

# Sharing pain of death through writing can be healing agent for authors

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In 2003, when Christal Jordan, 31, got the disturbing phone call that her father had died she was not sure how to respond. Dealing with death can be traumatic in itself, but dealing with the death of a parent can be especially difficult. Jordan found herself at a loss as to how to really handle this painful situation. "It had always been my goal to have a relationship with my father," said Jordan, who lives in Henry County. "I was not prepared for his death, and felt that when he died I lost a purpose - not just a father." This sense of loss, pain and confusion prompted Jordan to pen a fiction novel about a young African-American woman with a similar story. So, in January of this year, "Under the Cherry Moon" was published. She found that writing about her pain through her novel was a stepping stone in the healing process and a way to gain needed closure.

"I had been writing all my life but never written from such a painful place," said Jordan, president of Enchanted PR. "There was no healing in talking about it and writing allowed me to tap into every emotion." Research shows that writing about traumatic experiences can be more beneficial than attending support groups or talking to a therapist. A study headed by Gillie Bolton, Literature and Medicine Editor of the *Journal of Medical Humanities and Senior Research Fellow* at King's College in London, England, showed that writing about painful situations allowed for more communication, creativity and self-listening. The 2003 study further showed that writing provides the opportunity to explore penned up feelings and thoughts while providing privacy and clarity. Carol Celeste, editor of the on-line newsletter and writing course called Writing to Heal, Writing to Grow agrees.

"It is extremely important to write about painful or traumatic situations. It is well-known that keeping strong emotions inside, particularly negative emotions, is bad for physical and mental health," said Celeste, who lives in Orange, California. "Writing is an excellent way to relieve the stress that leads to many ailments and to get past the pain." Writing is not just beneficial for the sufferer but for the reader as well. Reading about someone's pain can relieve isolation, resulting in understanding and healing. "My book was written partly to continue my healing process, but also I wanted to share my experience to empower others in need," said Dr. Shirley Reams, author of "*When Death Knocks*", a story of how she dealt with her child's suicide from his battles with depression. "I wanted my son's death to not be in vain, and wanted people to understand." Reams, a retiree from the DeKalb County Public School System, published her book in May. "This book honors my child's life and he would be proud that I did this," Reams said. "He was 30 years-old, a Morehouse grad, worked in real estate and wanted to be mentally well. It is so important that we talk about this and acknowledge the grieving process."

Writing about death, illness, family challenges or even stressful situations can be done in a variety of ways. Some choose a book, journal, personal essay or even poetry. "Since childhood writing poetry has been my best tool for coping with stress and problems," said Anastasia Clark, author of several books of poetry on life challenges and women's issues. "I truly believe that sometimes when you are overcome with an emotion and can barely speak, somehow your poetic voice takes over and says things for you." Clark, whose first book was "*Grieving with Poetry*", also notes that writing poetry allows you to become whoever you want to be and experience the trauma in a safe way. "I wrote the poem 'The Morning Tiger' the day after my father died and it allowed me to take on the persona of a tiger which gave me courage to get through the immense grief," said Clark who lives in Miramar, Florida. "People have always looked to literature and the arts to relieve pain. As deep as trauma and pain might be there is an equally beautiful piece of art that overcomes us with pleasure."