

The Rug Hooker's Journal

EXPLORING THE CREATIVE MIND

STORY BY GWEN DIXON/PHOTOGRAPHY BY THE ARTISTS

Ideas and information about journaling have caught my attention lately. It seems I now have the time to journal and the motivation to write down my experiences and thoughts.

Journaling is a simple practice that you can do almost anywhere at any time. It is the recording of something, such as thoughts, feelings, memories, information, and ideas, usually on paper, and can be done regularly or as needed. There are many ways to journal, and journal writers often use more than one way or combine the different ways into one journal. Here are some examples.

Daily journaling can include anything from your day that you want to record, such as where you went and who you saw, conversations you had, and things you discovered. It can be as simple as "I went to the new coffee shop and had a mocha latte."

Art journaling is a way to play with creative ideas and collect visual information. In this type of journaling, you might play with color and composition, explore an idea, or plan a piece of work.

Gratitude journaling follows a basic prompt such as "Today I am grateful for..." and is often done daily.

Bullet journaling is making a list of anything you are thinking about, such as things you have accomplished at work, people you spoke with recently, and ideas or other things on your mind.

Free-writing journaling provides an opportunity to explore your innermost feelings and ideas. It is done by writing continuously, without concern about grammar or spelling. Free writing can be helpful for brainstorming and for identifying raw ideas and emotions. A form of free writing that you might be familiar with is the "Morning Pages" that Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way*, recommends.

Travel journaling is a way of recording a trip that you are taking or have taken. Recently, I saw a travel journal made up of postcards that the traveler had sent home to his pets with a description of the day's events. Later, the postcards were put into a book to make a journal.

Structured journaling is a more organized and planned approach to journaling. It follows a framework or template, such as prompts, questions, or guided exercises. This type of journaling is useful for goal setting, self-reflection, and reframing. It helps bring clarity, intentionality, and a sense of direction to your journaling practice.

Rug Hooking & Journaling

In June 2023, I listened to a series of interviews called “How to Use Journaling to Thrive During Change & Transition” by the International Association for Journal Writing (IAJW). Following the interviews, I signed up for the presenters’ newsletters. I love receiving their newsletters and journal prompts by email, and I have developed favorite prompts that I use regularly to clear my mind so that I can move on with my day, get a little bit more organized, or create space in my mind for making.

I wondered if other rug hookers had found a place for journaling as part of their day or in their creative process, so I asked this on my Facebook page. Then, I asked people I knew and who I was quite sure had either journaled as part of their making process or during challenging times. With their permission, I am sharing what I learned, with samples from their journals and photos of their mats. In the examples, you will see how rug hookers use journaling to record and organize thoughts and ideas for making mats.

Many of the following rug hookers use art journaling and include drawings and color plans on their journal pages. In some of the examples, the rug hookers’ thoughts about their daily lives, as recorded in their journals, naturally flow over into their making, such that their pieces become metaphors for what they have written. Others use journaling as a way of recording the details of their everyday life—whether at home or traveling—and their mats show some of those details. For others, journaling has provided a way through difficult times and has inspired the making of mats related to the challenges they faced.

You will also see how rug hookers have combined different ways of journaling into one journal to suit their unique needs or purposes. I found the thoughts, ideas,



The Window of Inspiration, designed and hooked by Terri Vetter, with an excerpt from Terri’s journal used to plan the making of this mat.

and photos they shared with me very inspiring, and I hope that you do too. You may even decide to start keeping a journal yourself!

Terri Vetter

In her journal, Terri Vetter describes a friend who shares her love for Nova Scotia folk artist Maud Lewis and how that friend inspired her to make her mat *The Window of Inspiration*: “The artist Maud Lewis got her inspiration from looking out her window. My friend has been so wonderful to me through major surgery and has inspired me and guided me to places I may not have found. I wanted to do this piece for her to show her my appreciation. I see her by the window sending her warmth, kindness, and strength to others.”

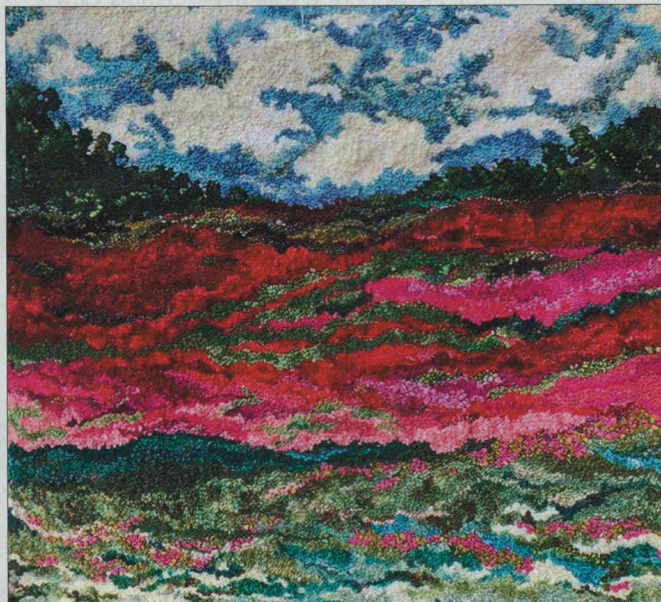
Michelle Palmer

Michelle Palmer has been art journaling for a long time: “I have been a watercolor painter and illustrator for 37 years. My first sketchbooks were in the margins of college notebooks. Sketching kept me focused through lectures. As design ideas popped into my head, I drew next to the notes that inspired them. I transferred most of those little illustrations into proper journals. When I began working with fiber, I approached needle felting, punch needle, and rug hooking with the same attention to color, negative space, atmosphere, and contrast. As soon as an idea pops into my head, I sketch it into a book or on a scrap piece of paper. Too quickly, great



Dance of the Harvest Crow, designed and hooked by Michelle Palmer.

ideas vanish from my memory. When I'm finished with a project, I reach for an armful of sketchbooks to inspire a new design." View her work at michellepalmerart.blogspot.com.



Wild Roses Roam, designed and hooked by Deanne Fitzpatrick.

Deanne Fitzpatrick

Deanne Fitzpatrick's mats are extensions and ongoing expressions of the things she writes about in her

journals. In this way, they are metaphors for what she is thinking and writing about. She shared the following journal writing: "I have never felt more creative in my life than I do right now. It is because midlife, for me—contrary to what I was ever told—is a time full of hope. It is a time full of creativity, beauty, freedom, and abandon."

When I asked Deanne how her rug *Wild Roses Roam* is related to what she had written in her journal, she said, "I think the rug is a metaphor for trusting in your feelings, letting go, letting things run wild, and trusting in the process. I think this journal entry is about all those things." For more of Deanne's thoughts and the mats that express them, visit hookingrugs.com.



Untamed, designed and hooked by Janine Broscious.

Janine Broscious

Janine Broscious has explored the use of journaling in a couple of ways. She says, "I have been journaling in one form or another for the past 20 years. I have kept nature journals, art journals, prayer journals, and regular journals. They have been extremely important in my art journey and in my mental and spiritual health."

She explains how she started free-writing journaling: "I was never consistent with my journaling until I read *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron. And I journal the way she suggests—a stream of thought. There is no worry about what to write about, I just write."

"*Untamed* shows animals and places that we saw on one summer trip in our RV. While we were on the trip, I wrote almost every day in my journal, recalling places we had been and what we had seen. Then, I wrote questions in my journal about what I should include in my rug about the trip. I often work out rug-hooking ideas in my journal. I ask questions, and ideas flood



A photo of Janine's journals.

into my head. Then, I write them down. While working on *Untamed*, I also wrote about color ideas and how to use different colors in my animals. It seems that writing about it is a place to work these challenges out." To read Janine's blog, go to joyfulwonder.wordpress.com.

Meryl Cook

Meryl Cook explains how journaling helped her transition to a new way of life:

"I woke up one day and I didn't know who I was anymore. I didn't know how I was going to move forward with my life or my career. Maybe you can relate.



Curvy Lines, designed and hooked by Meryl Cook.

I was like so many women out there looking for what's next and not knowing how to find it. We look outside ourselves when the answers are right there—inside all of us. I made myself a promise. I promised that I would give myself space and time to look inside for answers. I began keeping a journal in which I wrote and sketched and dreamed wildly. My journals formed the basis for my first book, *One Loop at a Time*, a story of rug hooking, healing, and creativity. Writing and sketching were huge components of how I reinvented myself. My experience was that, the more I wrote and sketched, the more my rug-hooking designs flowed out of me. It is as if the act of writing released my creativity. In doing this, I figured out how to move forward with my life and found a new purpose and a new career!"

Meryl provided this explanation of her rug *Curvy Lines*: "When I was designing and hooking *Curvy Lines*, I was exploring the themes of creativity and sensuousness. I had never been a straight-line kind of girl, and the curvy lines were calling me."

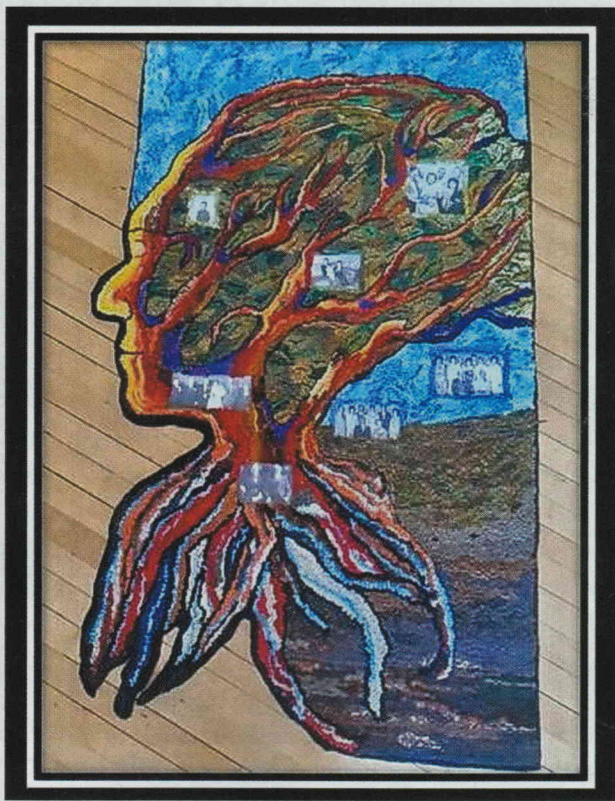
Journaling has become so important to Meryl's creative process that now, all her pieces begin with a journal entry. For more thoughts from Meryl, go to merylcook.ca.

Remi Levesque

Remi Levesque shared his story of how journaling helped in his recovery from a traumatic cycling accident: "I was brought back to life after a traumatic accident in a body I didn't recognize or accept. Physical healing took over three years. I started writing a journal after my right arm and hand started to function and to move again. When I started seeing a therapist, I started to develop my 'rug healing series.'"

Remi shared this journal entry: "November 7, 2021, 6 a.m. Wide awake again . . . can't sleep. No matter how hard I try to remember the accident[,] I can't . . . nothing . . . it's really gone, I don't even dream of it, no nightmares . . . What else have I lost from my past? That I can't remember! . . . I'm so tired of always thinking . . . searching my brain . . . It scares me that I may have forgotten something about my parents . . . something we did . . . a story or something they told me . . . my brothers . . . my grandparents . . ."

During the process of making the rug *My Roots*, Remi recalled memories and stories from his life and made an important realization: "Then, after three months of



My Roots, designed and hooked by Remi Levesque, is the first in a series of three rugs about his recovery after a cycling accident.

repeated motion, pulling loop after loop, meditating on who I am, it finally came to me, *nothing* had changed . . . I remember everything that makes me happy. The process strengthened my sense of self . . . Who I was is who I still am!”

He continued, “*My Roots* talks about my family. I remember the day when all those pictures were taken, I was there, except the ones of my great grandparents’ and my parents’ weddings. I remember both my grandparents’ fiftieth wedding anniversary pictures, with all my uncles and aunts, [and] my parents’ fiftieth,

A Special Note About Health, Healing, and Journaling

Journaling can help us see situations from new perspectives, and it can record changes and progress. Lynda Monk, director of the IAJW, tells us that journal writing helps us gain self-awareness and new insights, deal with negative thoughts, and reduce stress. Many articles confirming those benefits of journaling can be found in reputable medical journals.

In *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*, Louise DeSalvo explains how writing regularly fosters resilience: “As we write, we become observers—an important component of developing resilience. We regard our lives with a certain detachment and distance when we view it as a subject to describe and interpret. We reframe the problems in our life as challenges as we ask ourselves how to articulate what is on our mind in a way that will make sense.”

For healing from more traumatic events, “expressive writing” is recommended. This is structured writing, ideally done with a therapist, that helps the writer to link detailed descriptions of what happened with feelings—from both then and now—about what happened. For more on this use of journaling, please see DeSalvo’s *Writing as a Way of Healing* and *Opening Up* by Writing It Down by James W. Pennebaker and Joshua M. Smyth.

with my brothers and sisters-in-law, and I remember when the photo of me and my two little brothers was taken, and . . . the one when I started school.”

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In *My Roots*, Remi's profile is in the shape of a tree. He explains the importance of memories and identity in the process of healing: "The roots bring up the energy and the memories of my past, to nourish the tree."

Getting Started

Starting to journal can be as easy as buying a notebook and beginning to write—but the task can seem intimidating, and the idea of filling a blank, white page can feel impossible when you first start.

The IAJW has a wonderful website at iajw.org. It provides free resources such as journaling tips and tools and monthly journal prompts.

If you decide to start journaling, find me—Gwen Dixon—on Facebook and let me know! I would love to hear from you. **RHM**

Gwen Dixon is a fiber artist and adult educator who studied at the University of Victoria. She is from Riverview, New Brunswick. View her work at gwendixonwoolarts.com.

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