Everyone has a story to tell. You want your stories to have an authenticity that is uniquely yours so that your expressions come alive with what you want to say. Your purpose is to write about your life with detail and meaning that will jump off the pages into receptive minds. Your voice is the identifiable part of your personality that keeps popping up in your writing style, so all you have to do is pay more attention, and trust what your subconscious mind says.

We aren’t all gifted writers; it is our critical voice that interrupts the flow. Give yourself permission to be imperfect. Don’t worry, just start writing. In the process, you will learn to trust your mind and your body. Remember your hands are part of the heart chakra, and when you write, your deepest and truest self emerges.

Not everything that emerges from your deepest heart is appropriate to publish, but that doesn’t matter during the early writing stages. In the beginning, you are learning about yourself. There are times when your writing will surprise and delight you, and there are times when it will make you cry as shadows of your life’s difficulties flood in.

During your writing you will begin to recognize your difficult times as your very own divine challenges. They provide the catalyst for personal growth, and they are nothing to be ashamed of. Remember how you surmounted these challenges, and consider telling your stories, for they may be useful to others.

**WRITING TOOLS AND WRITING ENVIRONMENTS**
The tools you choose for your writing projects are important. Use a computer if you want, but by all means experiment with paper and pens and pencils. Decide which tools are best for you. For myself, I like to have a couple of inexpensive note pads strategically placed, one pad by my bed for that special nighttime revelation, and one by my favorite place to sit and look out the window. When good ideas come, I like to jot them down fast before they leave my conscious mind. Other times, I like to sit at my computer with eyes closed and write from the preconscious level of the mind.

I always give myself permission to allow my thoughts to come out any way they want, never worrying about spelling and punctuation, because they can get in the way of the idea forming; I want to capture the thought while it breathes. I can always clean it up later if I think it’s worth keeping.

**WRITING PRACTICES**
Writing is like working out in the gym—the more you work out, the more fit you become. And the more you write, the better your writing becomes. Working with words and ideas are like muscles, and they are meant to be strengthened and stretched.

So start a daily or weekly writing practice. Set aside five to thirty minutes every day, or once a week to explore your mind for material. While sitting at your computer, or with pad and pen on the table, shift into your right brain and write down what ever comes up for you. You do not have to make complete sentences or dot every “i.” Write as fast as you can, and let the “untamed” mind express itself, but whatever you do don’t judge it while you are in this free-associating stage of writing.

**TOPICS LIST**
Sometimes you can’t think of anything to write about, and nothing wants to come. You feel intimidated by the blank page, and your chattering mind says, “I just can’t do this. I can’t think of anything.” We all know that one, but there is a simple remedy: Keep a page of topic ideas that are interesting enough to write about, and, whenever you think of something new, go to your notebook and add new topic ideas to the list. Later, when you want to write but are drawing a blank, go to your topics list for ideas. The best thing about the list is that you begin to see what interests you and what is in your world that you want to share with others.

**ORGANIZING IDEAS**
After filling up your notebooks with your thoughts, one of your journalled entries may jump out and entice you to write a longer piece. Again, continue to write spontaneously. Then use your left brain to organize and give your ideas structure. Once you have the backbone of your story, you can flesh it out with additions and deletions. Read through the work several times and be sure to read it out loud to yourself or to a friend. Continue to add details, changing and refining, until it suits your own ear.
EDITING HELP
Some journals and magazines have editors who will help you edit your writing, but many do not. Before you hire a private editor, ask several friends (ideally ones who love to write) to read your essay and give you the honest feedback you need. Take a college class and join a writer's group. Your local library or bookstore should be able to recommend one, and there are even on-line groups you can join.

Then when you are ready, get an editor. Everyone needs an editor. Even Editors need editors, all the best writers are the ones who appreciate editors the most. Hiring one is the best thing you can do for yourself and your writing projects. You will find out (necessarily) just how much your ego is attached to your writing. While it is difficult to accept cutting a favorite passage out of an essay, at the same time you must consider the recommendations of the editor, who more often than not is right. Even so, it is your story and there are times when you are the best judge of what you want to say and you must always make the final decision.

In the process of writing, keeping these things in mind, your hands will get practice teaming up with your heart to express your unique perspective. And you will have a finished piece that has a professional polish that you can be proud of. Even a well-crafted Letter to the Editor is a personal and artistic accomplishment.

TONI GILBERT, RN, MA, HNC is a certified holistic nurse and transpersonal counselor. She reads tarot on radio and on-line (see page 8), and is the author of Messages from the Archetypes: Using Tarot for Healing and Spiritual Growth.