

A white torn piece of paper is the central focus, featuring handwritten text in black ink. A gold-colored pen lies diagonally across the paper. The background is a black, textured notebook cover.

*Write now is  
the  
Write time*

A 7-Day Guide to  
Purposeful Journaling

SELENA STONE

Write now is the Write time  
By Selena Stone

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

WELCOME	4
THE PROMISE	6
THE PAST	12
THE PRESENT	20
PERSPECTIVE	26
PRESENCE	33
THE PLANTING SEASON	42
THE PLAN	49
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	58
ABOUT THE PROCESS	59

# WELCOME

Dear Reader,

Thank you.

Thank you for taking a chance on me by purchasing my first book, a passion project of sorts (because while I loved the experience, I do want to make some coin). But seriously, thank you for taking the time to journey down this road of thoughts and ideas, reflections and experiences.

Thank you for taking a chance on yourself. This is not a passive read. As a matter of fact, I don't think it will make much sense if you read it passively. Instead, this book is meant to be a guide through your own journaling experience. Whether a novice or a seasoned journal writer, this book is meant to help you through this 7-day process. And let me be very clear, especially for those new to the journaling fam, the 7 days do NOT have to be consecutive. Do what works for you. Write them consecutively or write 1 a week. Read the entire book first and then write your journal entries or alternate. Write your entries in a notebook or type it. Write using sentences and paragraphs or bullet points. Write with words or images. Journal how you need to.

You will notice this book is organized in a very specific way. Each chapter is made up of 3 parts: the text, my journal, and your journal. Yes, my journal entries are a part of what you will read. And let me make 1 thing very clear... I was cussing myself out the entire time for deciding to do that! Talk about feeling vulnerable! But my reasoning behind this was what kept me committed to this process. I needed you to see the truth. Journaling isn't perfect (you might notice that I did not focus on editing grammatical errors in my entries), it is not meant to be polite (if you are offended by



curse words, go ahead and put this book down now), it is not always pretty (entries are sometimes incomplete because maybe you don't want to write about something anymore or maybe you jump from one idea to the next), and it can sometimes be painful (I know, I'm doing a great job at pitching this idea to you, lol, but you already bought the book so you might as well see things through).

Now, for my friends and family reading this, don't worry. I am okay. Yes, some of my entries might be dark, making you worrisome, but again, I am okay. More than okay, I am good! And I know that some parts might be confusing because they are what I call the, "carefully hidden parts of myself." No, not hidden because I didn't trust in your love enough to share with you my pain, but hidden because in my crazy mind I valued your love so much I wanted to protect you from it. Many of you already worry about the logistics of my life, like me living so far away from home, so I never wanted to add another layer. But like I said, I am good and I thank you for always supporting my many endeavors.

This entire experience has been nothing short of a true blessing. I feel free. I feel peace. I feel clarity. And I feel that write now is the write time to share!

Selena

# 1-

## THE PROMISE

---

I never make promises. Well, let me never say, “never.” Many years ago, when there was a 2 in front of my age and I was charged additional fees when renting a car, I made a promise to God. Without going into too much detail, I made a promise to God that if He got my sister and our friend out of a scary, sticky, and (to this day) hilariously memorable situation, I would never do this one particular thing again. And ya’ll, it has been the most difficult promise to keep. Hence why I avoid making promises... until now.

There is something about the promise. Something about making it and recording it that ups the accountability factor. It creates a level of commitment that is really hard to ignore.

And any way you want to slice the tomato... toe-mah-toe... a promise is just that: a word. An assurance. A vow. An oath. A guarantee. Now, do you see why I stay away from them as often as possible? It’s some serious shit!

Even so, with all my fears and apprehensions behind this act of a promise, I knew I needed to make it the first part of our experience. I knew that if I didn’t take the time to make a commitment to myself about embarking on this journaling journey again, I would not see it through. And yes, this is coming from someone who knows and has experienced the fullness of what journaling has to offer. So, I can only imagine how someone who is not a fan of journaling must feel.

# **“PROMISES ARE LIKE CRYING BABIES IN A THEATER, THEY SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT AT ONCE.”**

*~Norman Vincent Peale*

The most effective way I could think to do this (mainly for myself because it's no easy feat) was to ask and answer a series of questions that would help lead me to creating my promise statement.

## **Question Set 1:**

Who am I willing to become during this process?

Who am I willing to share this experience with?

Who will I need to connect with in order to stay committed?

## **Question Set 2:**

What am I willing to commit to during this journey?

What part of this journey is new for me?

What part of this journey am I afraid of?

## **Question Set 3:**

Why do I journal?

Why don't I journal?

Why did I stop?

## **Question Set 4:**

How will I stay focused and clear of distractions?

How will I trust myself during this process?

How will I handle breaking my promise?

## **My promise statement:**

*After reflecting on my responses, I knew I needed to go back through and pull out any key words or phrases that truly spoke to me. I used these to help create my promise statement.*

## Entry 1- My Promise

#1- I am willing to become...

- ◆ The woman in my dreams and of my dreams
- ◆ Emotional and **vulnerable**
- ◆ A little more isolated and removed as I navigate this journey and process
- ◆ More accepting and more **patient** with myself

#2- The part of this journey that's new for me is the fact that I am writing a book! What the hell? Lol, was this really my idea?

Journaling is such a personal and intimate process that can be so impactful in a person's life that while I want to write and keep it all to myself, I also want to share it with others. I want to show people that there is power in the pen. I want to show them that there is **freedom** in the **process**. I want them to know that anyone can journal. There is no set rule or method. But how do I get these ideas and beliefs across without opening up and sharing a very personal part of myself with others?

This is scary new. I'm legit not even **afraid** of actually writing this book. There's no part of me that worries about whether or not I will sell copies and reach an audience beyond my network of family and friends. What scares me shitless is being so exposed. But because I have seen and experienced the benefits of this activity, I am willing to approach this new journey in a **new way**. And I believe that

this new way is going to allow me to experience a level of freedom that I have never experienced before.

### #3- I journal...

- ◆ To **process** emotions and experiences
- ◆ To get through my darkness
- ◆ To remember
- ◆ To meditate and pray
- ◆ To get to my **truth**
- ◆ Because I believe in the process

### #4- I will stay focused by...

- ◆ Leaving my phone in another room
- ◆ Sitting at my desk
- ◆ Journaling in the morning (Lord have mercy because it's 4:37 AM at this very moment... that's a little early, even for me!)

### **Promise Statement:**

I promise to be patient with myself and to trust in the process. I promise not to let fear stop my new approach but instead to push through to the level of freedom I know this is going to bring.

# YOUR PROMISE

---

*For this entry, respond to **ANY** and **AS MANY** of the questions in the previous section. Number them or don't. Write in full sentences or jots. Respond **HOW** you see fit. As you respond, more questions may pop into your head. Jot them down! Choose to answer them or simply record them. Just know that they came to you for a reason.*



# 2-

# THE PAST

---

I struggled with this section for many reasons. First, I struggled with the title. Juggling between “my past” and “my pain,” I was uncertain about what I needed this section to become for me and you. Second, I struggled with the purpose. When journaling about the past, it can include anything. From joyful memories to traumatic experiences, I wondered if it would be both necessary and beneficial to even take this journey back in time. Third, I struggled because I knew from prior journal entries, that this is the most difficult section to write. But I also knew, from these same entries, that it is one of the most impactful and eye-opening sections as well. Hence, Part 2.

**“WE CAN’T CHANGE THE PAST BUT WE CAN LEARN FROM HISTORY AND REMEMBER THE IMPORTANT THINGS - THE SACRIFICES... AND THE PRICE OF OUR FREEDOM TODAY.”**

*~Vera Lynn*

Revisiting the past can be a tricky thing. On one hand, I don’t want to dwell and obsess over it, even the joyful memories. After all, it is the past. It has already happened, it cannot be undone, and it cannot be relived no matter how hard a person tries. But on the other hand, this idea that a person can and should forget the past and focus on the present is not always an effective approach either. I mean,



maybe for some that might work, but it scares the crap out of me.

Okay, “Picture it: Sicily, 1912...” (and if you don’t get the reference, at least get your life and google Sophia Petrillo from *The Golden Girls*, but I digress). Picture yourself as that 4-year-old inquisitive (nosy) and spirited (misbehaved) child. Now picture that alluring object in your kitchen. That metal and glass-looking square thing with knobs. Oh my goodness, tons of knobs. Knobs that when turned, causes this beautifully enchanting blue and orange warm wavy thing to come dancing out of its hiding place in a circle. Go on... picture it. Feel the warmth from afar as it draws you in closer... and closer... and closer... the shit must be magic! There must be a little wizard hiding in this box and at 4-years-old, you totally want to meet him. Am I helping any parents right now? Yes, your child sees the world differently. They see the world as a place to explore and the desire to know and learn more increases because so much of the world is right outside their reach.

So, what’s my point?

For that 4-year-old who manages to get close enough to discover that the magical wizard hurts when you touch it, he or she experiences a moment that shifts time from present (I’m touching it...) to past (I just touched it, and it hurts!) and teaches a monumental lesson: the stove is HOT.

Now let’s revisit the argument of those whose sentiment is to leave the past in the past or not to relive old shit. What happens? The “why” of our present is lost. While it is true that the stinging pain of the burnt little fingers on our 4-year-old hands will heal and the trauma of being in pain and scolded by our caregiver will slowly fade, if we completely release the memory, the “why” behind the directives of “stay away from the hot stove” also leaves. Consequently, we’re back at the dang stove looking for this dang wizard.

Hopefully, my strange analogy worked, and you have a clearer understanding of the purpose behind this section. Journaling about the past is less about trying to relive it and more about understanding our why:

***Why do I speak to others the way I do?***

***Why do I avoid social situations?***

***Why do I hold on to toxic relationships?***

***Why do I struggle with my finances?***

***Why do I self-sabotage?***

***Why am I afraid to try new things?***

***Why do I let others make decisions for me?***

***Why do I procrastinate?***

***Why am I scared to take up space?***

These are just a few examples of the questions you might ask yourself that can only be answered by unearthing some much avoided truths from your past. But that's the caveat: if you're not willing to go back in the past to HONESTLY acknowledge and self-reflect on some things, you're never going to be able to answer your questions in a way that will bring about the sustainable changes in mindset and behavior that you desire.

## Entry 2- My Past

I am not even about to answer too many questions because I already know how I can get. Also, this entry, like the others, is going to be made public and... well, I'm just not ready for that much of my truth to be shared. But I still need to honor the process. I still need to be truthful and transparent. Not necessarily for my readers (because I can pretend like the best of them), but for myself. Because although I am creating my entries as part of the process of creating this book, I am still actually journaling. Meaning, I'm not about to fake it and miss out on another opportunity to heal, evolve, and connect with myself and my God.

### **So, why do I constantly feel expendable?**

The last two weeks, admittedly before I started this process, I was in a dark place. An unfortunately all too familiar dark place. And, I didn't pick up a pen and paper. Not even my phone to create an audio entry. Nope. This darkness had me so tight I stayed there for days. My darkness? Memories of the time and love I gave to so many people, each one for varying lengths of time but all with great intensity and authenticity, all of whom discarded me without looking back. Without a second thought. Without a single regret. Fuck the trash- I was the shitty toilet tissue that remained long gone after a single flush. And they all walked out of my life within months of one another. Did they plan that shit?!

I knew where this darkness came from because it had shown up before. And I know that I am in a much better place now than I was when it all happened. But every so often, the idea that I am expendable creeps into the passenger seat and decides to go along for the ride.

How do I know when it's here? When I'm driving and I play a full scene of my car crash in my head and my initial thought is: "better me than someone else. I have nothing to lose." Or, "sure, some people may miss me, but they have their own family so they'll be good."

I even have this martyr scenario play out, in different versions/storyline, but all with the same ending: "no, not you! You have your \_\_\_\_\_ to go home to. Your \_\_\_\_\_ needs you to survive. I don't... let me take this L."

That's some fucked up thinking, I know. This is why in addition to my daily prayer life and my journals, I'm finally looking for mental health services. 'Cause when I re-read this entry in the future, I know I will be in an even better mental and emotional space. I know that the next time darkness pays me a visit, that bitch ain't staying as long.

But I know why I feel expendable at times. It's not because those individuals walked out of my life, (because I've healed from that part and re-reading some old journal entries has truly helped

me realize that), it's because they walked out and left behind remnants of gifted promises. They left me with the torn up wrapping paper and gift boxes. They left me to clean up... to mourn the promised gifts that I never even got a chance to open.

It's crazy how I literally just made that connection! I just realized that during those dark weeks I didn't feel anger or hurt towards those individuals, I felt it towards myself. And I didn't understand why until now. Lol, this shit is crazy! I'm just now seeing this:

**They didn't throw me away, they left with the gift because the gift wasn't meant for me. I chose to pick up the trashy wrapping paper and boxes. I chose not to let it go!**

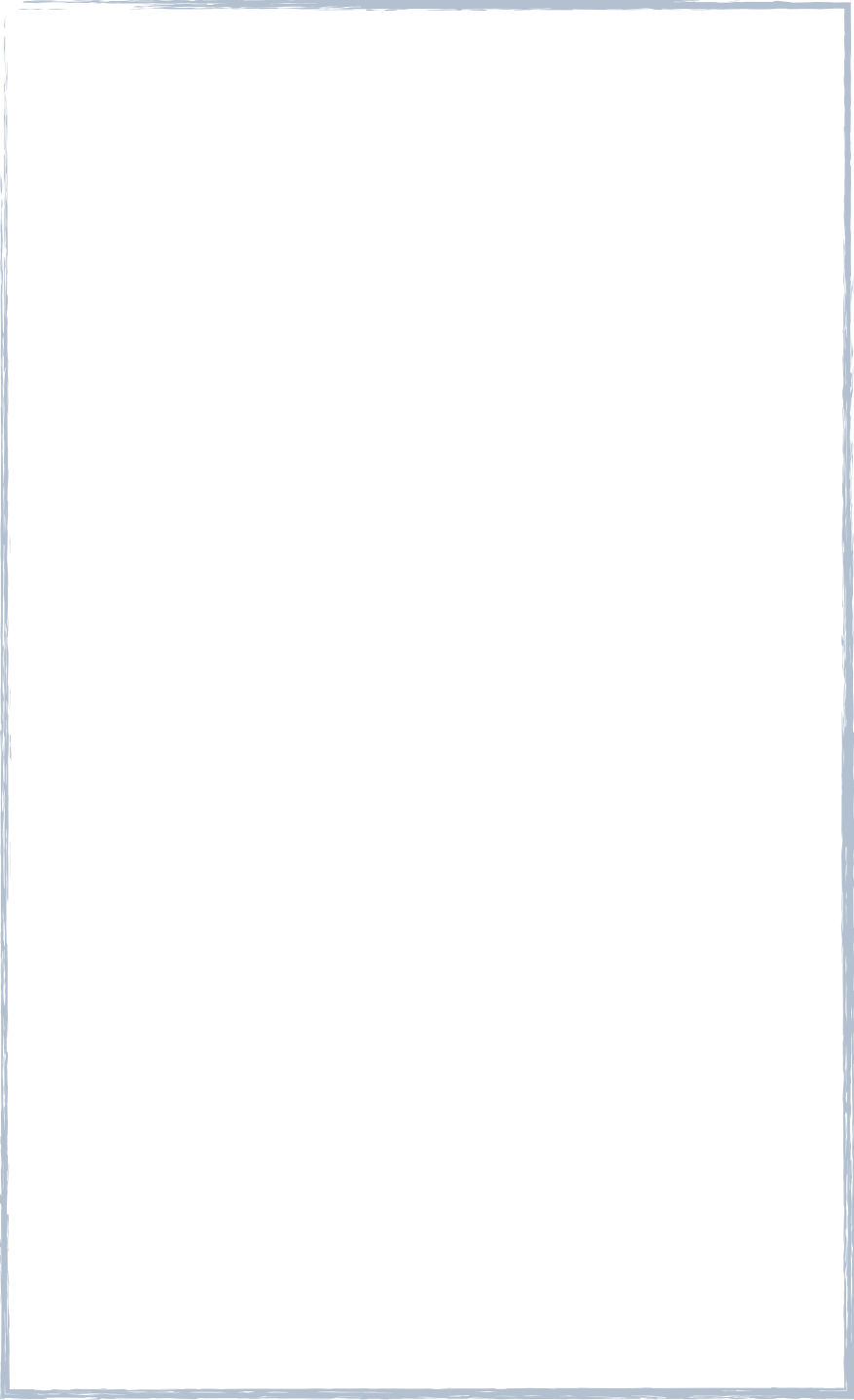
I'm done. This entry is done for today. I know that people reading this (those who don't know me) might be thinking that I'm lying or making it up to be dramatic. I don't give a shit. I need to re-read this now and sit with it and talk to my God because wow... I wasn't even ready for this entry and I'm glad I wrote it on a day that I didn't have to go to work.

# YOUR PAST



*What are you dealing with today that is the result of something from your past? What have you been avoiding by keeping yourself busy and occupied? What thoughts or attributes of yourself do you want to change? Where do they stem from?*

*Whatever you want this section to be, let it be. Just be honest.*



# 3-

## THE PRESENT

---

**“FEELING GRATITUDE AND NOT EXPRESSING IT IS LIKE  
WRAPPING A PRESENT AND NOT GIVING IT.”**

*~William Arthur Ward*

I woke up this morning still in awe of yesterday's revelation. That “ahah!” moment after five years of what felt like the longest grief cycle ever. Five years going back and forth between denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. And if you know anything about the Five Stages of Grief theory, or have experienced them yourself, you know that each stage can occur in any order, can vary in length of time, frequency, and intensity, and can be experienced simultaneously. Overall, the stages of grief are a mindfuck.

When I woke up this morning, I wasn't sure what this section should focus on. Don't get me wrong, the entire book had been brainstormed, planned, and outlined days ago, but I was not completely sure of the order. I didn't want to journal past, present, and future simply because it made chronological sense. I wanted to journal in an order that made sense to the experience I believe each person completing this process will have- which in and of itself is a tall-order because how can I write a book that when read by different people, living with different circumstances, will create a shared experience?



So, I did what I knew to do. I prayed.

And let me tell you about the God I serve: He doesn't always answer right away and His answers don't always make sense. Which is annoying! And I don't know why He hasn't addressed this issue yet because I left Him plenty of comments and ideas in His suggestion box, but I digress.

So while spending this time in prayer, I reflected on yesterday's revelation and understood the experience even more.

I realized that I had been stuck in the cycle of grief because a stage was missing. Now let's be clear: I do not possess any of the education, experience, and expertise as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, the psychiatrist who came up with the Five Stages of Grief theory. But because I possess the fullness of my own experiences, I believe this additional stage has been the missing component for me. I believe this missing stage has the power to end this cyclical process of grief.

I call this stage: Clarity.

This is my present.

And let me provide you with a little clarity as well. In this section, the term "present" does not simply refer to a moment of time that is happening right now. Rather, it refers to the gift that this moment brings.

Clarity must have been the word of the day because this morning God responded immediately, and His directives were very clear: write about the present as a gift and use today's entry to express your gratitude.

## Entry 3- My Present

I am grateful for the gift(s) of:

### ◆ **Clarity and Confirmations**

Over the last few years I've found myself pairing these two words together, specifically when I was being indecisive (meaning often because I am an over-thinker). This was in part a result of being uncertain about whose voice I was listening to. Whether subtle messages from the media/social media or direct opinions from people I confided in; whether my stubbornness playing the response I wanted to hear or God telling me the response I needed to know, the different voices made it really hard to confidently move forward.

But recently, I have picked up speed! And I know this is because of the relationship I have with my God. I move in faith because I trust who He is and who He is in me. Since I've made this shift, I noticed that God continues to clarify and confirm along the way. While I move. No more wasted time in this faith walk!

Receiving that moment of clarity while writing my last journal entry (mind still blown) and then a confirmation during yesterday's preached word has my mind officially blown!

### ◆ **A Good Word**

Yesterday, Pastor Richie Mullis @FreeLifeChurch shared an

amazing word that spoke to me so directly- my heart is still full. He preached on Mark 14, the familiar passage where Mary Magdalen, who is known as the woman who had many sins, used some of the most expensive perfumes/oils to wash Jesus' feet.

I am so grateful for the gift of this message and that among the many notes and new levels of understanding that I walked away with were these two things:

1. I didn't do anything in my past to disqualify my future- that's not how God works
2. There's no need to run from my broken season because it qualifies me for God to pour in and for me to pour out (Mary broke the Alabaster box before she poured the perfumed oil). I can't have breakthrough without being broken.

### ◆ Sleeping in

Did someone say, "4-Day Weekend?!" I'm not asking why this time was put on the school calendar, but I am genuinely thankful. Not having to set an alarm is what I look forward to the most. Waking up this morning (which in and of itself is a blessing) when the sun was fully out... yes! My mind, body, and spirit needed the extra couple of hours of sleep. And oh, double yes! I get to do it again.

Thank You Lord for these gifts!

# YOUR PRESENT



*What are you grateful for today? What presents/gifts will you recognize during this moment of gratitude?*



# 4-

## PERSPECTIVE

---

It's interesting how few things there are in this world that we have the power to change. As a matter of fact, the older I get the more I realize how little control we have.

Instead, what we have is the allusion of having/being in control because that's what humans need in order to feel some sense of security. Disagree? Consider the following:

We think we have control over our finances because we budget every single penny of our income, but let a hacker get access to our personal information and it's a wrap. We've apparently spent \$10,000 in a few hours, in foreign countries, shopping at merchants we've never even heard of, all while asleep.

Too extreme? Okay, let's try another one. We think we have control over our daily schedule. We set alarm clocks to wake up at a certain time, we use navigation to make sure we take the best route to and from our destinations, we even keep calendars and reminders to make sure we accomplish the tasks we set out to do. But let there be one power outage so that our phone battery dies or a car wreck that turns our 20-minute commute into an hour, and all of our careful scheduling gets thrown out the window.

Don't get me wrong, I used to believe these things as well. I especially thought that if I didn't have control anywhere else, I at least had control over the things that happened in my

own home. Well, fast forward to a fire ant infestation which led me to realize that... “the lie detector test said, that was a LIE!” And let’s just say from someone who has officially self-diagnosed herself to have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder tendencies, to realize how little control I actually had was a hard pill to swallow.

But that’s also when I discovered the power of perspective and it made all the difference.

## **“WHEN YOU SHIFT YOUR PERSPECTIVE, SUDDENLY THE LIFE YOU’RE LIVING CHANGES.”**

*~Mandi Briggs*

Now let’s make something very clear: I am not talking about shifting your perspective in a way where everything you experience in life becomes rainbows and butterflies. Toxic positivity, the rejection of all difficult emotions in favor of cheerful ones, is real and very dangerous. Ecclesiastes 3 puts it best by illustrating that there is a time for everything, including a time to weep and a time to laugh. When I refer to perspective, I am talking about understanding your situations from a slightly different context. Understanding that while you can’t control what happens, you can control how you choose to view the things that happen.

As an educator there is so much out of our control it’s ironic that most of what a great classroom teacher does is all tied to planning and preparing. But it was this mind-shift that allowed me to navigate some very difficult situations even in the classroom. For example, returning to the classroom after the pandemic was not an easy feat. Students seemed to be more apathetic than ever and the cell phone battle was at an all-time high. My pre-pandemic self would have taken the constant disregard for classroom norms and procedures personally. I would have been pissed! And while I was never

a “yeller” as a teacher, I think I would have quickly turned into one.

But then I started looking at these student behaviors through a slightly different lens. I adjusted my perspective. What I had deemed as blatant disrespect became evidence of real anxiety and addictions. It’s a real thing and it’s called Nomophobia, the fear of being without a working cell phone. Dig a little more and you’ll find many treatment centers created specifically to address cell phone addiction.

Now let’s make one thing clear: I did not excuse their behavior. What I am saying is once I shifted my perspective, how I approached the situation also changed. I found I was slower to get angry. I also focused my efforts on different ways to remind students of our cell phone policy since I still did not like having to repeat myself. And because I saw these actions through the lens of addiction and realized the anxiety students felt was very real, I embedded practices, such as scheduled cell phone breaks, into our daily lesson cycle.

The result? Student accountability with adjustments in teacher planning that made the classroom experience smoother. All because I saw things through a different lens. All because I shifted my perspective.



## Entry 4- My Perspective

There are a lot of things I wish I could control. There are a lot of people I wish I could control. Well, not really the person... just their thoughts and actions and reactions. Okay, so even writing that sounds a bit psycho-maniac-ish, but it's true. But clearly the focus of this entry is all about my perspective. I can't change others, but how can I change how I see and respond to them? And how can I do it in a way that isn't toxic.

There are people in my life right now who no longer function/ play the same role they once did. For the sake of this experience, I will not use any names. What's crazy is nothing happened. There was no dramatic fallout or major fight. Life happened. Time happened. And while I don't think this is a good enough reason for where our friendship currently is, we are here nonetheless.

I admittedly toyed around with the idea of completely letting go (let's be real, it wouldn't be the first time I had to say, "good-bye"). But each time I think about it I get a feeling or a reminder that these friendships haven't reached an expiration, they just need an adjustment. And perhaps that's the result of me being selfish or in denial, trying to hold on a little longer than I'm supposed to. And if it is, I sure as hell am not tackling that in this journal entry...

But are friendships supposed to be THIS much work? Are they supposed to be this draining? For so long? I am cool with

seasons, but even winter doesn't last this damn long. Are things as one-sided as I think they are? Is only one person checking in? Does only one person care enough to even notice? Or am I overthinking?

Regardless, after many conversations and direct approaches to the situation, I have two options. I can either let go, or I can change my approach. I choose the latter. I choose to see:

- ◆ That we are at different places in our lives now than where we were when we met 10+ years ago
- ◆ That the way we spent time together and socialized in our 20s worked well because we were in our 20s
- ◆ That the way we communicated in our 30s worked well because we were in our 30s
- ◆ That we are damn near in our 40s...
- ◆ The need to cultivate our friendship for who we are and who we want to be, not who we were

I can't change them and I won't force what is no longer meant to be. I won't stress myself out by forcing things and I won't take everything personally. Instead, I will choose to adjust how I see things and how I respond. And most importantly, I will accept when it's time to fully let go.

# YOUR PERSPECTIVE



*What things are you trying to get control over that are outside of your control? How do you see that situation now? What are some mind-shifts that you can do to help navigate the situation? What are some things you need to think or say to yourself to help you get a new perspective on this situation. Remember, be careful of toxic positivity.*



# 5- PRESENCE

---

**H**ow you see the world is one thing. How you exist in it is another.

Michelle Mazur authored one of my summer reads entitled, “The 3 Word Rebellion.” It was a text that challenged entrepreneurs to see their business as a platform for making change and to leverage it as a resource to create a movement.

Mazur’s book was interactive, similar to this one, and only had meaning and relevance if the reader marked it up. As a matter of fact, she explicitly instructed her readers to, “highlight passages. Doodle in the margins. Complete the exercises. Use it as your messaging journal.”

It was the result of this process that made me realize it was not good enough to simply see the world through a certain perspective, instead, I had to also occupy it in a way that made more sense. And that the only way to occupy it was to have a presence in it. I had to realize that it was alright to have a voice. And not just alright, but my right. Thus, my own 3 Word Rebellion took shape and I boldly began to do what I later coined as: **TAKE UP SPACE**. And just in time to take stage as one of the speakers at the annual Educators Moving On Network summer conference! This is what I said:

---

## “Take up Space. Take up Space? **TAKE UP SPACE!**”

These words came to me as I sat on a plane on my way back to New York for my annual “visit the family” trip. I was writing/journaling my thoughts, in what would later become my first blog entry, and was hit with this idea that I, Selena Stone, dark-skinned, black, plus-sized (because anything with a ‘plus’ is a bonus, so my rolls are my bonus/extra credit points), queer woman of Caribbean and Hispanic descent, was actually allowed to sit in this first-class seat. And I know what some of you may be thinking, “girl, it’s a lot easier to take up space in first-class,” and you’re right. But what hit me was that I was sitting in a seat and space that was purposefully constructed to provide its passenger with more room... or space... to occupy, and I was still trying to scooch closer to the window and hold my carry-on tightly so as to not disrupt my neighbor. Y’all, your girl even hesitated and contemplated getting up to use the restroom!

Why? Because my entire life I’ve felt as if I was not allowed to belong and that when I did enter a space, it was a privilege and I needed to occupy as little of it as possible. The dark-skinned black girl in high-school and college classrooms with predominantly white peers who tried to make herself less visible in every back corner seat in the hopes of blending in (as if I was a chameleon). The plus-sized woman who found herself literally tiptoeing down school corridors paying attention to whether or not her steps caused the flimsy classroom walls to vibrate and disrupt student learning. The queer woman who loved her relationship with God, prayed and served faithfully, but sat in many of

an awkward conversation in church meetings and Bible studies feeling voiceless and afraid of being “found out.”

I can go on and on and on about the many ways I was, and still am, frequently reminded that I was somehow different than the person sitting or standing next to me and that my differences caused me to believe I was not worthy to belong... making me think things like, “girl, know your place” or “woman, you better just keep your mouth shut before these folks look at you like you’re crazy.”

Y’all, long before that plane ride I had grown exhausted of my own disappearing act. Tired of feeling as if I was an intruder in my own world and that everyone else belonged except me. So yes, at 35,000 feet in the air, I made the decision to stop holding on to my heavy baggage. Instead, I decided to exhale, to settle into what belonged to me, and to finally take up space!”

And I wish the same for you. Because I truly believe that if you look closely at different areas in your life, there are places that lack the fullness of your presence. There are places where you have probably told yourself to “dial it back” or that “you’re doing the most.” Maybe you had that amazing idea to contribute during a team meeting, but you couldn’t get a word in. Or you have spent the past several years taking care of the spaces in your home for everyone else except yourself. Or maybe you find yourself in friendships and relationships where everyone else’s ideas and choices always take precedence over yours.

Your presence matters. If it didn’t, you would not have been given the blessing to wake up to another day. You were created because this world needed you. Not part of you, all

of you. So stop downplaying how much your presence is needed.

**“FOR THERE IS ALWAYS LIGHT, IF ONLY WE’RE BRAVE ENOUGH  
TO SEE IT. IF ONLY WE’RE BRAVE ENOUGH TO BE IT.”**

*~Amanda Gorman*



## Entry 5- My Presence

My speech was the heart of my entry/journal, but I still wanted to honor the process and take the time to reflect on the areas in my life where I have boldly taken up space as well as the areas where I have not.

Over the past few months I have been fully present:

◆ At my new job

Now this was clearly not always the case. With a new school district, new school, and new position, there was a lot that I had to learn and there was a lot that folks had to learn about me. But I am excited that even when I was quiet, it was because I was listening more and speaking less (which is necessary at times-taking up space doesn't mean being obnoxious). I love the fact that it did not take me as long as it usually does to find my groove and to become a full contributor to the instructional support team.

◆ With my business partners (AKA the BOBS)

I can't help but chuckle to myself at this one because I KNOW they're going to be like, "what?!" as they read this. But it's true! You don't get to know people until you get to know people. So even though we hit it off at the conference this past July, I was slow to warm up. Would they think I was too intense? Too OCD? Too bossy? Too direct? Because things can get very uncomfortable very quickly when it comes to business. But nope! While they do see some of these things in me, they embrace it. They appreciate things like my OCD because it allows me to have an eye for detail.

Who knew that when you showed up as your authentic self, there would be people who would love and respect even the things you find annoying about yourself?

◆ In my own home

Granted, this is a strange one to add to my list since it's my home. Why would I not be fully present? But after relocating cities and states over 12 times since I turned 18, being fully present in my home was something I struggled with. Truth be told, I still had several moving boxes ready for a "just in case." Recently, however, I started to throw them away and trade them in for Amazon boxes of home decor items and other supplies. I started to settle in and take up my own literal space.

◆ When I went to a gay country/line dancing club

While the heading speaks for itself in so many ways, this experience was truly an example of how much I have allowed myself to take up space. I love to dance but hadn't done it like that in a long time. I hadn't done it like that ever... country line dancing? Bruhhh, palancing is probably as close as I've ever gotten. But I wanted to try it because I want to be that person who tries new things without overthinking so much. So, at the comedy club one minute and then caravanning it to another part of the city to continue the fun was as impromptu as it gets. And fun I did have! I even got in on the dancing when they played the Wobble, which still puzzles me how that selection even made it in, but I have no complaints. I decided to take up space that night and had one of the best nights I have ever had since the quarantine was lifted. Next time, because yes, there will be a next time, I will even try line dancing to a

country song.

Now, I still have work to do. I have not boldly been my fullest and most authentic self in every space that I occupy, specifically:

- ◆ At my new gym
- ◆ At my new church

It's a good thing to see that there are more places and situations where I take up space than not. And looking at my "not" list, those places are directly connected to my own insecurities and not tied to other people. Which means I have an opportunity to do more perspective work. And I'm totally okay with that.

# YOUR PRESENCE

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*In what rooms do you feel like your presence is being ignored? In what situations and relationship do you see yourself putting others first and only leaving just a little space for yourself? Whether it's a coworker who tries to silence your ideas and contributions during a meeting or a new partner who refuses to make room for you in their lives after months of dating or a family or friend who leaves you unread and unanswered... remember that you have the right to exist. You have the right to **TAKE UP SPACE!***



# 6-

## PLANTING SEASON

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It seems as if everyone I know is getting ready for an imminent zombie apocalypse and in preparation, they are learning and refining their horticultural skills as if their lives depended on it. And in many ways, it does. All of our lives do. And I find myself in deep admiration of these people who have taken the time to learn the techniques of gardening: from my aunties to my cousin to my sister, I get to witness firsthand how much planning and care go into planting, growing, and harvesting your own food. However, as for me and my house, we will continue to shop at Kroger!

But by watching my loved ones go through this process, I have learned a few things:

1. Planting requires patience.
2. Planting requires sacrifice.
3. Planting is just the beginning.

**Planting requires patience.** Dare I say that planting probably requires more patience than it does skill.

Now, I know nothing about dirt and seeds and plants other than it all belongs outside of my home. I don't garden. I don't like flowers. As a matter of fact, at one point I had this brilliant idea that I would build a house surrounded by nothing but concrete. The concept of planting seems so frustrating to me. You have to go through this long process and then wait and hope. And it doesn't seem to matter whether or not you're a novice or an expert, because at the end of the day,

Mother Nature has the final say in whether or not your effort will reap the harvest you are hoping for. And if you plant the wrong thing at the wrong time, or too much of one and not enough of another, your garden will be overrun by things like dill. I can still hear the frustration in my sister's voice, "Dill. Dill! Who the heck eats dill?"

## "IF WE DON'T PLANT THE RIGHT THINGS, WE WILL REAP THE WRONG THINGS."

*~Maya Angelou*

And when these things happen, you don't just throw in the towel and give up, you go back, dig again, and wait some more. Patience!

**Planting requires sacrifice.** You have to be willing to get on the ground and put your hands in the dirt. You have to be willing to tend to the garden on brutally hot days and extremely cold ones. You have to keep a constant eye out for evidence of uninvited pests and critters whose sole mission is to reap your harvest. And your garden does not care how much money you spent on quality manure or how late you got home from work or how achy your muscles feel from tending to it previously. The planting season does not wait until you are ready.

This is where sacrifice comes in. You have to be willing to set some things aside. You have to be willing to get a little messy and experience a little pain. If you are uncertain about it, remember the words found in Isaiah 66:9, "I will not cause pain without allowing something new to be born," says the LORD. Don't let the fear of the sacrifice keep you from the blessing of your harvest.

**Planting is just the beginning.** If you don't tend to what you planted, it won't ever grow.

After planting, you still have to water, watch, and wait. And when your hard work finally bears fruit, there is still more work to be done. Otherwise, you would reap the harvest, enjoy it, and then starve.

This is why I titled this chapter accordingly. Because we all have a planting season and a harvest. We all have an area in our lives that requires some more tending to. More patience. More sacrifice. And chances are, it's probably an area that we have worked on before but then grew tired before we got to the harvest. Or maybe the harvest was plenty and we thought that meant the process was over.

Whatever the reason, it is time to put that little seed back in the ground. It is time to make the sacrifice and trust in the process. Don't let fear or past failure keep you from reaping your harvest. And worse yet, don't limit God by thinking the harvest you were able to reap was all that He had for you. It's time to plant again.



## Entry 6- My Planting Season

There is clearly a need to err on the side of caution, as danger is a very real thing: hate crimes, mass shootings, drunk drivers, etc. But staying shut in and becoming reclusive is not the answer. It's time to get out. And not kind of get out, like in my half-ass typical way, but really get out. Step out. Exist and live life more abundantly.

So as I slowly begin to make this happen, I want to commit to doing so on a regular basis. Because I know myself: I will go out, party hard, and then be good for like 6 months (shit, I even have a shirt that says: anti-social butterfly, smh). And although that is my pattern of behavior, it's not how I actually want to live.

When I picture my life in fullness, I picture living memorable experiences where I connect with diverse groups of people. Now, this does not necessarily mean making lifelong friends or bringing random folks home. No, it means living experiences where I can share a good story or two, laugh and be silly, and enjoy life's moments as they come and go. Because in life, when you work hard you should also play hard. Balance.

So, improv comedy club... check! Line dancing at a gay club... check! Zombie Safari paintball hunt... soon to be checked!

That is one of the seeds I am planting today (because the rest

cannot be shared publicly- sorry, not sorry). And I know it might seem insignificant, even shallow, to some reading this, but like I mentioned in other parts of this book, this is my truth.

And it's not just about going out more. No, the seed I am planting is one that will allow me to exist in spaces I never imagined I would belong. It's planting a seed that will allow me to live a full life doing things and traveling to places that I want and not letting the discomfort or uncertainty of others dictate where those spaces are. And while I still love the idea of visiting my familiar spaces (I mean, there is a reason why they are so familiar in the first place), I also know that I will continue getting the same result if I continue doing the same things. And that's boring! It's like harvesting the same crop for life... spinach is my favorite green but even I need some romaine every once in a while (screw kale!).

So I'm planting the seeds of more and different. I am planting these seeds and then unapologetically enjoying my cornucopia-level harvest when that time comes.

# YOUR PLANTING SEASON

*What idea, desire, or goal do you have that you have been holding on to for so long? What do you need to protect and take care of more so that it can finally break through? What do you need to guard carefully from pests that seem to try and steal it or ruin it every chance they get? Is it your time? Your peace? Your joy? Your dream? What will you plant this season?*



# 7-

## THE PLAN

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I don't know what this experience was like for you, especially if it was your first time journaling, but if you made it this far, kudos! To set out with a goal in mind is one thing- to execute it is another. That is why I thought it fitting to conclude this 7-day journal with this topic.

I want you to go back to your promise statement from chapter #1. Go ahead, I'll wait...

Now, I want you to rewrite that statement. I'll put mine here as well:

I promise to be patient with myself and to trust in the process. I promise not to let fear stop my new approach but instead to push through to the level of freedom I know this is going to bring.

You might have initially thought that this promise was only related to the completion of this journaling process, but if my hunch is correct, you might now have also noticed that it can connect to other areas in your life. Reflecting on my own statement, I am in awe of how the promise I made myself regarding this process as a writer has been so applicable to the conversations I have had in my personal and professional life as well:

"Trust in the process" were words spoken to my teams as

we unpacked the data from this year's first major assessment.

"Give yourself grace" were sentiments shared with my colleagues as we navigated some very overwhelming situations.

"Keep trusting" were prayers I whispered to myself throughout the days as I experienced reminders of my unanswered prayers.

And yet, a promise is only as good as the plan of action made to see it through.

The reason why a lot of promises remain empty and broken is because of a lack of planning and accountability. Shucks, this is also why big promises are only acknowledged as valid when accompanied by written contracts:

- ◆ School permission slips are promises to take your child off school property only for that specific purpose and on that specific day
- ◆ Credit card agreements are promises to repay borrowed funds
- ◆ Retainer agreements are promises to receive certain services when required
- ◆ Prenuptial agreements are promises to retain ownership of certain assets should the marriage fail
- ◆ Will and Testaments are promises to fulfill a person's wishes after their death

The list goes on...

And what's even more interesting about these big promises is the fact that they come with a plan. That school permission slip would not have been signed if the school did not lay out a clear plan that included times, transportation, chaperones, and food.

So as we get ready to culminate this 7-day experience, I want us to consider our plan. No, it does not have to be a plan on how to continue this journaling experience (although if that's what you're leaning towards... that's dope!). It can be a plan for anything you need. A plan to remain connected to the promise you made in chapter #1, a plan connected to some of the things you wrote about in the other entries, or even a plan based on something you need to accomplish that had nothing to do with anything you journaled about.

And I'm totally going to "teacherfy" this (yes, that's a word) by helping you create a plan. In education, we refer to these plans as goals. S.M.A.R.T. goals to be exact:

**S**pecific- connected to one activity, thought, or idea

**M**easurable- something that can be tracked/measured

**A**ctionable- clear tasks that can be taken toward progress

**R**elevant- aligned with where you are now and where you want to be

**T**imely- realistic and doable

**"IF YOU'VE GOT A PLAN, IT'S NOT JUST LIKE A PIPE DREAM. YOU HAVE A STEP-BY-STEP LIST OF THINGS TO DO TO GET TO YOUR GOAL."**

*~Nipsey Hussle*

Let me use this book as an example of the plan I created when I made the promise to write it.

During my quarterly planning meeting, on October 1st, I wrote down two things I would focus on from October through December. One of those things was writing my first ebook. This book. Yes, the one you purchased (thank you) and participated in (you're welcome). Although I had contemplated writing a book for a while, I never wrote down a plan. Consequently, life happened. Busy happened. And you know what did not happen? The book. Until now.

After I wrote down my promise, I brainstormed ideas and then created the following plan:

- ◆ I would research possible platforms
- ◆ I would begin writing on Monday, October 3rd
- ◆ I would write in the mornings when I first woke up
- ◆ I would write a chapter one morning and then complete the journal for myself the next morning
- ◆ I would save revising, editing, and formatting for the very end

Did my plan work out exactly as I had envisioned it? Hell no! After chapter 3 I realized I needed to start revising, editing, and formatting some of it before I got to the end. I also realized that I needed to finish writing the chapters first before completing the daily journal prompts myself, which proved especially helpful during moments when I experienced writer's block.

In other words, even though my plan was pretty SMART, when it needed some adjusting, I adjusted. But what I did not do was walk away from it altogether. Instead, I kept my written promise and remained patient with myself throughout the process.

The result? You're reading it!

So, I dare to ask you now: What's your plan?



## Entry 7- My Plan

So how am I going to make sure I reap my harvest? With so many factors in my life that are outside of my control, it seems asinine to take the time to plan. But no, planning is still a part of the process. Being flexible and resilient is the other part.

The crazy thing is I've done this before. Moving from state to state, eventually landing in Texas, was no easy feat. I admittedly gravitated to the urban neighborhoods and black communities because it's where I felt comfortable. But now, I am living in an area that's transitioning from rural to suburban. There are literally cows and bulls, goats and llamas, down the road. A road that is one lane in and one lane out. So I know that this is a goal I can reach. This city girl is living in a place that just added two streetlights in the past two years... yeah, I think everything will be okay.

My ultimate goal right now is my 40th birthday celebration. When I turned 30, I turned up in Montego Bay. I initially wanted to go someplace that I hadn't been but was still in my comfort zone. Meaning staying on this side of the world. But now, I'm going to push boundaries. The 40th is going to be in Ireland or New Zealand. Maybe. It's in damn near two years away so yes, I have to be flexible because who knows what will be happening in the world at that time. But if it's available, that's where I'll be. My black ass on the other side of the globe. I said it, I wrote it, no


backsies!

**Goal:** I want to experience more unfamiliar social spaces by the time I'm 40, including taking an international birthday trip.

In the meantime, to make it more realistic and attainable, I need to start small. I will follow and watch travel videos on social media/YouTube at least once a **week** to get an idea about traveling to other countries, especially by bloggers who are black and/or female. I will then challenge myself to try something new at least once a **month**... including food (Lord help me get out of my sushi zone right now). Then, to get ready for my solo 40th trip, doing biannual solo retreats? Maybe rent a cabin...? In the woods...? Okay, this is already sounding like the start of a great horror movie... and I am totally here for it.

Yeah, I think I like this plan.

# YOUR PLAN



*Create a plan for any area in your life that resonated during this journaling process. Maybe it's a plan connected to improving your health, finances, or relationships. Maybe it's a plan that will help you achieve a dream that you placed on the back burner. Whatever it is, put it in writing. Let this plan be both your guide as well as your accountability.*







## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**O**n a mission to support middle school and high school leaders and educators, Selena Stone brings a wealth of knowledge, skills, experience, and empathy to the team at Foundations- Educational Consulting and Coaching LLC. Her passion for literacy instruction has allowed her to take on the roles of classroom teacher, curriculum writer, new teacher mentor, instructional coach, and now, lead consultant.

Selena believes that the literacy classroom has a responsibility to go beyond standards based instruction and to provide students and educators a safe space to find their voice, tell their story, live their truth, and take up space.

When she is not consulting, coaching, or writing, Selena enjoys listening to music, dancing to soca/dancehall, singing karaoke (loudly and off-key), and going for leisurely drives.

# ABOUT THIS PROCESS

**T**his process required authenticity, not perfection. I erased the images of a perfect set up, the perfect notebook or pen, the perfect lighting or mood, or anything else years of edited media had put in my head. If my space was a little cluttered, I still journaled. If my time was 4:00 am, I still journaled. If my notebook was actually random sheets of paper, I still journaled. If I chose to record my audio transcript instead of writing, I still journaled.

And I encourage you to do the same. Whatever works for you, let it work.

Check out some behind the scenes pics of what this process looked like for me (insert judgment free zone disclaimer here). I included these as evidence and reminders that your experience is your own. Embrace it and trust in the process.



