

Interview with writer

Kathryn Vercillo



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Amazon: [Kathryn-Vercillo/author/](https://www.amazon.com/Kathryn-Vercillo/author/)

Linktree: <https://linktr.ee/kvercillo>

Ingredients

- Writer
- Crocheter
- Collager

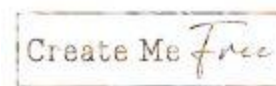
Preparation

1. Artistic Weapon of Choice:

I am primarily a writer, and words are definitely my favored form of self-expression. However, since I make my living at writing, that can get complicated, and sometimes I need a wordless form of creativity. Therefore, crochet and collage are my other two go-tos.

2. What inspired you to become a writer, and when did you first realize you wanted to pursue writing professionally?

I have been a writer for as long as I can remember. I have shelves of journals dating back to my early teens. My only hesitation about writing professionally, which I've dealt with off and on over the years, was the concern about the financial instability of it. Nevertheless, the urge to write persisted. It intersected well with the early days of blogging, when I was able to get work blogging for various sites, and my career grew from there.

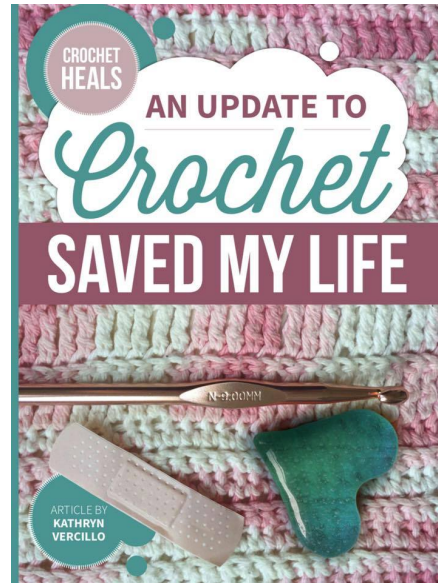


I've tried other things over the years. I did a lot of work in group homes and foster

care, thought perhaps I wanted to teach, got a Masters in Psychology thinking I might want to work as a therapist, but always I come back to writing. I like to learn and do many other things but writing is where my heart is at.

3. How do you typically approach the process of writing a new piece, such as a book, article, or blog?

I write daily, and over the years I've honed my niche. For many years it was writing about crochet as therapy then more broadly craft art as therapy. I've expanded in recent years to write about all aspects of the intersection between art and mental health - so not just art as therapy but really the more nuanced ways that our creative and psychological selves intersect. How mental health challenges can impact an artist's creative process, content, medium and productivity - in ways "good" and "bad." As well as how art institutions (galleries, museums, schools) might consider the mental health aspects of visitors, students, staff, community. All of it.



I believe that we are all creative, existing on a spectrum in terms of how that shows up for us. Likewise, we all have mental health with various strengths and challenges. So for each of us, the way that the creativity and mental health intersects is different. I work to understand and share that, through essays about my own lived experience, interviews with contemporary artists, and deep research into historic art and psychology.

So, all of this is to say that I am writing deeply about a specific topic in a daily ongoing way - blogs, newsletters, articles, books - and so it kind of never feels like I'm starting something new at all. It feels like the continuation of the same conversation.

4. How do you deal with writer's block, and what strategies do you use to overcome it?

I live with chronic recurring major depression, and the symptoms of that are typically what might cause something like

writer's block for me. The number one thing is a combination of insomnia and fatigue that just makes it feel impossible to think, let alone write. Also symptoms including feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness ... I stop seeing the point in any of it, so the motivation isn't there to do it. So, treating the depression is really how I treat the writer's block. For me that means medication, therapy, lots of downtime and rest, freedom of schedule, time with my dogs, time with my partner and friends and family, reading, crochet, and a lot of being gentle with myself. The healthier I am as a human, the easier it is to write consistently. That said, mostly I just write every day whether I feel like it or not because the routine keeps the pages coming.

5. Where does the textile art fit in? When did you first discover it?

In my late twenties, I went through a bout of life-threatening depression. I did everything that I could to try to be "okay" during that time. At some point, I read that you should try doing things you enjoyed as a child. I remembered learning to crochet, and I decided to pick it up again. And it ended up being a huge part of my healing process, a story I've shared in my book [Crochet Saved My Life](#).

I began writing about the healing aspects of crochet, which led to a blog (that I eventually sold), several books, and writing for just about every crochet blog and magazine that exists over the course of the past decade. I did sell some crochet work and create patterns and tutorials and whatnot but mostly the crochet itself was a healing personal thing and then the

writing about it was what I did for related income.

Today, it's mostly the same, although in the past year I've been working on a line of crochet art for sale. The work all explores depression recovery through color and texture and consists of wall hangings, soft sculpture, and wordless fabric books. It is almost ready to launch for sale.

6. What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced as a writer and textile artist, and how have you worked to overcome them?

Depression and its symptoms are the number one thing for me as a human and writer and artist. I am in my forties now, and I have a lot of strategies under my belt for dealing with it, reducing its impact, working through it ... but I think it's just something that I'll always deal with.



Outside of that, finances are probably the most challenging part of making a creative living. I choose to live in San

Francisco because I love it there and feel most creatively satisfied there, but it's a really expensive place to live. So, I have to make a decent living and sometimes that's hard. How I've dealt with that over time varies but mostly it means doing a lot of freelance writing work to pay the bills and trying to keep up as much creative work as possible at the same time. That's not always easy because sometimes it feels like I have no energy to write creatively when assigned work is taking up my brain. I try to find and choose assigned work that is in line with what I want to research and write anyway so that I stay inspired. But I go through ebbs and flows with that. I've gone through periods of burnout where I wondered if I should do something else to earn money so I could just write creatively but usually I find that the solution is actually the opposite - to dig deeper into my own writing and promoting my original writing and trying to keep moving with that.



7. How do you balance your personal voice and your scientific mind(ie your Masters in Psychology) to come up with books such as *The Artist's Mind*?

I really try to write authentically from a place of lived experience and deep interest. I have always been interested in the human mind and relationships and why we do what we do so for me it doesn't feel "scientific" even though I suppose it is. It just feels human. I personally love reading other writing that combines first person experience with deep research and that's the work that I'm trying to do myself.

[The Artist's Mind](#) came about because I was writing for Sartle, an art history website, and we decided to collaborate on a book, and the way that my interests and their needs converged became the outline for the book. I'm working now on a personal project that is an extension of that work but allows me to incorporate

first person voice, which feels more true for me.

8. Can you describe your editing process and how you work to refine your writing?

I would love to say that I have some brilliant process, but I don't. The truth is that I don't do a lot of editing. A lot of people hate that and may look down on my writing because of it but that's okay ... I believe that what emerges first is really what's the most true for me and truth is what I want to share. I don't mind if it's messy - both in terms of typos or in terms of emotional or intellectual content. I think this is related to what I was saying before about not feeling like any piece is particularly a new place. It's all an ongoing conversation, a big body of work, so for me refining my writing is really just about continued practice ... each piece is perhaps in a way a kind of edited or refined version of what came before.

That's more true for articles than books. Naturally, books require more actual editing. I typically write an intro first because that's what reminds me of what I'm trying to do. Then I do an outline. Then I start plugging in my original writing throughout the outline. After that, I do my research and add that in. Once it's book length, I go through, delete repetitions, add thoughts, move things around.

9. How do you research and gather information for your writing, and what methods have you found to be most effective?

I am a voracious reader and that's my preferred method of taking in

information. I read constantly, and I try to deep dive into the topic or person I'm studying. I find that if I read daily and write daily and always kind of have the thoughts going in the back of my mind then it coalesces for me. I do, however, supplement my reading with other media (documentaries, podcasts, etc.), interviews with artists about their own experiences, and general conversations with all different kinds of people about the topic I'm working with.

10. Can you discuss a project you've worked on that you're particularly proud of, and what made it stand out to you?

[The Mandalas for Marinke](#) project is the one I'm most proud of. I had interviewed crochet designer Marinke Slump for my book *Crochet Saved My Life*, about how crochet had helped her through various challenges. We stayed in touch, and her work really began to flourish. She became known as a crochet mandalas pattern designer. A few years later, sadly, she died by suicide.

I channeled my own grief into a project called *Mandalas for Marinke*, in which I invited people to contribute a crocheted mandala and anything they wished to share about depression, suicide, or crafting to heal. More than 300 people contributed over 1000 crochet mandalas of varying sizes and designs. It became a two year blog series in which I shared each contribution alongside words of Marinke's from her blog and facts/resources related to depression and suicide awareness.



That became a coffee table style book, and I also did a few art gallery shows in Southern California, where we were able to display the crochet mandalas, read pieces from the book, incorporate artistic responses to the book, teach crochet for healing and more. It was really powerful.

I have an idea for a similar project - collaborative, incorporating writing and crochet - but I haven't fleshed it out yet.

11. How do you stay motivated and disciplined in your writing practice?

Maintaining a routine helps a lot. My mornings are generally reading and writing. That said, I have a lot of ebbs and flows with how well I can stick to it. The more I do, the more it builds on itself, but I try to be gentle with myself when it's not happening. I find that in those cases, it's good to just go small. Writing even

just one sentence per day keeps the momentum going.



12. What advice would you offer to aspiring creatives who are just starting out?

Be gentle with yourself. What you are doing is exactly right just as it is. It's going to grow and change and that's going to be right, too. Try to imagine that you're creating a lifelong body of work. What you create now matters a lot right now and has value in the body of work ... but also it's just one part of your learning and growing and creating and sharing with the world. So if it's working, that's wonderful, enjoy that feeling, but if it's not working, know that that's part of the process, too.

13. Create Me Free was started in 2021 to assist artists in achieving creative and financial success while maintaining wellness. Can you tell us more about

how you got started and what it is?

It's really just an extension of everything I've been doing over the past decade, incorporating my knowledge of therapy work and creative wellness and crochet as therapy. I officially launched it as a business in 2021 because I was ready to create a financial structure around it.

The goal is to offer a series of products and services that assists artists with better understanding how their own specific mental health challenges and strengths impact their work in myriad ways so that they can make choices that will enhance their own creative and financial success. That's built on my twenty years of learning how to do that for myself.

Right now, I offer a subscription-based inspirational and informative blog through [Substack](#). I'm working on a couple of books. And as aforementioned I'm about to launch my textile art line. In terms of products, the goal is to create a series of journals and workbooks that further assist artists in refining their understanding of their own experience. The textile art will combine with writing and reading and therapy circles and craft lessons to create projects similar to Mandalas for Marinke.

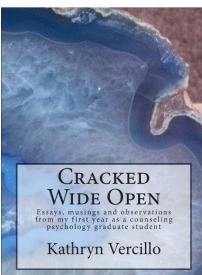
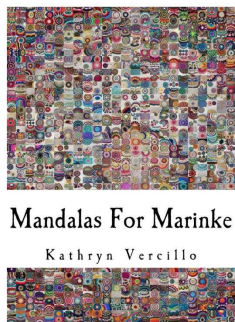
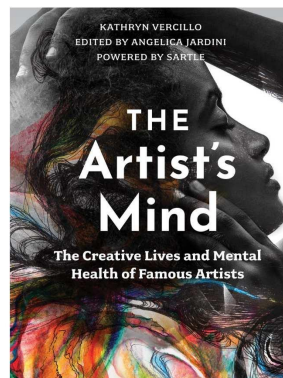
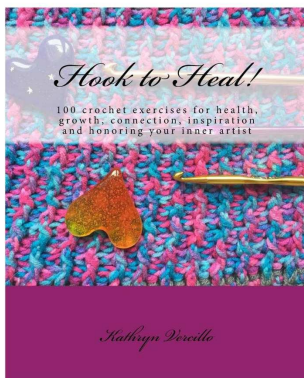
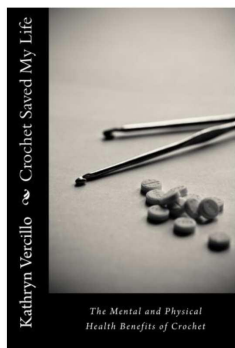
In terms of services, I am working on creating workshops as well as 1:1 consulting services for artists to dig deeper and learn how to achieve creative, financial, and psychological wellness through art therapy exercises, psychoeducation, business planning and more. I'm also working on a course or workshop to assist therapists and teachers better understand the foundational information about how art and mental health intersect for their clients. And I aim to eventually consult with museums, galleries, and community centers to enhance mental health among their artists, patrons, etc.

Upcoming Shows:

[My newest book](#) comes out May 28, 2023. I will be having both in-person and virtual book launch parties but probably not until later in the summer due to some family commitments.

The best place for people to stay in touch about that and read all of my original writing is through [my newsletter on Substack](#), where I have free and Pay What You Can subscription options.

Chef-d'œuvre



Books by Kathryn Vercillo

