

## Chandler woman shows how storytelling can heal

BY SRIANTHI PERERA  
Contributor

A serious illness can leave one bruised and battered for years, but that's not the case with Sandra Marinella.

After winning a battle with cancer, the Chandler resident is enjoying success with her self-help guide to writing as a means to healing.

"The Story You Need to Tell – Writing to Heal from Trauma, Illness or Loss" features Marinella's own story as well as dozens of others.

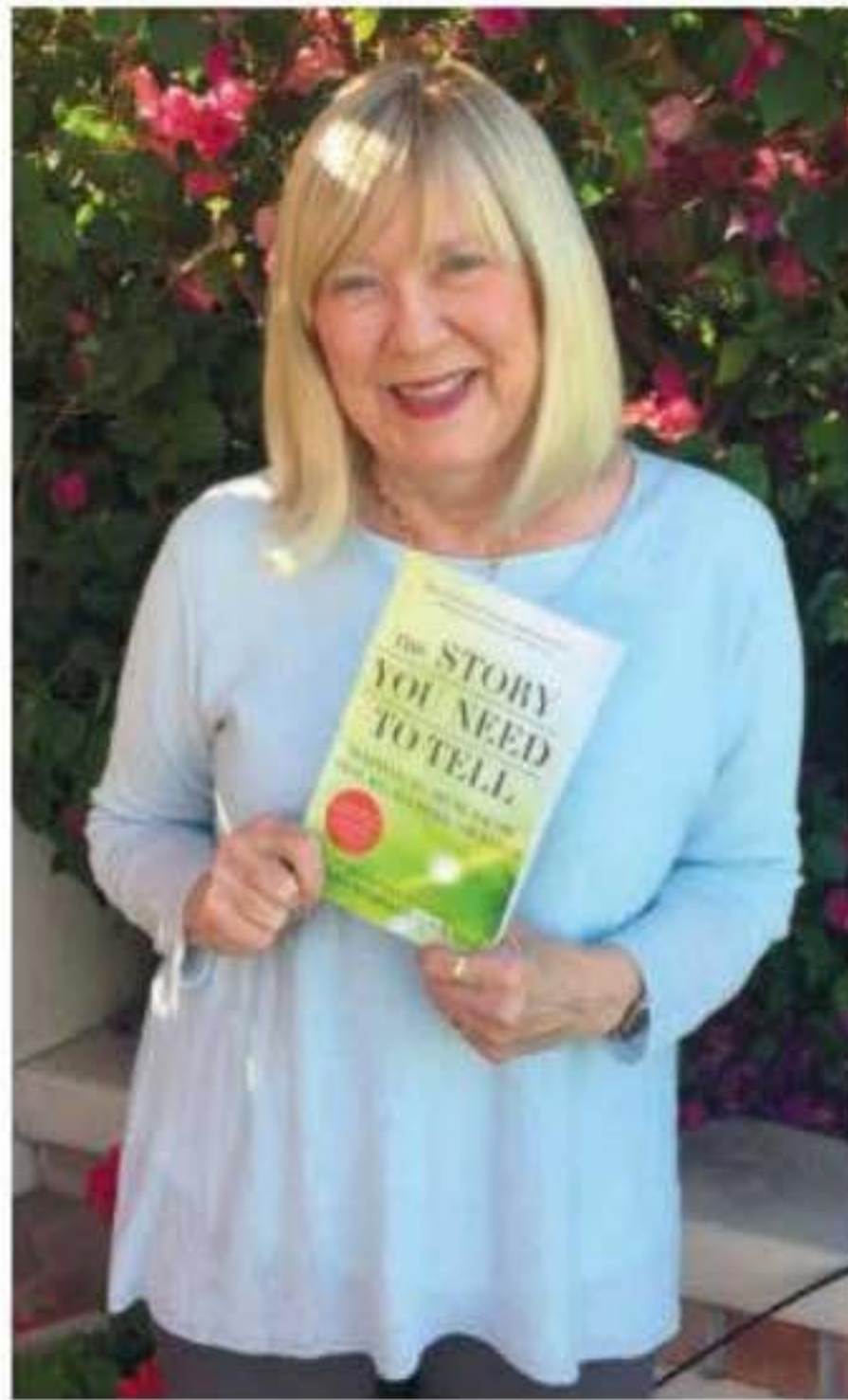
More than 200 studies have shown the power of written storytelling and its impact on improved mental, physical, spiritual and social health.

"I truly believe everyone has stories they can share. And I think the power of writing gives more benefits than just telling the story," said Marinella, who holds workshops to disperse the message of her book and guide others so they may also benefit.

She's also at work on her second book, focused on storytelling.

A writing teacher, Marinella was absorbed in her career, teaching at Mesa and Red Mountain high schools as well as Rio Salado College over the years. In 2012, things changed unexpectedly with a breast cancer diagnosis.

Rather than being with her beloved students honing in on a fine point of



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grammar, she found herself in a sterile hospital room on a gurney, surrounded by what she calls the world's most-wicked looking needles, awaiting a nipple biopsy.

This was just one of several painful intrusions into her body that she had to endure for a whole year.

During this time, she began to explore the possibility of editing her own story.

She writes in the book: "In recent weeks my bright-red journal and I had become inseparable. I began frantically listing my questions about cancer. I read and researched voraciously, looking in strategies for handling this disease..."

"Mentally I searched for a term I had scribbled somewhere in that red journal. I felt as if cancer was trying to suck me under. I didn't want it at all, but since I had it, I had to make room for it in my life. At that moment I made a promise to myself. Cancer would not own me."

As the months passed, the journal helped her reflect on her story. She toyed with ways to rewrite it. She understood its importance in her life.

"It was my lifeline, the way I would maneuver my tragic gap (the space that lies between our hopes and our reality). By writing, I could reflect on and experiment with the changes I might make. Then I could make a plan and move forward."

Which is exactly what Marinella did.

After her "cancer year," Marinella formed the Story You Need to Tell Project, to help others find and write their narratives.

She interviewed more than 100 people during the course of her research, among them cancer patients,

including those at Mayo Clinic and Piper Cancer Center, troubled students and veterans. She helped them to move forward and find resilience.

Among them is Scottsdale resident Kelly Collins, who was a caregiver for her father, when he suffered twice from brain cancer before passing.

"The experience, namely the second time around, profoundly changed me, even more so as the years passed. I knew I wanted to help other cancer patients not suffer as he had and give them hope and a future," Collins said.

She became a holistic cancer coach and partnered with a German organization offering a lifesaving medical device.

"A whole new path has opened up, my true calling, which is one amazing blessing that came from this tragedy," Collins said.

Initially, Marinella wanted to tell stories such as this one in her book and leave out her own because, she thought, the marketplace is saturated with cancer survival books.

Then, she attended a writers' conference on Whidbey Island in Washington State, where participants, led by her mentor Christina Baldwin, persuaded her to do otherwise.

Handily, the journals contained the material she needed to add.

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"It was transformational, in writing and integrating that story into the book," Marinella said. "Now I do it all the time."

Her work with cancer patients is increasingly garnering the attention of the medical community. A study on the efficacy of writing to heal workshop at a Mayo Clinic in Phoenix has concluded that patients had a high level of satisfaction.

Over a two-year period, 199 participants attended 23 workshops and 96.1 percent of attendees reported that they were "very satisfied" with the experience and found it very beneficial for their stress, mood, and general wellness, while 50 percent found it very beneficial for pain.

When working with individuals, Marinella sees her process being repeated.

"I'm watching them unfold with the same kind of realization that we not only write our story, we can rewrite and recreate

our story through our words," she said.

Inspired by her veteran husband Steve, she also helps veterans share their stories and be at ease with their difficult experiences.

Writing to change your life is not limited to journal writing. It includes fiction writing, poetry, painting, even writing lists, as they have the power to view how we interpret the world.

Often, people come because they have a story they think is worthy of being published.

"In the process of writing their story, they are amazed at the impact that writing their story has on their lives. And they leave you saying 'I don't even need to publish it. I'm just grateful I learned how to write it,'" Marinella said.

A case in point is Kathryn Evans of Phoenix, who had even written to best-selling author Jodi Piccolt with her story idea stemming from the medical, legal and social issues faced by her family following her adult daughter's prolonged battle with seizures.

"This workshop taught me the value


of writing, not so much for publishing, but for its transformative power,"

Evans wrote. "There truly is power in the pen. Sandra's workshop provided a positive outlet for all those words and feelings that have been building up for the past years."

"I now understand that the first step is simply putting my story down on paper...transferring my feelings from the right side of my brain to words formulated by the left side. I call it magical, but the satisfaction and catharsis is actually quite real and, according to the research, scientifically sound," she added.

Asked for the single most benefit from writing the book, Marinella said that it helped her grow as an individual.

"That personal transformation was a big part of the process of writing my own story and learning how to give that to other people in positive ways. I work with people, helping them pull their stories out and share them in their own way," she said. "I love seeing the changes in them. And I certainly have

experienced a positive change in my own life." 

Sandra Marinella's book is published by New World Library, is available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Details: [storyyoutell.com](http://storyyoutell.com)

## Author workshops

Susan Marinella will conduct The Story You Need to Tell Workshop – Women Writing through Changes 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. on Oct. 10, 17, 24, and 31 at Changing Hands Bookstore, 6428 S. McClintock Drive, Tempe. Register at 480-730-0205 or through Eventbrite.

She also will conduct a six-week workshop series titled "The Story You Need to Tell--How Writing Your Stories Can Transform Your Health" 10 a.m.-noon beginning Jan. 14 at Mayo Clinic, Phoenix. \$100. Details at 480 342-4888. For more workshops, visit [storyyoutell.com/events](http://storyyoutell.com/events).