

# CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT

episode notes




## EP 31 - Writing To Heal Workshop with Eric Kreuter

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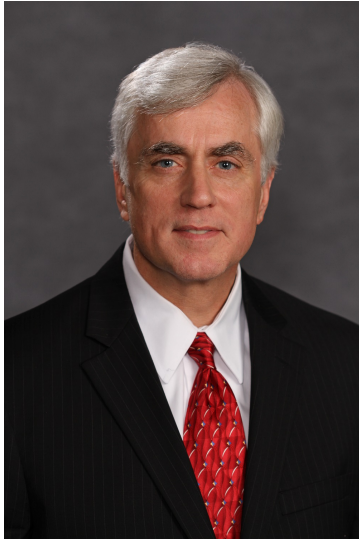
 *AI Statement: All elements of this episode are products of the author, Chris Kreuter, and his guests, and made without any use of AI tools.*

The Writing To Heal workshop is a deep dive into the powerful effects of writing as a therapeutic tool in addiction counseling. My interview with Eric A. Kreuter (PhD, CPA, CGMA, CFE, CASAC-T) provides insight into the power of pouring out thoughts and emotions onto the page. We cover the training, frameworks, and support structures that provide successful recovery and personal growth. There are plenty of powerful takeaways for anyone interested in the written word as a tool for positive change.

I recommend downloading the free PDF of the today's show notes: In addition to a summary of our conversation, there are links to additional resources and details on how you can help contribute to the mission of St. Christopher's Inn. You can find the PDF at [chriskreuter.com/wth](http://chriskreuter.com/wth)

**WARNING: This episode contains descriptions of trauma, abuse, drug & alcohol use, and addiction. While this episode does not contain any graphic details or profanity, it is not appropriate for children.**

## Today's Workshop Guest



### Eric A. Kreuter

PhD, CPA, CGMA, CFE, CASAC-T

Author of 15 books.

Managing director at CBIZ Marks Paneth.

Chemical dependency counselor at St. Christopher's Inn.

## About St. Christopher's Inn

St Christophers's Inn at Graymoor, Garrison NY: Inpatient Rehab and Detox

St. Christopher's Inn in Garrison, NY, Putnam County, offers inpatient rehab and detox services.

<https://stchristophersinn-graymoor.org/>

- Part of [OASAS - New York State Office of Addiction Services & Supports](#) - covers addiction clinics
- 110-150 adult men only
- Stays typically between 3 months & 1 year
- 2 after-care locations:
  - Brothers Christopher House - White Plains, NY
  - San Domiano Farm - Garrison, NY

## Creative Writing As Therapy

- Optional program during recreation time on weekends

- An **adjunct treatment modality** alongside traditional therapy
- Training & skills needed:
  - Masters in Psychology
  - PhD in Clinical Psychology (Correspondence program: 6 years)
  - Residencies
  - Writing experience: 15 books (Goodreads Link) + articles + film (link)
  - New York State - CASAC certification (Certified Alcohol & Substance Abuse Counselor) - Trainee certificate
- At the same time as PhD - changing life physically helped to clear the mind & boost creativity
- Volunteering at a women's prison
- Types of writing done in group therapy settings:
  - Poetry
  - Song lyrics
  - Journaling
  - Letters

*“What creative writing does: It allows somebody to dig into a topic that I’ll give them. They think thoughtfully about it, they write it . . . Then bringing it into group and sharing it and getting feedback. There’s a tremendous vulnerability along with that. But what happens is that by getting it out from the interiority of a person, they can actually examine what it is they’re writing. What it is they’re speaking. **There is strength in sharing what’s going on inside an individual.**”*

- Writing out of our thoughts allows us to examine them in a new light. To find new meaning in an old suffering.

- The writer is a testifier: Someone else can listen and recognize meaning in their words. They can understand themselves better because they understand the writer better.
- **Pairing the creative writing with the professional need for therapy:** The writing provides a more targeted point of view from an individual
- Meeting Flow:
  1. Check in (10-20 men for ~1 hour)
  2. prepared writings go first
  3. readings & feedback
  4. psychotherapy
- Concept of drafts - how does the editing process come into play in a therapeutic setting?
  - The first part is to get the thoughts out on paper
  - Ask them if they want it polished - never forced
  - The editing process is more one-on-one, not a group function
  - Editing by giving suggestions (word choices): Never editing content
  - The use of profanity is a mark of sincerity in the addict
  - Opportunities to increase their vocabulary: Giving writers new words to describe their emotions
  - Sometimes their thinking is all over the place: Reflects in their writing
  - Just because he found something confusing, doesn't mean the writing won't resonate with another addict.
  - Revising of words parallels to revising of thought patterns:
  - Sometimes in poetry you can say too much. Can make it read more like an essay.

*“The work is worthy of being produced in the more professional way”*

## Prompts

1. Person In The Mirror
  - a. There is a real difference between the person and the reflected image
  - b. Mirror voice is typically older / mentor voice.
  - c. That's their subconscious who knows what has to be done. What changes of thought need to occur.
  - d. When you look in the mirror, do you make eye contact? **You can't hide from yourself.**
2. Pick 5 Adjectives & Use them to write a story
3. Walk outside & everything is upside down
  - a. Gets them into the action
  - b. Metaphor for their life being upside down
  - c. By becoming able to recognize the world is upside down - they can find a way to cope in an upside-down world.
  - d. If they can do that, they can apply that creativity to their own life.
4. Write a letter to addiction
  - a. Have addiction write back: Become the voice of addiction
  - b. The voice of addiction typically written cruel, hurtful: "I'm taking over your life."
  - c. Create a dialogue
  - d. Technique from Gestalt Therapy: "The Empty Chair" (LINK)
  - e. The writing can act as a commitment statement - a reinforcement they can return to in order to remain vigilant.

*"Addiction is in the parking lot doing pushups while they're in rehab."*

- If they can write directly into the heart of compulsion, they can see the inconsistency with living a good life.

- What's their destiny? What's their purpose in life?
- What's their relationship with the drug that competes with reaching their destiny?

*"I can't tell them 'You're valuable'. I can only ask them a question. To dig in, to find the value they find in themselves."*

- The pen is the therapist

## How to get involved in helping St. Christopher's Inn

- Always looking for counselors
- Run by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement
- Monetary donations always appreciated
- Many men show up homeless: Clothes very helpful
- Softball gloves, recreational items appreciated
- Published book: [Effective Use of Creative Writing In The Treatment Of Chemical Addiction](#) (Nova Science Publishers - Nov 2021)
  - All proceeds from the book go to St. Christopher's Inn
  - An academic book
  - An archive of the beautiful creative work through pain & trauma & triumph of 60 men

*The act of publishing is first for their own therapy, and then to give it away to the world*

- In what ways could an individual help heal themselves using writing?
  - Intent here it to bring lessons Eric's learned "to the people"
  - Perhaps provide them similar prompts or exercises you use in therapy?

## Relationship Between Accounting & Therapy

- REFERENCE/LINK TO CPA ARTICLE?
- Accounting is “The Trusted Profession”
- Accountants tend to be hardcore capitalists
- It’s not just about the money: When we step away from what it is we do, and think about who we’re doing it for, giving back to the world helps balance the accounting mind.
- It balances the mindset of the business person: To think at a different level.

## By Hand Or By Key?

- Think differently with a pen & paper versus on a keyboard
- It’s a different brain function to move the muscles across a piece of paper
- More creativity working something out on paper
  - Slows down the mental churn
  - Helps people hone in closer to their true emotions
  - The brain operates differently when writing and the writer can read along their own written thoughts – a form of self-therapy
- It’s not about the handwriting itself:
- You can take a pad of paper anywhere
- The movement through the arm, hand & pen becomes a linkage between what’s deep down inside, in a well of what could be repressed feelings, that comes out through that process.
- Limited access to technology allows greater focus on recovery
- When they’re writing they’re also sitting in the world someplace. They’re noticing things that they otherwise would have missed.
- That’s exactly what happens to the addict: The drug numbs everything. It distorts the world.

*“When they’re in a sober environment, and they go out into the world, all of the sudden the bird that they didn’t realize existed is*

*there . . . And they're brought to life. So by bringing together what they're visualizing, and by matching that with what they could write creatively, all that energy that's inside that's hurting them comes out on the paper."*

- They're taking something painful, archiving it on a piece of paper, they get to read it, and it's changed.
- By having somebody go through, in a safe environment, all the trauma & all the pain. Poured out in writing, they no longer feel that pain hurting them inside because it's not on the outside. **And when it's shared it dissipates.**

## The Sober Lounge

- Writers present their work to the entire community.
- They learn presenting skills in addition to the writing skills
- Going from "I can't" to "I will push myself to do" → This is a triumph!
- The audience can realize that they too can have the courage to talk about their pain
- Modeling: Can help those "locked into themselves" to realize it's okay to share.
  - Maybe it's okay to feel & express my feelings
  - Teaching emotional intelligence

*"Life isn't lived cerebrally all the time - it's meant to be felt"*

## Writing's Role In Counseling

- Writing can be a powerful tool for:
  - Emotional healing
  - Deeper human connection
  - Decrease cognitive distortions
  - Increased self-awareness of locked up inner pain
  - Coping with extreme trauma



- Discovering the potential within oneself to write can aid their discovery of reading & other untapped potential skills
- The trauma never goes away - it's never exempt from their life. But it doesn't need to be. It just needs to be brought into the context of their life going forward.
- By having them find the power, in the way they find effective, it balances their life.
- The transformation of emotions & pain can reflect in the writing itself, the words used.
- The length of time required for both therapy & writing:
  - Bring their group work into their small work with other counselors
  - It's never homework or a requirement: It's always a suggestion
  - It's not for the therapist to tell someone how to use their time

## Dark To Light

- Darkness is typical in the mind of the addict: Their lives have darkened
- Encourage people to write into the darkness. Use dark metaphors to find the light.
- Writing is a physical act that puts thoughts actually out into the light
- By sharing it it goes out into the room, providing more light
- They give up the notion of being shackled by the darkness
- A pillar of recovery: Letting go

*“When we forgive the abuser for hurting us, we gain. When we forgive ourselves for hurting a person, we move forward.”*

- The Step Of Amends: When you've made amends, whether or not they accept it is their problem.
- Analogy of sculpting: The sculptor didn't create the object, they chipped away the rough spots.
  - **Give them the power to be the block, the statue, the hammer & the chisel.**
  - Most people are oppositional - They don't want people to change them.

## Other Modes of Creativity

- The artist is often discovered in a place like St. Christopher's Inn
- The reading of others' words can bring them to life in new ways. The reading is itself art.
- This form of treatment is scalable
- It's important to not judge the addict because they're an addict: It's a human being
- Helping them pick a direction is important
- Is what I'm explaining digestible & understandable? At the same time, there's nothing wrong with poetic expression
- Page A Day: If you write one page of your life story every day, in a year you've got a book.

*"We can't escape our histories, but we don't have to repeat it"*

- Writing is a great tool to help us get out of our own way & discover what's hidden.
- Writing is a way to help them regain their lost power
- The blank page allows purposefulness in writing

## Exploring This For Yourself

1. Problem Resolution
  - a. For anyone who wants to solve a problem but doesn't know how.
  - b. Split the page down the middle
  - c. On the left: Write every element of the problem. Break it into components
  - d. On the right: Write a tentative solution to each.
  - e. From that sheet, use a new sheet to write a cookbook on how to achieve the solutions
2. Perspective
  - a. A very sincere exploration of who a person is

- b. Remember 3 points in time: Who they were, who they are, and who they want to be
- c. A way of letting the dream live, letting the past be the past, living in the present & not in the future
- d. I can write about my past, but I'm not living it

## Links

[St. Christopher's Inn \(Garrison, NY\).](#)

[Resource Recovery\\_\(Middletown, NY\).](#)