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Come in...and be captivated...

[Writers' Craft Box](#)

What this section is intended to do:
Give writers suggested hints,
resources, and advice.

How to use: Pick and choose what you
feel is most helpful and derive
inspiration from it- most importantly,
HAVE FUN!

What a Writers' Craft Box is: Say
you're doing an art project and you want
to spice it up a bit. You reach into a
seemingly bottomless box full of
colorful art/craft supplies and
choose only the things that speak to
you. You take only what you need to feel
that you've fully expressed yourself.
Then, you go about doing your individual
project adding just the right amount of



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everything you've chosen until you reach a product that suits you completely. So, this is on that concept. Reach in, find the things that inspire you, use the tools that get your writing going and see it as fulfilling your self-expression as opposed to following rules.

Writing is art and art is supposed to be fun, relaxing, healing and nurturing. It's all work and it's all play at the same time. A Writers' Craft Box is whatever your imagination needs it to be- a lifeboat, the spark of an idea, a strike of metaphorical lightning, a reminder, or simply the recommendation of a good book. Feel free to sit back and break out the crayons. Coloring outside the lines is heartily encouraged.



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Author, editor, writing coach, and spiritual counselor, Noelle Sterne writes fiction and nonfiction, with specialties in writing craft, spiritual self-help, and personal essays. She has published over 250 pieces in print and online venues, with many guest posts. Noelle's Ph.D. is from Columbia University, and for over 28 years she has helped doctoral candidates (finally) complete their dissertations. In her book, Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams (Unity Books), Noelle draws examples from her practice and many other aspects of life to help readers let go of regrets, relabel their past, and reach their lifelong yearnings.

Visit Noelle's website at: www.trustyourlifenow.com

A YouTube review of the book can be found at:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ziP_7KSSlpE&feature=relmfu

INTRODUCTION TO "DID YOUR PARENTS TORPEDO YOUR WRITING DREAMS?"

When I received the email accepting my first book for publication, after the

ecstatic screaming and jumping all over my husband, and finally catching my breath, I thought of my mother. Other than my husband, she was the one I would have most wanted to tell. Although she was long gone, I wondered about her response.

- Would she be happy, smile broadly, and shriek with me?
- Would she murmur pale compliments through a straight-lipped smile?
- Would my achievement gratify her fondest hopes for me?
- Would it remind her of her own spoiled creative aspirations?

I can never know the answers to these questions, but they kindled thoughts about our parents' encouragement—or otherwise—of our writing, and how we're affected.

As this piece evolved, it became more than a confessional or personal essay, and more than a writing craft article. I recalled other writers' struggles in dealing with parental responses to their successes and rejections. Remembering many teary conversations, I realized more was needed than another writing prompt or craft rule. My aim was to confront the source.

So this piece developed for handling our parents' over- or underencouraging responses to our creative longings. I continue to use the suggestions, affirmations, and exercises offered here (many, as you'll see, from wonderful authors), and I hope this essay gives you the support, solace, and courage to persist in your own writing dreams...

DID YOUR PARENTS TORPEDO YOUR WRITING DREAMS?

by Noelle Sterne

When we struggle with our writing dreams and aspirations, our thoughts often turn to our parents. Maybe we blame them for not encouraging us

(“You’ll never make a living at it”), encouraging us too much and then finding the world doesn’t quite agree (“my little genius”), or denigrating our efforts (“I could be a writer too- just hand me a pencil”).

Having heard such messages, we let our resentments grind at us, and our parents’ cruel words can paralyze us from writing at all.

Then we sigh, alternately furious and brooding, “If only they understood, if only they listened, if only they bothered to read one of my pieces.” But even when we try to get them to understand, listen, or read, they don’t. Instead they roll their eyes at our weight gain or make a pointed remark about our current inadequate girlfriend.

“We all have family patterns,” says spiritual teacher Louise Hay, “and it is very easy for us to blame our parents, or our childhood, or our environment, but that keeps us stuck We remain victims, and we perpetuate the same problems over and over again.” [1]

If we truly want to loosen the ferocious hold we think our parents have on us and free ourselves to write, we can take control of our runaway minds. We can forgive them. And, possibly to your shock, we can see them as role models.

Forgive Your Parents

Rebelling already? Granted, our society encourages us to blame them. Shrinkers push us to cough up all the wrongs our parents done us. Child psychologists warn of all the harm they can do at every developmental stage. Books tumble out regularly commanding parents, sometimes with astoundingly opposite advice, how not to damage their children for life.

We trusted them and loved them, had every right to expect the best from them. Like so many of you, my parents, too, betrayed my trust, undercut my aspirations, and too often simply weren’t there.

Now, as adults and maybe parents ourselves, we have a choice:

1. Never forgive them. Continue to wallow in our blame and keep them responsible for all the excuses we've made for not reaching our dreams of writing. Keep grouching about how terrible they were (are) in contrast to the parents of the latest best-selling author we're jealous of. Find lots of people (writing groups make prolific ground) who agree with us and use the meetings to exchange competing stories of how our parents skewered our creativity.

2. Or forgive them now. Even if it takes a lot of practice and backsliding. Even if it takes teeth-gritting willpower and extraordinary determination. Even if it takes many tears.

Whatever the extent of your disappointment, disillusion, and disgust with your parents, they've served an important, noble purpose in your life.

Radical as it may seem, I believe, with Hay, that we choose our parents before birth to learn valuable life lessons. Our higher Self knows the experiences we need to grow spiritually, and these start with our nuclear family. "The lessons we learn seem perfectly matched to the 'weaknesses' of the parents we have." [2] I'll be exploring this idea a little later but now, if you need a little more convincing, here are four reasons for forgiving your parents.

Four Reasons to Forgive Your Parents

1. They were really doing the best they could at the time, even yesterday. They needed to do, say, or not do or say whatever it was for their own convoluted, unforgiving, transferential reasons. This realization doesn't mean you're condoning or excusing them. Rather, you're seeing that their level of maturity allowed them to act in the best way they knew how, even though it hurt you.

In fact, they could have acted no differently. Even with good intentions, as most parents have, they may not be equipped to respond positively, much less support your writing dreams.

2. They were acting out of their own low self-worth, deprivation, guilt, and probably the ways their parents acted toward them. Maybe they always wanted to write (or paint or dance or teach) and regret mightily not pursuing their own dreams. Maybe they seethe at their own sense of helplessness and what they see as their wasted life. Maybe they're secretly terribly envious of you. Maybe they're in awe of your conviction and persistence.

3. Inside their adult shells, they're little children, crying for love. In some ways, we all are. As you realize this about your parents, you see too that they have no power over you.

4. They love you in spite of everything they said, did, and didn't, and you said, did, and didn't. If you give them a chance, they'll finally tell you.

Now, with this broader understanding, and if you really do want to free yourself to pursue your writing dreams, ask yourself a few wriggling questions:

Four Questions to Ask Yourself

1. Do I want to continue to be miserable?
2. Do I want to stay negatively tied to my parents, mentally and emotionally, even if they're no longer physically here?
3. Do I really want to let go?
4. Do I really want to grow up?

You know the answers. No matter how much your friends, partner, or estranged mother's brother shores up your rationalizations to cherish your grudges against your parents, the remedy lies not with them but you.

Even if everyone you know can't seem to get along with or never see their way to forgiving their parents, you do not have to do the same. "My sister can't get along with my parents either. They trashed her dream of becoming an actress." "None of my cousins has a good relationship with their parents. They're really talented musicians but they all settled for accounting jobs."

That's them. No one else's patterns have the power to sway, influence, limit, or dissuade you.

Re-Establishing Communication

Maybe you've tried to re-establish communication with your parents on new ground, autonomous ground. You envision the destructive aspects disappearing and affection and listening surfacing. Maybe it hasn't worked, and you've been frustrated and enraged at every holiday gathering, and dread every phone call in between. You're ready to give up.

But apply a new perspective. Try relating to them differently. As you change, something magical happens: contrary to everything rational, they change too. A truism of family therapy says that the actions, thoughts, feelings, and words of one member cannot help but affect those of the others. [3]

It doesn't matter whether they live in close proximity or thousands of miles away. Once you think and act differently, so do they (kind of like family quantum physics). The catch, of course, is that you have to change and not react in the same old ways to the caustic family dances.

Whether your parents are living or not, try it. Here are five suggestions to help you break the decades and dams of resentment, guilt, and regret.

Five Ways to Communicate With Your Parents

1. Meditate

Picture them, separately or together, and see them surrounded by light. Hold this image as long as you can, with no thoughts, judgments, or dialogue. Infuse the picture with love. Feel only love. This technique is an absolute prerequisite to any of the others.

2. Visualize

As if you're looking from across a room, see them sitting with you in a

pleasant setting, maybe a lovely living room or favorite childhood spot. Feel only peace in this setting. Hear all of you speaking in conversational tones. You don't have to know the words or subjects. Just see this scene taking place and linger in it.

3. Visit with them

Choose a pleasing, convenient private place. Ask for their total attention, without interruption, and pledge the same when you've finished. Prepare a few notes, if you wish, on what you want to say. For example, tell them you want above everything to improve your relationship and enjoy each other. Tell them you want so much to share what's important to you—your writing—and invite them to read some of your work.

Talk to them as if they no longer suffer incurably from all the faults, hang-ups, and closed minds you've always known them to have. Talk to them as if they're really listening. Talk to them as adults. Talk to them as friends.

4. Listen to them

How much have you really listened to your parents? Maybe they've got the same gripes about you as you do about them (revelation!). Whether in person or in your mind, they will respond. You may find yourself having a dialogue with them, on a much different, deeper level than ever before. You may discover facets about them they never revealed and find that they're people you never really knew. You may even hear an anecdote you've never heard before. It's time to see them as beyond parents, as individuals.

5. Write them a letter

Tell them what you really want to say. Let yourself write what you've been holding in all this interminable time. You never have to mail the letter, and no one else has to see it. You can still use, if you wish, as the basis for a real conversation with them.

When you reach out in these ways, your parents, possibly to your

amazement, may respond very differently from their habitual patterns. Change may not take place immediately, and several visits may be needed to clear the air. All of you may get enraged, let off steam, cry, or clam up for a while. This is all part of the process. Just keep seeing them in light and giving them love.

If, after several attempts, communication on new ground still isn't possible, accept this too. Love them and see them in the best way you can—maybe for holidays only, maybe for unsolicited advice that they need to give, maybe for children or grandchildren. Your relationship to them will have changed. You will have forgiven them. And freed yourself.

An Illustration: Letter to My Father

In a personal growth workshop, I followed the advice to write a letter—to my father, who had died ten years earlier. He was a very closed and distraught man who had much talent in music, had studied at Juilliard, and played the violin like a concert artist. He never realized his potential—now I would say he never followed his dream—and this ate at him all his life.

With a growing family, he settled for a second-rate administrative job that used a sixteenth of his intelligence, and he barely tolerated the small-mindedness of his boss and everyone else around him.

To his family, my father was emotionally absent most of the time. His primary method of showing affection was the sarcastic putdown or blanketing silence that permeated the whole household, punctuated by unpredictable thunders of temper. Yet, when my mother complained to me about him, or more accurately, complained under her breath in my hearing, I always defended him.

In the workshop, at the leader's prompting, I began the letter. The first few lines were stiff and awkward, but soon, despite the fact that I was sitting on a metal bridge chair in an overheated roomful of people, I was alone with him and he was there. I could hardly write fast enough, pouring out everything I'd kept bottled up during the years he was alive and all this time

since his death. I hope it inspires and helps you acknowledge, cleanse, and heal some of your own issues with your parents:

Dear Daddy,

Please, see me, Daddy. Notice me. Talk to me. You've always been so preoccupied with work. Or usually, too tired after work to do anything but sit in front of the television and fall asleep.

How often have I seen you smile? Maybe three times in my life. Once on a rare vacation when two fawns pranced across a field. Once when a neighbor's kid crawled into our bushes. And once, the time I cherish most, when you smiled right at me.

One Sunday, when I was about 10, we'd had a houseful of relatives visiting, and at the end of the day you and Mom drove to the highway entrance, with their cars following. The kitchen and living room were piled with dirty pots, dishes, and glasses on every surface. I collected it all, plunged in, and did sinkful after sinkful of dishes. Then I put everything away and wiped every surface.

As I was scrubbing out the sink, you came home and looked at me in the kitchen. And smiled.

You said, "You're a good kid."

I've carried that smile and those four words with me throughout my life. They were the only compliment you ever gave me.

Everything else was storms and crises, fuming and cursing, or worse, whatever grades or awards I brought home, ignoring my presence.

Look at me now, Daddy. See what a good kid I turned out to be. See what I've done. Could you say those words again now, smile, and be at least a little proud of me?

Daddy, I'm not only thinking of me now but you too. As you kept away

from me, you kept me away from knowing you. I want to. I know you were struggling, for years and years. Your last illness was a gathering, a collection of everything that bothered you, stuffed down for so long that the lid, your chest, had to burst.

I understand and forgive you. Forgive me, too, for intruding on your life and making you have to earn money at something you hated instead of following what you loved.

But I've learned from you—your strength and grit, your intensity and passion for music. I've learned from your insistence on doing a thorough job and seeing it through, and your outraged disdain for slackers. I've learned from your love of quality and genuineness, whether of violins or cars or people.

Daddy, you were the best you could be for me.

I love you and forgive you.

My Parents as Role Models

Writing this letter I found amazingly freeing. It enabled me to finally stop fixating on my father's temper and shell-like withdrawals and see him with positive qualities. I recognized him, and my mother too, as I'd never thought about them—as perversely positive role models.

My father was a talented but frustrated violinist. My mother was a talented but frustrated artist. Both were angry at life and felt victimized by it.

I thought of Hay again. Our parents and their weaknesses, Hay says, “were perfect for what we wanted to work on overcoming.” [4]

So how were my parents, I asked myself, perfect for what I needed to overcome?

The answers came immediately: To use my own talent, in writing, I needed to learn not to see life as against me or myself as a victim of it. I needed to

love myself enough and feel worthy enough to nurture my talent, allow it, and not deny it as they had. I needed to learn that I could indeed trust my life and reach my dreams.

My parents were additional models for what creative guru Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way* calls "shadow artists." [5] These are people who engage in (we should say choose) jobs and careers on the edges of the work they really want to do—composers who become arrangers, painters who become illustrators, writers who become agents, dancers who become costumers. They were likely encouraged by their families to pursue more economically viable careers than the "pure" creative desires of their dreams. Or felt they had to. Or, even with day jobs, were afraid to dive into the scary waters of total commitment to their creative passion.

My mother, with her painting dream, became a textile designer.

My father, with his violinist dream, became a sporadic weekend player (I accompanied him on the piano), and mostly a listener and concert subscriber.

My career of coach and editor to other writers too, for all the help it brings, can be considered a shadow career. And my task, possibly like yours, is to learn from my parents as role models in their shadow careers.

They showed me, by their own unhappy examples, the supreme importance of developing my self-worth and self-love. They showed me, by opposites, to acknowledge and develop my talents. They showed me, by their frozen aspirations, to follow my dreams.

They also gave me dance, piano, and flute lessons, took me to the ballet, opera, concerts, museums, and plays. They subscribed to sophisticated, well-written magazines and acquired a rich library of literature. They gave me the love of drama, art, music, knowledge, and, most important, reading and writers. These lifelong gifts not only continue to nurture me but have long served in broadening my own talents.

Your Parents as Role Models

Are you prompted to think about your own parents? Maybe they were great positive role models: a mother who is, or was, a successful businesswoman combining her career with gracious and joyous nurturing of her family. A father who is, or was, a courageous entrepreneur who built a flourishing company, with branches throughout the country. Or parents who are following their own creative dreams. Maybe they aren't, or weren't, afraid of money, success, accomplishment, radiant health, or supporting their children—you—in what you truly wanted to do. Maybe they truly exult at watching you bloom. Wonderful!

Or maybe not. Think a little more:

Which of your parents are you emulating most?

Which one would you like to emulate more, or not at all?

Which one, or both, might you feel you can never match or surpass?

How can you reframe your perceptions of their negatives, and your own, into positives?

How can you learn from them now?

Most of all, are you ready to use their best and forgive them?

However you answer these questions, forgiveness of your parents is the key. In addition to the techniques suggested above, here are six powerful methods to encourage your practice.

Six Prayers for Forgiving Your Parents

1. Close your eyes. Mentally list all the negatives you can think of about your parents. Keep at it until you feel you've finally run out. Visualize them with those negatives flying around their heads. Now see the negatives, like black darts, shooting off into space.

Creep up on a positive or two. Admit a few more and write them down. Command the positives to surface and surround your parents. Surround the whole picture with light and let it blaze.

You may experience peace, warmth, and relaxation. Stay in this feeling as long as you can. Know that it is being transmitted to your parents. Open your eyes gently.

2. If you're stuck in the mantra, "It's all my parents' fault," repeat the following two sentences five times a day: "My parents treated me the way they had been treated. I forgive them and their parents too." [6]

3. Reverse roles. For a moment, see yourself as the parent, doing what your parents did to you. See them as the child. If you're a parent now, you may have found yourself, probably in horror, echoing your parent. Perfect.

Now say, "Mom/Dad, I forgive you. I really forgive you. You were acting out of your own best understanding. You didn't kill me. I'm still here. I forgive you."

4. Go back mentally to when you were a small child. Even if you don't remember exactly, imagine that you do. How did you see your parents? You trusted, loved, admired, and wanted to be with them. Become that child. This is the truth, beneath all the adult overlay. Bask in the feelings.

5. Refuse to keep playing the "game of guilt," as spiritual teacher Jerry Jampolsky in his *Goodbye to Guilt* calls the endless and fruitless ping-pong of abrasive interactions and resultant bundle of negative feelings towards others. [7]

To free ourselves, he suggests these words:

This is my instant of releasing you, _____, and myself from a guilty and unforgiving world. Together we can join in seeing a healed world free from guilt. [8]

6. Louise Hay's affirmations too help neutralize our carefully guarded collection of negatives. Like catching a spark that flicks out of the fire, catch your negatives and douse them with any of these:

~ I am willing to go beyond my own limitations and judgments.

- ~ I forgive them, whether they deserve it or not.
- ~ I release myself from prison. I am safe and free.
- ~ I give myself permission to let go. [9]

You can let go. Allow yourself the redemption and freedom from your own prison of condemnations. Your parents deserve it, and so do you.

The more you forgive your parents, the more you'll be able to see them, and everything, differently—what they did to you, how you've suffered since, and how you think they stopped you from achieving your writing dreams. They didn't. You did.

This is why it's so important to forgive your parents. Whatever your impressive edifices of rationales and evidence, they're not hampering you now. When you practice forgiveness of them in the ways suggested here, you'll feel lighter, freer, freed. You'll more easily accept your own self-worth and profoundly thank them for what they gave you. And now, you'll commit yourself fully to your writing—and soar.

Endnotes

- [1] Louise L. Hay, *The Power Is Within You* (Carson, CA: Hay House, 1991), p. 53.
- [2] Louise L. Hay, *You Can Heal Your Life* (Carson, CA: Hay House, 1987), p. 36.
- [3] Michael E. Kerr and Murray Bowen, *Family Evaluation: An Approach Based on Bowen Theory* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988).
- [4] Hay, *You Can Heal Your Life*, p. 10.
- [5] Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1992), p. 25.
- [6] Louise L. Hay, *Love Yourself, Heal Your Life Workbook* (Carson, CA: Hay House, 1990), p. 97.
- [7] Gerald G. Jampolsky, *Goodbye to Guilt* (New York: Bantam, 1985), pp. v, 83.
- [8] Jampolsky, *Goodbye to Guilt*, p. 90.

[9] Hay, *Love Yourself, Heal Your Life Workbook*, p. 97.

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