



Before I get into Mona's interview, I'd like to talk about journaling.

***What is it?*** Journaling is free writing. Writing down thoughts, feelings, quotes, jokes, song lyrics, stories, daily goals and how to achieve them, and daily affirmations that make you feel better. Journaling is a way to help support all these ideas and needs and more.

***How to develop it?*** Journaling is like a habit. Do you have a morning or night routine? Add it to your daily routine so you don't forget.

***What to use for a journal?*** Many people use a diary or a composition book. Loose leaf binders can be used too! You can journal on anything.

***What are the benefits of journaling?***

Journaling offers benefits to adults as well as children.

- Stress releaser: A very good way to release built up emotions that have a negative effect on the body,
- Outlet for thoughts and feelings (good or bad): Special events that have occurred, challenging situations that can be analyzed, reflections of past bad wounds,
- Express creativity: Write anything you want, draw a picture, write lyrics to a song, write a story, glue pictures of family members,
- Doodle: Great way to relax your brain and release and energize your senses,
- Improves writing skills: Offer prompts to help with writing skills like 1) I could have made today better by \_\_\_\_\_ 2) Tell a story about your favorite animal.

**Mona, thank you very much for stopping by!**

Leslie, I just want to start by thanking you for inviting me to your newsletter. I feel so lucky to have become friends with you through our picture book marketing group!

***Where do you live?***

I live in Westchester County in New York, just north of NYC.

***When did you know you wanted to become a writer?***

My great joys, as a mom, grandmother, and a reading specialist for 25 years, are sharing books and encouraging writing. Two of my plays were locally staged and one of my essays were published in the NY Times but I didn't become a writer, in my own mind, until recently.

***How did you become a writer?***

Julie Hedlund's 12x12 Picture Book Challenge, with its monthly goals of picture book drafting and revising, helped me act like a writer because I was writing every day and constantly revising my work with the help of a wonderful critique group.

Last year, Phil, a friend, and chef asked if he could read one of my stories. My first reaction was "No!" It crossed my mind that not wanting to share my stories was akin to Phil not wanting to share food at his home or restaurant. Sharing food is what he does and who he is. That moment, when I realized that sharing words with others is what I wanted to do, and is the moment I

became what I consider a “real” writer.

***What do you write?*** I write on a range of topics, from beached whales to stories inspired by my Bronx Irish childhood. I also write poetry. As a teacher, I started every class with a poem, and as an adult, poetry has been a source of joy and comfort.

One of my favorite writing projects is my spelling-themed picture book, *Stanley and the Wild Words*. After years of working with students who struggle with spelling, I discovered an approach to teaching spelling that was both joyful and effective called Structured Word Inquiry (Bowers, 2010).

I felt strongly that Structured Word Inquiry needed a picture book to give students an engaging overview. No book existed so I decided to write my own! It has been an incredibly collaborative process and I am so grateful for my critique group, friends, and family. Nancy Kincade, my longtime friend and, a colleague has brought the whole story to life with her amazing illustrations. I am so humbled and grateful because *Stanley and the Wild Words* is just a dream come true.

***Where do your ideas come from?*** Childhood, teaching, heartbreak, daydreaming and reading.

***Tell us about your publishing experience.*** The first draft of *Stanley and the Wild Words* was written in February 2021 and revised over the following year. Look for *Stanley and the Wild Words* on September 15, 2022!

To celebrate *Stanley*, let me know a word that you think makes no sense and I will share some secrets about spelling with your readers.

Send me your words at [mona@monavoelkel.com](mailto:mona@monavoelkel.com) and I will show you how spelling makes perfect sense!

### ***MONA'S JOURNALING:***

***How long have you been journaling?*** After I took a class with Julia Cameron in 2008, I started doing daily “morning pages,” which are three pages of writing whatever comes into your head, without judgement. Since March of 2020, I have been keeping a somewhat-daily visual journal, which is a combination of images and text on a page.

***What do you write about when you journal?*** I usually start each morning by painting a background wash with watercolors on one or two pages of my little journal. Then, I write something that’s on my mind, or jot down a quote or line of poetry from that morning’s reading. I usually look through some magazines to find an image that goes with what I wrote and glue that on the page or just do a quick sketch. There are no rules, really, just the idea of some words and some images that move me.

***When do you journal and do you have a special place that you go?***

I journal in the morning at a round table.

***Do you have a special book you journal in?***

Yes. I am absolutely obsessed with spiral 8.2” x 5.5” blank journals.

***How has journaling helped you write?***

Making a journal page helps me start my day by creating something. It helps me write because it becomes a collection of ideas that can become their own writing inspirations.

***What is next for Mona?***

I’m taking a wonderful poetry class with Chelsea D’Autelis called “*The Joy Workshop*.” I participate in Susanah Hill’s *Perfect Picture Book Friday* and review a picture book on my blog every Friday. I am also gearing up for the publication of *Stanley and the Wild Words* in the fall of 2022.

***Mona, one last question, tell us something that no one knows—something about you that isn’t***

*posted anywhere on your website or social media.*

I am a huge fan of Taylor Swift! Her creativity and songwriting are incredibly inspiring!

**Provide your website address, and social media accounts:**

[www.monavoelkel.com](http://www.monavoelkel.com)

Twitter @movoelkel

Thank you so much for having me, Leslie! If your readers are looking for a book recommendation, I highly recommend *Dear Genius: The Letters of Ursula Nordstrom*.



MONA'S JOURNALING ART (Above)

NO MUD, NO LOTUS

Thich Nhat Hanh





For me, there is very little difference between magic and art. To me, the ultimate act of magic is to create something from nothing. It is like when the stage magician pulls the rabbit out of the hat.



This is for the one entering a new chapter... a new dream... a new way of thinking.

MORGAN HARPER NICHOLS

ELBER

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