

IT HAD BEEN DECADES SINCE I HAD laid eyes on my childhood diary, with its vivid blue cover, its shiny gold lettering and, most importantly, the fancy gold lock. Buried behind boxes and garden tools sat the old trunk in which I found it—safely tucked beneath the stuffed bunny I won in a colouring contest and the embroidery sampler I made in elementary school. In the fat, loopy script of my youth, I had penned the first entry on January 1, and I still remember my eager anticipation at filling those waiting pages with exciting adventures and profound thoughts.

The little locking diary reigned supreme as the coveted birthday gift of yesteryear. Instantly enamoured with those two tiny keys, we all thought: *Finally, a safe place for my secrets!* But was it? Diary collector Irving Finkel owns several locking diaries and points out their most disappointing flaw: “Their locks can be opened with a limp piece of spaghetti in the dark and offer no defence against brothers at all.” For me, the space between my mattress and box spring provided a second level of protection for my little blue diary, but others were far more creative in their quest for privacy.

“My sister had to walk through my room to get to hers, and I worried she would read my diary,” recalls author Alex Behr. *This diary would probably bore you*, she wrote on the spine of one diary. The cover of her seventh grade journal confronts any trespassers with bold letters: *KEEP OUT!* Inside, a second warning reads: *Anyone who reads this without my consent will have a very sad week.* Heavy threats like this can be found in a majority of diaries, but did they actually work?

When Gayle Sawamura found her childhood diary tucked inside a nightstand drawer, she was perplexed to find some of the pages painstakingly stitched together with needle and thread. “My memory had failed me as to what I had written and why it was so important that nobody ever read it,” she says. After some contemplation, she carefully clipped the threads. Those stitches had sealed away an enormous sense of sadness that both confused and embarrassed her. “My diary contains things I would never have remembered on my own, and when I read it, I can almost feel what it was like to be 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 years old.”

For therapist and writer Carrie Thiel, a lifetime of prolific journaling began with a little floral locking diary she named Flower. She, too, finds that her diaries fill in memory gaps, especially when she is writing personal narratives. “Without my diary to remind me, my writing would lack important thoughts and feelings from different times of my life,” she says. “It’s so easy to misremember. I would be absolutely lost without my journals.”

This irreplaceable quality renders diaries invaluable to their owners. Artist Erin Killian’s lock-and-key diary



KERRIE MORE

Dear Diary,

STORY BY
KERRIE MORE



ALEX BEHR