

Telling Your Story of Trauma

a step-by-step guide to getting it done

We're so glad you've decided to take this journey ... or are considering doing so!

Here's what to expect:

We have broken the journey down, into 7 modules (with a bonus "inspiration" module at the end!):

Module 1: So You Have a Story to Tell

Module 2: Putting It All Together

Module 3: Just Write!

Module 4: Dealing With Triggers

Module 5: Defamation, Libel, Slander, and NDAs — What You Need to Know

Module 6: The Writing is Done ... Now What?

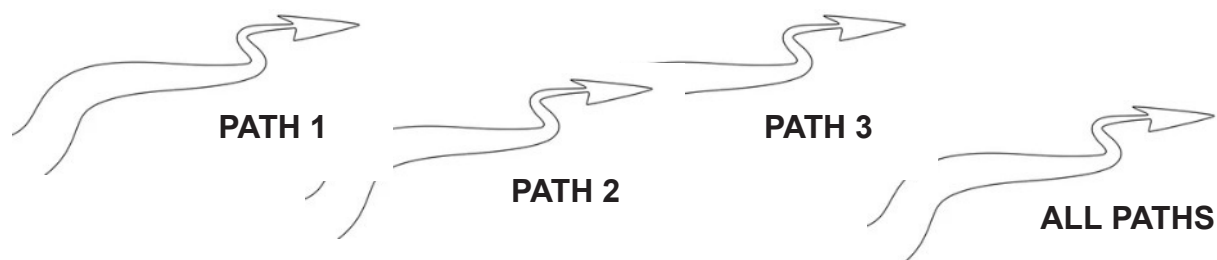
Module 7: Bringing in the Outside World

Module 8: Some Motivation Before We Say Goodbye

We are all-too-familiar with the inner critic, who becomes more vocal than usual when we are trying something new. Where applicable, we've included some of the common messages you might hear from that critic, and we've countered those with encouraging and supportive messages in response.



As you'll learn in Module 1, there are three potential paths to follow in the telling of your story, we have included some signposts, as some of the required tasks will vary depending on the path you choose.



Lastly, each module will end with a “How Do I Feel?” section so that you can keep track of how the process is affecting you as you work through it. If you would like to share any feedback from these sections with us, please email lisa@onethousandtrees.com. We may use this in social media or print promotion, but we guarantee your anonymity. Neither your name nor your email address will be made public.

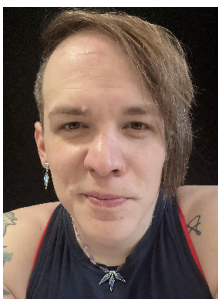


If you have questions or concerns as you work through the modules, you can also use this email address to ask those questions, and receive an email response in return. Our goal is to make what can be a challenging exercise as easy (and stress-free) as possible, and we are here to help whenever we can.

A LITTLE ABOUT US



Lisa Browning is the founder of One Thousand Trees, a publishing company with a mandate of empowering others through storytelling and connection, which she started back in 2010. At the time, she was in the process of leaving a very emotionally abusive relationship, and dealing with the effects of PTSD. She felt unheard, unseen, and unvalued. The company was not only a diversion from the day-to-day trauma — and the melodrama — that Lisa was experiencing ... it was also a way to give back. It was a way for her to help others be seen, heard, and valued. And doing that helped her in her recovery as well.



Luke Russell is



Sarah Wilke Russell is

2. Why do I want to share it?

3. Who do I want to share it with?

(These last two questions will help to determine the tone of your story, and potentially what is included and what is not, as you get writing.)

* * *

Now that you've given some thought to the *what*, *why*, and *who* questions, think about the *how*. What format do you want your story to end up being? There are three options, or paths, to choose from. Check off the path that you'd like to follow.

- Path 1:** I am writing a short version of my story for my eyes only. I just want to get it out.
- Path 2:** I am writing a short version of my story, for publication in the Braving Healing Library, a magazine, or an anthology with other authors.
- Path 3:** I would like to write a full memoir, to be published as a standalone book.



1. Who am I kidding?!

It's so easy to look out and see other people's stories and think they're worth telling, but I look at my own and don't feel like it's as important...



2. I'm not a writer. How can I possibly get this done?



1. Everyone's story is important. By telling yours, you never know who you might reach ... who you might help. There will be someone; there always is. Even if you reach just one person, who is going through something similar to what you went through, you can provide them with the hope to carry on, just by showing them that you made it through. This is life-changing.



2. You don't have to be a professional writer. You are a storyteller. Getting your story down on paper is all you need to worry about!

Now, take a deep breath! You've got the ball rolling, and that's a huge accomplishment. Just making the decision to share your story is a huge accomplishment.

Here's where you can regroup, and write down any thoughts or feelings you might be experiencing after completing this module. We've included a full-size picture of the emotion wheel on the next page. Again, you can share this with us if you'd like, or it can be for your eyes only.



How Do I Feel? _____

Why? _____



Module 2: Putting It All Together

Part 1: Now that you've answered the preliminary questions in Module 1, it's time to do a "brain dump" ... create a list of all the pertinent topics/events that you want to include in your story, or themes/lessons learned, etc. No need to organize these yet, just get them all down. Write down every idea that comes to mind, no matter how messy. Once you think you have a complete list, leave it for a day, then go back to it. Other events/ideas may have come to mind, so add those to the list.

There are two ways to do this:

- 1) Use a blank piece of paper. Research has shown that writing something down (physically, rather than on a computer) can be more impactful. Using pen and paper also allows you to draw arrows, boxes, etc ... which can help you to organize your thoughts.
- 2) Use Microsoft Word or Google Docs on your computer. If you prefer to use your computer, that's perfectly fine too! (And certainly this method is easier than the pen and paper method, once you come to reorganizing!)

Part 2: Take a look at the work you did for Part 1. Do you have anything else to add? Anything to change? Take some time to do that now.

Part 3: When you're sure you have a complete list, it's time to organize it into the order in which you'd like it to appear in the final product. Many people will organize their story according to themes or topics (eg The Drugging and Drinking Years; My Time in Recover, etc) while others will go strictly in a chronological order. It's totally up to you.

Note: This is the first module of the course that will vary slightly, depending on the final product you're working toward.



If you are on Path 1 or Path 2, you'll be creating a title for your story, the sub-headings to be included, and the content for each. A good rule of thumb is to have around 6 sub-headings.



If you are on Path 3, you'll be creating not only the book title, but also the chapter titles and sub-titles, as well as the content that you want to include in each. A good rule of thumb here is to aim for 10 chapters, with approximately 6 sub-titles per chapter. Keep in mind that the order of chapters might change as the writing begins. But for now, it's best to figure out everything you want to include in the book.



1. This is a LOT to remember. I'm sure I'm going to forget something.

2. I think I like the way I've organized everything. But what if I change my mind?

1. Don't worry about forgetting anything. There will still be time to add new material when you start writing your story. In fact, it is often during the writing stage that "forgotten" ideas come to light.

2. Your outline is meant as a roadmap, but it's not the only route! Just as when you're physically driving somewhere, when you get into the writing process you might decide that you want to follow a different path. And that's okay.

Time to Regroup!



How Do I Feel? _____

Why? _____

Module 3: Just Write!

Many published authors will agree that finding the time (and holding that time!) to write is one of the more difficult things to do. Others will say that the most difficult thing to face is writer's block. This module will give you tips on how to set up and stick to a routine, and a space in which you feel comfortable and inspired to write. We'll also provide some tips on dealing with writer's block.

Tips for Setting Up Your Writing Routine

- 1. Select time and frequency.** Decide what time of day you will write, how often, and for how long. Some people find early mornings the best time to write, while others may choose to do so late at night.
- 2. Consider your space.** Figure out a location in which you will write, where you will feel comfortable and do your best work. This could be a spot in your home, or at a local coffee shop. If you're at home, consider the sound around you as well. Some people prefer silence, while others prefer music or the busy sounds of a restaurant or coffee shop.
- 3. Schedule your writing sessions in your calendar.** Treat your writing time as you would a medical appointment or a lunch get-together with a friend. You are scheduling time with yourself, for yourself, and that's important too.
- 4. Consider an accountability partner.** If you think you're going to have trouble keeping to your writing schedule, perhaps a friend or family member will agree to be your accountability partner, to keep you on track.
- 5. Create a pre-writing focus ritual to activate your creativity.** Take a walk, pour yourself a cup of tea, or light a candle, as a formal way of signifying that it's time to begin writing.

My Writing Plan

When I will write, and for how long: _____

Where I will write: _____

My accountability partner: _____

My pre-writing ritual: _____

Suggested Word Count

Depending on which path you have chosen (which final product you'd like to create), the word count you're aiming for will vary. Following are some suggested word counts for various end products, just to give you an idea of what to strive for:



- **Speech (10-18 mins):** 1,100-2,700 words (average 150 words per minute of speaking)
- **Story for anthology (6-8 pages):** 2,310-3,080 words
- **Magazine article:** 1,000-2,500 words



- **Full-length memoir (120-150 pages when formatted):** 60,000-90,000 words

How to Deal with Writer's Block

Writer's block is often related to anxiety, stress, or burnout. It can also be a response to fear. The fear of not being good enough. The fear of not finishing. The fear of failure and of success. The fear of beginning at all. Here are a few tips to deal with it:

- **Take a break:** Step away from your work to do something else. Go for a walk, get a snack, or do a physical activity to get your blood flowing.
- **Focus on a different aspect:** If you're stuck on a one particular part of your story, skip it and work on another part of the story. You can come back to the difficult part whenever you feel ready.
- **Connect with your emotions:** Take some time to check in with your feelings. Is the section you're working on bringing up negative emotions for you? If so, give yourself the time you need to process those emotions.

From your very first session, write freely and as quickly as you can. Don't worry about correcting or rewriting at this stage. Just get it all down on paper (or computer). And remember, you can always email lisa@onethousandtrees.com if you need guidance or support.



I'm so bad at creating and sticking to schedules like this. More like, I'm good at creating routine ideas but rarely successful in executing them. Help!

It is important that you do what feels right for you, so that you stay engaged in the process, and happy about doing so. Some days might be different than others. You might choose to write in the early morning one day, and late at night the text. As long as you're writing regularly, you'll be on track to completing your story, and that's the main thing.

Time to Regroup!



How Do I Feel? _____

Why? _____

Module 4: Dealing With Triggers

Because your story is so personal, and requires that you look back into traumatic situations, we want to ensure that you are equipped to deal with triggers, and all the emotions that might come to the surface as a result of this process.

* * *

Nothing is more important than your health and wellbeing. If you reach a point where you are feeling triggered by what you are writing, please connect with someone—either a therapist or a friend or family member—who can help you through it. Return to writing (or to writing the section of your story that triggered you) only if and when you feel prepared to do so. The tips below are NOT to be considered professional advice.

The following are tips to keep in mind:

Before a trigger happens:

- **Build self-awareness:** Keep a journal to track what triggers you and the specific physical and emotional reactions you have to them.
- **Develop a safety plan:** Create a plan for when you might be triggered, which could involve having a friend on call, planning to leave a situation, or using a specific grounding technique.
- **Practise relaxation and mindfulness:** Make grounding techniques like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or a 5-4-3-2-1 sensory exercise a regular part of your routine so they are easy to access when needed.
- **Create mental barriers:** Practise creating a mental barrier between yourself and a distressing event, such as imagining a brick wall or setting a mental timer before you'll acknowledge the stressor.
- **Prioritize self-care:** Engage in activities that bring you joy and a sense of control, such as hobbies, exercise, or spending time in nature.

When a trigger occurs:

- **Notice and name it:** Acknowledge that you are triggered and name the feeling without judgment.
- **Use grounding techniques:** Immediately use the grounding techniques you've practiced. Focus on your breath and use your five senses to connect with the present moment, such as by naming five things you can see.
- **Employ your safety plan:** Follow through with the steps you've planned. This might mean physically removing yourself from the situation, calling a trusted person, or using a specific relaxation technique to soothe your nervous system.
- **Resist the urge to suppress feelings:** It's okay and normal to feel a range of emotions like sadness or anger. Accepting these emotions without judgment can help you move toward recovery.
- **Take an opposite action:** When triggered, your instinct might be to fight, flee, or freeze. The CEO method suggests taking an action that is opposite to what your trigger is telling you to do, after you've taken a moment to calm yourself.



1. How do I determine if I'm safe enough in my own well-being to handle writing?
2. How can I create a more emotionally safe process for me when working on writing my story?

Time to Regroup!



How Do I Feel? _____

Why? _____

Module 5: Defamation, Libel, Slander, and NDAs — What You Need To Know

Your story will, no doubt, include references to perpetrators and other individuals who played a role in the abuse you were subjected to. Regardless of where your story will be published, it is important to be aware of what you can and cannot say, without running the risk of being sued for defamation, libel, or slander. There could also be non-disclosure agreements that will come into play. This module will make you aware of some of the legalities.

* * *

Just as your health and wellbeing is important, so too is ensuring your legal safety. While this module provides information about libel, slander, etc ... this information is NOT to be considered legal advice. It is crucial that you reach out to a lawyer prior to publishing your story, to ensure that nothing you include is actionable.

Defamation is defined as a false statement that lowers the reputation of another person, imputes improper or disreputable conduct, or has the tendency to injure, prejudice, or disparage that person in the eyes of a reasonable person.

Libel and slander are both types of defamation. **Libel** is an untrue defamatory statement that is made in writing. **Slander** is an untrue defamatory statement that is spoken orally.

Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) are legal contracts that prevent one or more parties from sharing specific confidential information with others.

Whenever you write or speak publicly about another person without their written authorization, you run the risk of legal action against you. It is crucial, therefore, to ensure that anyone you include in your story has either approved what you have said. If you don't have their approval, it is imperative that you speak with a lawyer, for your own protection as well as anyone who may assist you in bringing your story to the public.

Changing the name and identifying characteristics of anyone mentioned in your story, and providing a legal disclaimer, are also options to consider. However, even though these precautions may render a lawsuit difficult to win, they do not stop anyone from initiating the lawsuit. Consult a lawyer should you have any concerns whatsoever.

My list of people/situations that could be considered actionable:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Time to Regroup!



How Do I Feel? _____

Why? _____

Module 6: The Writing Is Done ... Now What?

Now that you've finished your first draft, it's important to take a step back and just breathe. You're three-quarters through the journey now, which is a huge accomplishment! After you've taken some time off, and focused on some well-deserved self-care, it will be time to come back to what you've written, and do some self-editing. Don't worry ... you don't have to be a professional editor, or proficient in grammar or spelling. The editing you're going to be doing is strictly about content. Now is the time to read through what you've written, delete anything you don't want to include (or reword it). If you've missed some key points, or want to rearrange some sections, now is the time to do that as well.

As you read through, keep a list of any questions you'd like to ask your beta-readers or editor, as well as any concerns you'd like to raise.

Once you have completed the rearranging and review process, you're ready to let your story go ... to beta-readers or Braving Healing, or a professional editor/publisher such as One Thousand Trees. But before you do, take some time to reflect on your journey. What were the highs and lows? What did you find the least/most difficult?

Be proud of yourself, and remember ...

You are the designer of your destiny; you are the author of your story.

~ Lisa Nichols

Questions and Concerns:



1. I know you talk a lot about not worrying about perfectionism. I tried to let it go earlier in the process, but now it feels really strong.

2. How do I know when to dig in on trying to hone a portion of writing and when to accept it as is?

1.

Time to Regroup!



How Do I Feel? _____

Why? _____

Module 7: Bringing in the Outside World

This module will address all you need to know about beta-readers and editors, as well as the steps involved in formatting and/or publishing (should you choose to follow the memoir path), submitting an essay to the Braving Healing library, or to magazines or online/social media platforms that accept articles.



1. I'm super anxious about having others read my story, especially those who know me. How do I pick who to ask to be my beta-reader?
2. I've written my story, and I'm glad I did. But now I want to sit on it for a while. Is that common?
3. Is publishing supposed to be this nerve-wracking?

1.

Time to Regroup!



How Do I Feel? _____

Why? _____
