Writing Letters as Therapy

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In this article, I will demonstrate how writing (and exchanging) letters is not merely a method, but an ethical and political practice. I share a five-week therapeutic process in a letter exchange with a woman who wanted to confront some traumatic events in her life. She thought she had put the past behind her, but suddenly it resurfaced in the present and startled her. That is why she turned to me. Her letters became active acts, and my replies became poetic testimonies to the discoveries she made. Most important of all was her right to decide for herself what she wanted to feel, remember, write, and reflect, and her unquestionable right to decide when she wanted to read my replies and questions. My letters contained, in part, affirming poeticizations of the woman's skills and values, and in part, I shared concrete knowledge about how unpleasant events can destroy one's sense of self, especially when they are not met with understanding and support. Finally, I posed four questions in the hope that they would inspire her and spark both awareness and reflection—questions inspired by narrative work on trauma and responses.

Post Office Box

The town post office by the coast in a small town in Central America. The heat is slowly circulated by large wooden ventilation blades in the high-ceilinged room. The feeling of longing mingles with the feeling of freedom.

I walk out of the post office and sit down in the park next to the vanilla-colored church. The young palm trees cast filtered shade over the older people playing dominoes at rickety metal tables. I opened my letter. The beautiful, thin stationery. "Par Avion," it says. It was sent three weeks ago. I take a sip of juice. Now I am in my own world, undisturbed by myself. I read …

The scene is more than 30 years old, but the feeling is so deeply ingrained in my sense of what it means to reflect on my life through writing and correspondence. Receiving and sending in peace and quiet. I remember my teenage diary and recall it as a calm and safe process. I have never forgotten it, and I practice it as often as I can—privately and in my work as a narrative psychotherapist.

Why does writing work so well? Writing my way to meaning is different from speaking my way to meaning. I don't feel observed while I write. I feel free. I can delete and edit until the words match what I want to express. I have the time and space to let memories, feelings, and thoughts emerge onto the landscape of the narrative and slowly move through connections and differences, intentions, and values—toward the creation of meaning.

Framing

Over the past few years, I've started experimenting with therapy through writing letters. It began for practical reasons, because someone I was talking to lived on the other side of the country, and I felt that online conversations were becoming too technical and confrontational. That's why I started writing to them.

Since then, I have corresponded with people when it has not been possible to meet in person, and through this I have become interested in how therapeutic processes can take place in ways other than face-to-face meetings.

One of the first things I've had to consider in my experiments with narrative letter therapy has been the time perspective. When you go to therapy sessions, it's at a specific and defined time. When you correspond via email, both parties can, in principle, be working 24/7, which I don't think is beneficial.

So, I decided to set a framework. It goes like this: You send me a message whenever you want; I'll reply after a week. That way, I define the boundaries of our working hours. I'm generally interested in the conditions we provide for people to help them get closer to themselves, their values, and their place in the world.

A New Way of Working with Certain Aspects of Life

Hanne was a student in one of our courses, and one day after class, she came up to me and asked if I'd talk to her. She told me she'd been working on some things in her life, but in ways different from what she could now see in the narrative ideas. Since she lived on the other side of the country, I asked her to write to me a little—then we could take it from there.

She was happy to do so, and what follows is a five-week exchange of letters between Hanne and me. In between, I'll share my reflections and choices regarding the letters:

August 20—First letter from Hanne

> *Hi Lone,*
>
> *First of all, thank you for agreeing to help me. We agreed that I'd send you my story, and from there we'd figure out how to make it work practically.*
>
> *Last summer, I invited my oldest grandchild to a Harry Styles concert at the Royal Arena. My good friends were going to drive us—they know I can get a little frantic when I have to both charge the car and find parking— 😊, and thankfully so. We arrive well ahead of time and agree to stop by Fields for a bit of shopping before the concert. However, it's hard to find a place to get dropped off, so Molly (my granddaughter) decides she'd rather head over to the plaza in front of the Arena and buy some merchandise.*
>
> *We get dropped off and decide to go to Burger King and grab something. The weather is nice, after all. While we're waiting for our food, we hear commotion outside, and people are running away screaming. I think, "Harry must have arrived, and the hysteria has started."*

Shortly after, we hear gunshots, and people in Burger King throw themselves to the floor. The doors are locked, and we're not allowed to leave. We have no idea what's happened. My brain quickly goes into Molly mode. I try to keep her occupied and get her to stand in line, and we just talk. At one point, she says: "I don't like this, I'm scared. We talk about how it's not nice, and that I also think it's strange, but that there's nothing else to do but wait."

No information at all. There are young students in Burger King who also have no idea what's going on. They've just been ordered to lock the doors and not let us out. Suddenly we see armed officers in riot gear. My first thought is terrorism, and I remember thinking that we're in a bad place. There are large windows everywhere, so those of us inside Burger King would be easy targets. I try to stay calm to keep Molly as calm as possible.

Then the doors open, and we're told by a police officer, I think, to go over to the Royal Arena. There's sort of a route with police officers standing along it. We must follow it. At the entrance, we were searched, but not a word about what's happening. We went inside and found our seats. Some people are crying, and others are walking around like nothing's wrong. It's very strange.

We take a walk around the Arena and buy a few things for Molly. Then we wait again and hear various reports from others in the hall that someone has been shot, but again, no one really knows anything. I remember we waited in the Arena from around 7:00–7:30 p.m. without receiving any information, and until around 9:00 p.m., when someone comes out on stage and says there has been a shooting and that people have died. That the concert is delayed because they're waiting for someone who hasn't arrived yet.

Then friends and family start texting and calling to see if we're okay. We still have no idea what's happened. We're fine, as far as we know,

but we keep getting conflicting reports that the concert will start soon or has been canceled.

There are 16,000 of us here, and a sense of unease is starting to set in. People are talking about terrorism and how we're an easy target, and so on.

Around 9:30–10:00 p.m., we get an announcement from the stage that the concert has been canceled. The suspect has been caught, but they don't know if there are more. We're to be ushered out and follow the police's instructions. All roads in and out of Amager are closed, and we can only get out via the S-train to Vanløse. The actual evacuation from the building goes smoothly. Some people are having panic attacks, some are talking on their cell phones, and my impression is that we're all being considerate of one another. No shouting or screaming. Everything proceeds calmly.

Then we walked in a long line toward the S-train. There are riot-geared officers on rooftops, balconies, and everywhere we look. I remember thinking that if someone were to shoot us now, there's nothing we could do. We still don't know anything other than that there might be more perpetrators on the loose. We got on the train. Along the way, we've been in touch with my friends, and they're going to meet us in Vanløse. It's reassuring to know that. The train starts moving, and we breathe a little sigh of relief. After a short while, the lights go out in the train, and it comes to a stop. I think, here it comes, this is the end.

We're all surprisingly calm. A little while passes, then we get a message saying there's a line on the railway, but that we'll be moving shortly. The relief is palpable. Finally, we reached Vanløse and found my friends. It's only once we're sitting in the car that we feel safe. On the way home, we stopped at a gas station to get something to drink. Molly and I can't stay inside. We must go back out to the car. All the

way across Zealand until we're home, there are police at most of the on and off-ramps on the highway. When we finally got home late at night, we sat down to watch the news. We must see what happened. We calm down a bit and are both able to sleep.

This whole episode, where I felt in danger, has, on several occasions, brought back memories of my first marriage. As I briefly told you, I was threatened with a hunting rifle. My husband at the time was a psychopath or had psychopathic traits, I maintain. He engaged in psychological terror, but so subtly that no one really believed it. I was 19 when I met him, and he was quite a bit older than me. A very charismatic man.

My parents adored him, and I was often told that I should be grateful. After all, I got a horse, a car, and we traveled. So, for several years, I was grateful, all the while losing myself more and more. He developed an alcohol problem and became increasingly cruel. He wanted to decide what clothes I should wear when we went out, etc. What I did right one day was wrong the next day. A mutual friend and colleague told me one day that he was seriously worried about me. He saw what my ex-husband was doing and told me I needed to get out of there.

We lived on a property where I also had my horses, my dog, and my cat. There were two living rooms, and I announced that I was moving into one of them until I found a place to live. One night, he came into the room where I was sleeping. I woke up to find him standing there staring at me. The dog was lying at the foot of the bed. I saw he had the rifle, and my first thought was just that he mustn't shoot the dog. I didn't say anything; he stood there laughing. Then he went out, but left the rifle unloaded in front of the door.

I left, but he pursued me for a long time afterward. It took most of a couple of years before I was free of him. By then I had found my

second husband, who, thankfully, was of a completely different mold 😊. I can physically feel it all again as I write about it. It's been many years since I've talked about or thought about my ex-husband, and I haven't felt like it's been a part of my life at all. I was convinced it was a closed chapter, right up until the episode at the Royal Arena.

Dear Lone, it's a bit of a mouthful, and I'm not quite sure what I need, but I feel like it's limiting my life. I'd like to be in a close, loving relationship again, but I keep people at arm's length. I find faults to keep them from getting too close. It's exhausting. I've learned to take care of myself, so I don't have to deal with it. I get along with my friends. They know me and my story and let me have it. They don't try to fix me. So that's a little bit about me. There's more, of course, but those are the main points.

Warmest regards,
Hanne

The Resonance Flows

I read the letter about the two episodes several times. The resonance flowed through me in different directions. Thoughts of being on a trip with our grandchildren and nieces. The desire to give and be with them to share great experiences. Seeing their joy, feeling their excitement, knowing they've been looking forward to it, we've been looking forward to it together, and we know it will be memorable. And then imagine… if an unforeseen and perhaps life-changing event suddenly arose, pulling the rug out from under us. From under them—the children. And happiness would turn into tragedy. What would that mean for my understanding of myself—if I were the adult with children who became unhappy?

I could feel that I needed to stay focused and direct my attention toward Hanne and her sense of self.

When I read the second, somewhat older story in the email, I saw a 19-year-old young woman with dreams, hopes, drive, and perhaps also a touch of adventure and openness in her blood. She wrote about falling in love—and yet I sensed the unease. She wrote that he was charismatic and somewhat older than her. Who falls in love like that? I had done the same myself, back when I was 20 and attending folk high school. He converted a car, and we drove around Europe for half a year. With art, nature, and sensuality, but also with his dark sides, which could get unpleasant—and once I thought, now I must leave. In the middle of an orange grove somewhere in Portugal, where the hell had taken him.

Hanne writes: "Now he's shooting the dog." What a cruelty to brace oneself for; to have a reason and the courage to give everything a chance. I wondered what kind of response she might need.

It struck me that her parents had overlooked her. That they hadn't seen her, hadn't empathized with her, hadn't listened—but, on the contrary, choosing to maintain contact with him had belittled her.

The world must not be like that. We must keep our hearts open and stay with the painful things others tell us, even if they are hard to understand and accept.

While I felt a personal connection, I became professionally interested in the stories in the email. Like most of the people I speak with, Hanne described the effects of her experiences—both the interpretive ones and the emotional and physical effects that the memories evoked in the present.

For example, Hanne writes: "*I can physically feel it all again when I write about it. It's been many years since I've talked about or dealt with my ex-husband, and I haven't felt like it's been a part of my life at all. I was convinced it was a closed chapter, right up until the Royal Arena."*

And that gave me an idea to tell her that sometimes you can spot past traumatic events when "the past moves into the present, as if it were the present," as my colleague Anette Holmgren puts it. My guess was that Hanne's sense of self, her

identity, had taken a hit back when she was 19 and that the incident reminded her of that.

August 20—First response to Hanne

In my response, I thanked Hanne for trusting my approach to letter therapy and hoped it might be of help. I then presented a narrative understanding of trauma, including the concept of value traumatization and the importance of receiving an appropriate social response.

To explore whether a traumatization of the self might have occurred, I asked four questions in the email to Hanne. At the same time, I outlined the process and invited her to reflect on my observations and concepts. I shared my knowledge of narrative trauma theory in the hope that together we could explore the themes related to her specific experiences.

> *Dear Hanne,*
>
> *Thank you so much for writing, thank you for your faith, and thank you for being willing to work with me even though we're not yet entirely sure how we'll go about it.*
>
> *I've read your narration, and I'm struck by the many skills and actions you took—we know these are rooted in values that have a history—but we also know that even if you managed it, and even if you've moved on, things have happened, and the Self has been in danger. Trauma is what happens inside us. Trauma is the effect of what happened, and you describe how those effects surface and impact your life. Anette Holmgren uses the term "value traumatization"—meaning that one's values have been trampled upon, and that perhaps the worst part was THAT it happened?*
>
> *1. That makes me wonder if you could reflect on or recall—and perhaps say something about—what the worst moment was in the first incident and what the worst moment was in the second incident?*

2. What do you wish someone had done back when you lived on the property and the incident with the hunting rifle happened? Who understood you? And who, perhaps, would you have wanted to understand you?

3. In the incident at Fields, there was a catastrophic lack of information, that is, a catastrophic lack of understanding of your situation. What, if anything, did that mean for you?

4. *What expectations could we reasonably have of public authorities in such a situation?*

When you aren't met with an appropriate social response after the worst has happened, it can, in a way, feel like a double trauma to your sense of self.
"I experienced this, but no one acknowledges that it happened to me, so maybe I'm the one who's misinterpreting it—maybe it's all my own fault?"
I also notice that you write one description in the present tense and the other in the past tense—do you have any idea why?

Dear Hanne—thank you again for writing and for letting me read along on important matters. Let me know how my immediate response here works for you, and whether it sparks any ideas about what might be good to do next.

Best regards,
Lone

August 27—Second letter from Hanne

Hanne replied that she liked the letter format. In her response, she used my questions as a framework for her answers:

Dear Lone,

Reflecting on your questions works quite well for me. Having to put it down in writing gives me time to think things through, and many memories come to mind. As your keen eye has surely already noticed, I've cut and pasted parts of your reply and am using your questions here to reflect and respond.

It makes me wonder if you could recall or reflect on—and perhaps say something about—what the worst moment was in the first episode, and what the worst moment was in the second episode?

I've thought a lot about what the worst moment was when I was threatened with a gun. It's very hard for me to answer that. What comes to mind is that the humiliation started long before that moment. Besides the fear, I also think I found a kind of stubbornness (I didn't want to show I was afraid); the fear was inside me, and it couldn't really get any worse. When he laughed, I took it as the most humiliating thing—he thought I was nothing. I remember thinking that he shouldn't have control over me anymore. I don't remember what happened the next day. What I do remember is that I packed a bag, which I hid. I had an agreement with a friend that I could move in with her at any time. It took some time before I moved. I became stubborn and wanted to decide for myself when I would move. Maybe an attempt to preserve my self-respect!

At the Royal Arena, the worst part was that I was responsible for Molly and dealing with the uncertainty. It was unsettling not knowing anything, especially since it went on for hours.

What do you wish someone had done back when you were living on the property and the incident with the hunting rifle happened?

I wish my parents had realized or noticed sooner how my ex-husband was behaving. They focused on how well I was doing—I was spoiled

with horses and such—and they always praised him because he was so talented.

When the incident with the rifle happened, they didn't help. But my father stayed in touch with him for some time afterward. That really pissed me off. I felt like my father didn't want to see how things really were.

I've had many discussions with my parents about it. For a very long time, they insisted that I wouldn't have listened to them. I wish they had seen it and been there for me anyway, until I was able to get through it.

It wasn't until I met my second husband that they expressed how terrible they thought it had been for me.

Who understood you? And who might you have wished had understood you?

When I moved, I also left my job. My husband and I worked together, so I had to step away from that. My former boss offered me a job, and he understood what I was going through. We didn't talk about it much; he was just there. There were friends who understood me and whom I could talk to about it.

I wish my family had been there more.

I also think I was ashamed of having been in that situation. I should have been able to do something. I fought and lost—that's how it felt back then.

At the Royal Arena, I just think I would have liked to have known along the way what was happening. Especially, I would have liked to have known when they had caught the man and there was no longer anything to be afraid of.

One description is in the present tense, and the other in the past tense—do you have any idea why?

I've thought about that a lot, and I can't figure out why. Maybe because one episode happened a very long time ago and the other happened just a year ago!

Kh. Hanne

September 8—My second reply to Hanne

In my next letter, I chose to address the two themes I had previously presented to Hanne: traumatization and appropriate social response.

In the first episode, Hanne was not met with an appropriate social response; on the contrary, she was left feeling ashamed and said of the effects: "*It has affected my view of myself. For most of my adult life, I've had the feeling that I had to prove I was good enough. Both to others and to myself."*

The second episode took place in a community, and many people felt it was a shame that they didn't receive information, just as Hanne was fully aware of her deliberate actions throughout the evening: *"I had no doubt about what was important, and I did my best."*

In an attempt to highlight the differences between the two episodes in terms of self-perception, I chose to poeticize Hanne's own words about skills, knowledge, intentions, and values from her first and second letters.

I did this because I knew I wanted to work with Hanne's sense of self and her values, intentions, and skills. Reproducing another person's words in connection with actions one has taken helps to clarify actions as active responses—and thereby strengthens the sense of agency and the sense of an intentional and active self.

In the first poeticization, I highlight Hanne's words about a "we" in particular. I want to reinforce the sense that she was part of a community and that she

created a community. I highlight Hanne's intentions and values through her words about taking responsibility and taking actions that can comfort her grandchild. My hope is that this will reinforce the sense of mattering to others, because it reinforces the sense of mattering to oneself:

> *Dear Hanne,*
>
> *Thank you for your two letters.*
>
> *In your first letter, which you sent to me on August 20, you described the incident from last year when you were at the Royal Arena with your grandchild. You wrote that you had felt in danger and that the incident had brought back memories of your first marriage, where you were threatened with a hunting rifle. I wrote back to you briefly via email, discussing, among other things, the importance of receiving an appropriate social response and the concept of value traumatization.*
>
> *You wrote back that it had been quite helpful to get closer to that feeling of worthlessness. You wrote: "It wasn't so much that he had a weapon, but that he was laughing. That's when the feeling of being worthless surfaced."*
>
> *The trauma isn't the specific event that happened. The trauma is what the episode has done to the person, on the inside, so to speak. I get the impression that the two episodes have affected you differently—and my guess is that last year at the Royal Arena, you recognized the feeling of being in danger—but you were able to act very differently (you acted/spoke/were responsible for your grandchild/were part of a group/etc.) and therefore you didn't lose yourself. Nor was anyone laughing at you; you weren't belittled—on the contrary, there were many of you together in danger, lacking information, etc. You were met with an appropriate social response to the situation. In the story from the Royal Arena, you remember and describe many details about what you did, what you all did, what you*

thought, what the context was like, what time it was, what people said, what was happening around you—and you were constantly surrounded by other people feeling and expressing the same things.

- *Later, you write that the worst part was that you were responsible for Molly—I wonder if that might also have been the best part, because it called for action?*
- *What do you think about this difference between the two episodes? About being met with an appropriate social response?*

<u>Below are your own words about skills, knowledge, intentions, and values from your first letter:</u>

I had invited my oldest grandchild to a Harry Styles concert
My friends were going to drive us
My friends know I can get a little frantic
We'll arrive well in advance
We'll make plans
We decide
We decide
I think
My heart races in Molly's mode
I try to keep her occupied
We're "just talking"
We talk about how it's not nice
And I say that I also think it's strange
But that there's nothing else to do but wait
My thoughts are terrifying
I think we're in a bad place
I try to stay as calm as possible so Molly doesn't get any more scared than absolutely necessary
We go inside
We walk around and buy a few things for Molly
We wait again

I remember someone coming out on stage and saying
We're okay, as far as we know
Announcement from the stage
We're being ushered out
It's my experience that we all look out for one another
We're walking in a long line
We've been in touch with my friends
They're welcoming us in Vanløse
It's reassuring
We breathe a sigh of relief
The lights go out and the train stops
I think
We're actually all surprisingly calm
The relief is palpable
As we sit in the car, we feel safe
When we get home, we watch the news
We have to see what has happened
We calm down a little
And both of us can sleep

<u>Your words from Letter No. 2 about skills and values</u>

I found stubbornness
I thought: He won't be in charge of me anymore
I packed a bag and hid it
I had plans with a friend
I was stubborn and wanted to decide for myself when I would move
It pissed me off that my dad stayed in touch
My dad wouldn't see how things really were
I've had many arguments with my parents about it
I wish they had seen it
I wish they had been there until I was able to...
I wish my family had been there more
I should have been able to do something

I fought and lost
That's how it felt back then

When you read these words—about what you learned, about who you became, about what you felt—back when you were 19—how do you think that connects to how you see yourself today? And to your desire to be close to another person, to receive unconditional love, to believe in love?

I get the sense that you might have been alone back then—that you weren't met with an appropriate social response, and the Self cannot tolerate that.

Let me hear what you think.
Kh. Lone

September 22—Hanne's third and final letter

After I sent the letter with the poetic rendering of Hanne's own words and descriptions, I wondered if it was helpful enough. Could my poetic rendering serve as an appropriate social response?

It took nearly two weeks for Hanne to reply, during which time my doubts grew. But when she did reply, it became clear that this very opportunity for slowness had allowed her to read the poetic rendering several times and feel what the words did to her.

Dear Lone,

Your question: ***What do you think about it? This difference between the two episodes? About being met with an appropriate social response?***

When I look at my own words about taking care of Molly throughout the whole process, I can see that I succeeded. She has no lasting effects from the episode. Reading those words again has made it

evident to me that I was quite competent. I knew what I had to do, and I did my best.

The episode no longer weighs on me the same way. In fact, it weighs on me very, very little.

The difference between the two episodes has become so much clearer. I have a feeling that time with my ex-husband has had the greatest impact. It has affected how I see myself. For most of my adult life, I've felt like I had to prove I was good enough. To others and to myself.

When I read your repetition of my words, I realize that I managed to do so much more than I was aware of. That it was largely about a lack of appropriate social response. Stubbornness has taken on a different meaning; I no longer need to be stubborn in the sense of being strong and able to endure (does that make sense?); it's okay to let go when something doesn't feel good or right.

It wasn't me who was wrong or not good enough. I was held captive by the norm that material values were most important, and that I should be able to endure staying in a relationship even if it wasn't good. It seems completely crazy now.

I hardly know what else to say. I feel better than I've ever felt before. I have an inner peace, and I no longer feel the need to prove anything to anyone. I can hardly believe that the feeling of being worthless ever took root inside me. THANK YOU, LONE.

I've noticed that I dare to give a little more of myself in my relationships; I no longer need to keep my distance to guard against what others might see (that I am worthless). I've also noticed that I care less about what others think or feel about what I say or do. It's a relief.

The episodes have lost their momentum.

Dear Lone, I hope this makes sense,
Kh. Hanne

My Afterthoughts

Gratitude is the first word that comes to mind. Gratitude for the trust that was shown to me and gratitude that I know what to do as a therapist, because time and again in my narrative practice I have found that the ideas do not fail. I mean the ideas that all people are competent—and that we should shed light on their intentions and values.

I believe in the ideas of sharing knowledge and of balancing the power dynamic between us. My first go-to in my work has long been a quote from Karen Blixen:

"All sorrows can be borne, if only we place them within a narrative"[1]

This is where I always start. When I meet people who have lost their bearings in life, people who may have lost themselves along the way amid sorrowful events, I always think of this quote. It is about placing events and understandings within a narrative and gaining an overview of the landscape of one's life.

The point of the quote is that pain becomes bearable when it is given meaning—not as a general, normative explanation, but meaning in relation to what a person values and stands for. We are struck by trauma and moral wounds when we experience belittlement, violence, and threats—and we rise with dignity when we are recognized for our significance to others and to ourselves. That is the point I love and always carry with me.

The Slowness

In this process, I became absorbed by the unique pace of written language—its slowness and timing—and what it does to another person's ability to step forward

[1] Karen Blixen (Isak Dinesen), interview with Bent Mohn, The New York Times Book Review, November 3, 1957.

as an agent in their own life. It gave me the opportunity to work at a different pace, with time to reflect, think, and formulate my questions with greater care.

Since then, I have been wondering whether spoken language sometimes forces questions and answers before they have truly ripened.

I have, of course, also been curious about whether narrative letter therapy can work for everyone. Over the past few years, I have tested it with various people. A young woman I met in talk therapy initially rejected the idea: “I can’t write; I can’t write at all.” Our contact slowly faded. But one day she sent a text message: “I’ve written a long letter to you about some of what’s happened that I never really got to tell you.”

This marked the beginning of a correspondence in which stories of violence and abuse gradually took on a different character. Responses, resistance, and a movement emerged. The shame shifted sides. What had been hidden was now shared and met with an appropriate social response—one that was appropriate for the young woman.

Decentered—But Influential

The understanding of others as people who always can, know, and want to do something is where I most clearly feel the power of narrative practice.

The trust that it is the other person who is doing the work. I do not step forward as an analyzing expert, but as someone who facilitates a process in which the other person can reclaim themselves.

Perhaps this is precisely where writing takes on its special significance. In the slowness. In the fact that words do not have to come immediately but are allowed to take shape at their own pace.

For in this slowness, my role as a facilitator becomes clearer to me. I am not there to drive the conversation forward or elicit answers. Instead, I can create a poetic framework where the other person has time to find their own words—at their own pace. I filter the words and give them back, while sharing the knowledge I

have. Each time, I am reminded of the value of remaining in a position that is decentralized yet influential.

The rhythm of the letter insists on pause and reflection. Thus, I find that narrative letters support a practice where the other person emerges more clearly in the light of knowledge, values, and agency.