that I didn't cause, and I never asked for. My bravest moment was finding my resilience, vulnerability and finding me. The me that had been lost for so long.

What are recent epiphanies, showing regard for standing in the power of our own truths and self-assurances to do the hard things we have to, no matter what the cost? Otherwise, in the end we are drowning ourselves, for others that wouldn't do the same for us.

“I stand in my power to govern my own being. I honor and liberate myself from the shackles, chains, anchors, and weights others tried to bind unto me. I breathe without hesitation, without apology in every exhale. I own my truth, my free will, my faults and flaws, my triumphs and tribulations. No longer waiting for the other shoe to drop, to feel a fleeing notion in my stomach when someone enters a room. To speak up and not just seen but heard. This is a new era: the era of ME.”

- Patient M 2026

What makes you memorable?

Why are the inner reflections at times the hardest prompts? I know my creativity; my crafts and my artistry create lasting memories. My cooking and my baking as well because it is so easy and fun to incorporate my artistry skills into cooking and baking. It's something that I personally love to do.

In the same instance, as flattering as that is, I would hope that who I am as a person would be just as memorable if not more. What an honor it would be to be memorable for the way that I love. Wholeheartedly, unconditionally and unapologetically, with a fire and a passion that surpasses all existence, with every fiber of my being. My kids, my pets and my family. I hope that the lives I have ever touched positively make me memorable. My goodness, my kindness, my empathy, my compassion and my humor. I wish all these things are what make me memorable.

I hope my testimony and my story make me memorable. The fight, the resilience, the fire and the strength it took for me to still be sitting here today despite it all. Everything meant to destroy me and easily could have. Almost succeeded more times than I'd like to admit but I damn sure never took the easy way out. One of the bravest things I ever did was live when all I wanted to do was die. That wasn't a destruction that I could leave behind with those who mean the most to me and I'm so blessed to have taken the hard road that led me here, to where I am and who I am today.

I hope that my desire for knowledge makes me memorable. Always wanting to learn and try new things.

I hope my ability to forgive makes me memorable. I still remember all the years of my life where forgiveness wasn't even in my vocabulary. Up until the past 6 years it was something I never thought possible, but I grew, I learned and I finally truly found the meaning of not forgiving for them but forgiving for you.

Not only do I hope the best parts of me are memorable, even my sailor mouth and larger than life badass attitude but I hope those who know me take all those memorable qualities and adapt them into their own hearts so they too may touch someone's life. To help others in need, to always desire to do the right thing. To always strive to be the best versions of themselves. To be better tomorrow than they were today.

I also dream that what makes me memorable is that despite it all I believed in hope, always, just one more time.

Sunnie C. Hall-Howe



Did you know PCHC offers group therapy?



DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOR THERAPY

Wednesdays at 2:00pm

In Person or Telehealth

Hope House
179 Corporate Dr.
Bangor

Work on skills like mindfulness, stress management & communication through practical tools to face life's challenges.

This is a closed group, committed to weekly attendance, assignments, and independent practice.

Not suitable for those with severe challenges in mental health, SUD or crisis treatment.



ANXIETY GROUP

Tuesdays at 2:00pm

Telehealth Only

A safe and supportive group for people with anxiety, working on their mental health and well-being.

Join us to connect, share, and grow in a judgement-free space.

This is an open group, available to anyone who wants to understand and overcome anxiety.

Stable internet connection required.



ANGER MANAGEMENT GROUP

Date and Time TBA

Telehealth Only

This open group uses Cognitive Behavioral and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to explore anger—what it is and the purpose it serves. Anger can feel overwhelming or confusing, with too many or no clear reasons. This group helps participants better understand their experience, identify common root causes and unhelpful thinking patterns, and recognize thoughts and emotions that escalate reactions. By learning to sit with and reframe these thoughts, participants can move toward more peaceful, balanced lives.



REFLECTIVE WRITING GROUP

Thursdays at 11:00am

Telehealth Only

A creative way to reflect and find strength through words. We'll share coping ideas, support each other, and learn how to express and handle our feelings better.

This group is for people with a mental health diagnosis who are feeling somewhat stable and ready to write. You should be able to read, write, and understand the activities.

**Required: Commitment of at least 4 weeks.*

Stable internet connection and private space to participate.



LGBTQ+ GROUP

Mondays at 4:30pm

Telehealth Only

This group helps build community and strength in a positive, supportive environment.

We'll use mindfulness techniques, coping strategies, and group discussions to help you improve your mental health and connect with others who understand what you're going through.

This group is for people in the LGBTQ+ community who are dealing with increasing anxiety and/or depression.

Stable internet connection required.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE :

Clients can self refer by calling 207-404-8100 ext 2817, or you can request a referral from your primary care provider.