



ReWriting Our Worlds by Anna Stewart©

Stage One - Before the Call

Guiding question: Who were you before the call?

In every journey, we start from where we are. That is usually the known world, our homes, families, work, school, etc. Before the call we go to the grocery store, walk the dog, make soup, get ready for work, meet up with friends, snuggle with our kids, kiss our partners, we live our lives. Who we are before the call includes all that we have experienced. It includes our childhood, our teen years, our first time on our own, college, partners, it is everything that makes us who we are.

In this first writing prompt, we will describe some of those memories and experiences, along with the people who were in our lives. Using the structure of starting sentences with “ I Remember...” , write for at least 10 minutes without stopping or editing yourself and allow the emotions of memory wash over your hands as you write about who were you before the call came.

You can take this prompt all the way back to childhood or you can place it closer to the present.

Start with I Remember....or Where I'm From as the first lines of your piece

Option 2 : Write about your first encounter with disability/addiction/disease. Who was it? How did you know them? Did anyone talk about it?

Craft of writing tip: Include the senses- what do you see, hear, taste, feel, and touch? Give details.

Anna's Journey

I remember standing in front of the school, chatting with the other moms, waiting for our kids.

I remember walking home for lunch when I was in kindergarten.

I remember making craft projects with my children, Elmer's glue, colored pipe cleaners and bright markers strewn across the table.

I remember spending hours in my room, door shut, fingers smudged with charcoal, animals emerging on paper.

I remember planning, cooking and cleaning up from family dinners where everyone got something they liked.

I remember choking down frozen cooked spinach so my plate would be clean.

I remember reading Underwear, Underwear just so I could hear my son's laugh and laugh.

I remember being very disappointed in kindergarten when I found out I would not be learning to read on the first day of school.

I remember sitting on the floor with pirate figures some days, baby dolls and bottles on others, wanting to go read a book.

I remember my mom doing the same thing with my young daughter, and she could have gone to read a book.

I remember having to get a watch and a mobile phone when my son started kindergarten, I had gone public.

I remember many meetings about my son trying to figure out why he was so antagonistic, angry, irritable, hyper, loud and anxious.

I remember arguing with my history teacher asking him to explain why it mattered.

I remember dreading when I saw that the school was calling, again.

I remember the day when my friend and I made a list of all our classmates and changed their names into something mean. They found out and taunted me all the way home.

I remember the first night my son made dinner for the whole family. We had to wait to be called to dinner and were given menus to choose from. I chose one of everything.

I remember making spaghetti dinner for my siblings so my dad wouldn't have to when he came home from work. My mother was passed out on the couch.

I remember pushing my son out of the car when he was in 5th grade, locking the doors and driving away wondering if I was doing the right thing.

I remember graduating from high school and having no one know I had.

I remember my son telling me he got drunk on beer at a senior party and then puked all night at his friend's house.

I remember being so glad that I was divorced so I could be the good parent.

I remember how afraid my children became of their father.

I remember that I once loved him.

I remember when my son smiled so hard he jumped when he asked the girl he liked to homecoming.

I remember being so proud of him dressed up for her, I could see the man in him emerging.

I remember when I watched my baby boy sleep.

I remember

Nisargo's Journey

I remember the willow tree in my grandparents' garden. I loved it when the branches had grown almost to the ground. I felt safe inside. And the garden was not so safe when the tree had just been trimmed.

I remember my first grade teacher who was supposedly still waiting for her fiancé, 20 years after the war had ended. She also had a suitcase ready under her bed so she would be ready to leave immediately when danger came knocking on her door, again. I remember going to the Chinese restaurant with my family and wanting to escape the staring eyes of other people as soon as my developmentally delayed sister opened her mouth. She was such a happy person but people judged her and us for being too loud. I remember the strawberry fest. Yummy cakes, drinks, desserts, all made from strawberries, red and juicy. I remember sitting on the balcony pitting cherries, for hours. My hands were dark red for days. But the taste of cherry juice and jam in the middle of winter was bringing the warmth of summer into my cold mouth.

A Cup of Tea

When I need to gather myself I make myself a cup of tea, or a pot, knowing this will take longer than it takes to finish a cup. I know that when I sit down with it, I will have something to hold onto, something warm and comforting that will soothe my hurting insides. I love my tea in the early morning hours when the house is all quiet and I feel like I am all by myself. And in the early hours of the day my mind is not yet engulfed by worries, anger and the excruciating sense of wanting to control. In the early hours of the day I can just be, and listen. I can actually hear the fire crackling or the birds sing or my breath go in and out of my body. I yearn for stillness. I can't believe I spent 10 years of my life in and around spiritual teachers and community and have little or no memory left of experiencing what was there, right in front of me. I must have been drawn to the deep peacefulness of those who had travelled this path for a long time. But all I remember is the drama of unfulfilled love, broken hearts and working through it all.

There were moments though. As a child I remember being engrossed by sitting outside and watching ants in my sandbox, snowflakes floating down from the sky and listening to the silence in church when everything went quiet. I loved those moments. I always seemed to have listened to what lay beyond. I remember playing the church organ. My favorite time was when it was pitch dark and I was all alone, practicing. The power of the sound was amazing. But more amazing was what happened when the music slowly disappeared into the dark behind me and - nothing - remained.

Lori's Journey

I sat in the back seat of our 1960's station wagon and cocked my head, peering out the window. I was trying to see to the top of the church spire. My mother pulled the car to a stop in front of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. Our eyes met in the rear view mirror. "Mom," I asked, "What's the meaning of life?" She smiled and heaved a sigh. "I don't really know, honey. Still trying to figure that one out myself." I grabbed my doll and held her tight. In we walked to my first day of nursery school.

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I was running down the hill behind all the other kids. The sun was shining brightly overhead as we cheered, screamed, and waved our arms in triumph. There was ice cream waiting at the pavilion for the winners of the color war. All of a sudden, I stopped cold in my tracks. What was I doing? I thought to myself. I don't care about color wars. Why am I screaming and waving my arms as if I care? I looked around at the campgrounds: the grass yellowing in the hot summer sun, the old wooden cabins standing silently by, and the cheering crowd of kids getting smaller in the distance. I took a step and walked the rest of the way to the pavilion for an ice cream sandwich.

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We were in the schoolyard during recess when it happened. It was seventh grade. I had been climbing the social ladder since sixth grade, when I figured out there *was* a social ladder. There were about six of us standing in a circle. Sue Barbieri, *the* most popular girl in the seventh grade was standing right next to me. Sue was speaking and everyone was captivated by what she had to say. And then it happened. Sue became very animated, moving her arms as she spoke. She took a step to the right, where I was standing, and turned toward the girls to her left. That was it. I was wedged out of the circle, kicked off the social ladder. As I stood there, staring at the back of Sue's denim jacket, I thought to myself, "How could she? Where are her manners? Doesn't she realize she's standing right in front of me?" I felt indignant and the sting of ignominy. From that day on I never stepped foot on that ladder again.

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"This is what it's all about," I said as I scooped up some dirt from Washington Square Park. "The earth. Life. I'd love to own some land one day." The boy who would be my future husband looked deep into my eyes. "You're not like other girls I've dated."

* * *

When he invited me to the nightclub, I hadn't considered that I had nothing appropriate to wear. I borrowed make-up from my roommate and dressed in the best clothes I had: a pair of old nylon dress slacks, a simple blouse, and cheap high heels I had purchased a couple years earlier at FAVA discount shoes. When we got out of the car, my heel got caught in a crack in the pavement. As I wrestled it free, the tip of the heel broke off. He offered me his arm and we walked to the entrance of the club. Click, click, click. The metal stub of my heel echoed on the sidewalk. I pretended not to notice. He held the door for me, and inside I saw a sea of glitter, leather and fur. The women were dressed in mini skirts, mini dresses, tight pants, stilettos, sexy boots and tight fitting tops; their hair and make-up done up to look like over-done high fashion models. I glanced at my date, smiled, took a deep breath, and with head held high, walked into the crowd. Click, click, click.

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“Mommy, look at me!” my 3 year-old proudly exclaimed. He had taken a poo in the toilet and had made a valiant attempt to clean himself. Only the “poo” was all over the toilet, his hands and his butt. “Wonderful!” I exclaimed with a sarcasm that a 3 year-old doesn’t yet understand. After he and the bathroom were cleaned up, my 5 year-old special needs son also had a poo, this one in his diaper. After he was cleaned up, I returned to the kitchen, where our 2 month-old French mastiff decided to get in on the action and made his own lovely poo in the middle of the kitchen floor. I wanted to laugh at the comedy of it all, but I couldn’t. “Fuck!” I cried. “I must have done something pretty shitty in a past life to deserve this now!” I had so wanted to get married and have children, to live in a lovely home on a lovely street and have a dog. I had all that. And there I was cleaning shit. Why was life so difficult?

Elizabeth’s Journey

Where I’m from.

I am from “No. I don’t want to come in yet to have this baby.” I don’t want to be tied down to heart monitors and beeping machines and hustle and bustle of medical staff and anxious, throbbing waiting.

“I’ll just sit here by the hospital fountain until I’m ready to come in.”

I am from the third of four: pretty girls. That’s what matters: pretty.

I am from a scar on my ring finger that used to go all the way around when hands were tiny and now I have to look closely to remember which hand it’s on. It happened when the baby pram I was riding in collapsed and clipped my finger tip and my young sisters were locked out of the house watching me because our mother wanted to take a shower in peace.

I am from girls in pretty dresses eating powdered scrambled egg and little sausages I called frankfurters on airplanes on the way to visit Grandma.

I am from crayfish in the creek, sod-mud houses behind the wood pile and peering over my mother’s house from tip-top tree branches.

I am from the abyss of love for my first born.

My Dad

The magician was really just a man who happened to be in the hospital waiting room and decided to pull a quarter from behind my five-year-old sister’s ear. But I didn’t know that.

My older sister, Suzanne, and I were enraptured by his tricks and existed solely in the delight of childhood innocence while my dad lay paralyzed below the neck just down the hall. I don’t even recall where my mother or other two siblings were.

Later, in my father's sick room, the abundance of greeting cards hanging near his bed caught my attention. I had heard whispers about how much he was loved and how so many of the patients he'd made well were rooting for him now.

There were other whispers, as there always are in the grown-up world. I sensed that great gravity abounded, but only understood that it was kind of peculiar for one's daddy to communicate by holding a pen in his teeth and moving his neck to scratch away messages to Mommy and Grandma and a whole lot of strangers who I gathered belonged there.

My dad breathed through a trache and couldn't talk to me directly, but I was one of his little girls and he didn't need to tell me anything, and I didn't need to hear voiced words from him.

Much later, months perhaps, my father came finally came home from the hospital. He walked using crutches.

I matched his long, tight white socks that he wore to increase blood circulation when I helped fold the laundry but didn't know what circulation was. I thought the socks were kind of weird and a bit disgusting the way old men's feet always seemed to be.

The picture I drew of my mommy and daddy for one of my first first-grade assignments showed my mom with bouffant hair in streaks of silver, brown, black and gold and my dad holding a cane. Pocket handkerchiefs and a cane were things that just belonged with a dad. Didn't every kid's father walk with a cane?

Little by little I pieced together stories of my father's rare brush with Guillain Barre syndrome, a disease we thought he picked up from a tick. My dad killed spiders and other such intruders that the five females in his life shirked from through the years, but things that stung or bite, like bees and ticks, still scared him.

Susan's Journey

The pink gerber daisies are in my hand, and the guests are seated. Though there is no rain, the air is moist, and the clouds are threatening. We are lined up in the back where no one can see us. I am in this moment, the one that I have been dreaming of for months. Our best man starts to play his guitar, and his wife begins to sing the song that my husband and I chose together.

Kind friends all gathered 'round, there's something I would say:

What brings us together here has blessed us all today.

Love has made a circle that holds us all inside;

Where strangers are as family, loneliness can't hide.

This Kate Wolfe song is my favorite song. For three months I have played this CD and listened to it over and over imagining what it will feel like to hear it on my wedding *day*.

Paul's parents are walking down the aisle. My sister is walking down too.

You must give yourself to love if love is what you're after;

Open up your hearts to the tears and laughter,

And give yourself to love, give yourself to love.

We start to walk down the aisle, my mother at one side and my father at the other.

And then, my mother is on the ground. She hasn't even taken a step yet.

Please get up, I say to my mother.

"Jerry help me," she pleads. She's only 53. She doesn't try to get up. My father is looking forward and it takes him a moment to realize what's going on. He pulls her up, and we start down the aisle. We were at the back, and in the end no one, but me, really saw. But somehow my mother instinctively knew the moment that I dreamed of. My focus is lost. The song goes on, but I can't get back to where I was. The moment is gone.

She does not apologize. She never apologizes, not for that not for anything else.

I've walked these mountains in the rain and learned to love the wind;

I've been up before the sunrise to watch the day begin.

I always knew I'd find you, though I never did know how;

Like sunshine on a cloudy day, you stand before me now.

I was 29 years old. At that very moment I realized my mother was never there for me, and she never would be.

Despair, however, did not come until about five months later when I am pregnant with my son. When I can't leave work to meet them for a layover at the airport, my parents decide not to speak to me for the rest of my pregnancy. They don't call to ask how I am.

I try to call and talk to my mother. I had planned to tell her that maybe we could do the baby naming in CT. I thought she would like that. But I don't get to say it. She says something very nasty. I get off the phone in tears. I just want a mother, I cry.

I try to call a second time and she never calls back.

My mother sends nasty letters to me telling me what a horrible person I am. At first I open them with trepidation. Then I have my husband read them first. Then I don't read them at all.

And by the time I give birth, I don't even bother to call them. But I feel despair even though I have a new baby. I feel despair as I try to physically recover with no mother to help or talk to. I feel despair in every well baby visit, when I see mothers accompanying their daughters. I feel despair every time I look at baby clothes, wishing that I had a mother to pick them out with me.

The despair continues on and on till it becomes background noise. I always wanted a mother, but I never had one.