

Writing a Myth or Fairy Tale

At this age level I like to introduce a new and very powerful writing exercise— the myth or fairy tale about your childhood. Your myth or fairy tale can focus on an event or events that occurred during your school years, or on an earlier event that strongly affected you. The good thing about myths and fairy tales is that they get around your rational, thinking brain. Your story can be about animals (a mama bear and papa bear), or about the gods, or about kings and queens.

Your story should have two parts. **Part one** should begin with “Once upon a time,” and describe the events you have chosen, focusing on how they created the spiritual wound. **Part two** should begin with “And when she/he grew up,” and should focus on the later life-damaging effects of the spiritual wound.

Don’t be concerned if you can’t think of a traumatic event that stands out dramatically in your life. You may have had a chronically depressed or anxious childhood, or you may have been neglected from the word go.

Here is an example from one of my workshop participants. The facts of this man’s life were as follows. His father was wealthy and married his mother because, while on a drunken binge, he got her pregnant. His maternal grandfather threatened a lawsuit if his father did not marry his mother. Six months after they were married, his father divorced his mother. He paid her handsomely and asked her to move to another city as part of the settlement.

The mother, age 17, was in the early stages of drug addiction. She was also a sex addict. She paid an elderly country woman to keep her son. She would leave him for months at a time. She finally married and moved away, totally abandoning her son.

My client was physically, sexually, and emotionally abused by the old country woman. He was a school failure and ran away at 16. From that point on, his life was a soap opera of mediocre jobs and abusive relationships with women. This is the story he wrote:

Once upon a time there was a powerful king named John. He married a lowly peasant woman named Gretchen. He married her because he got drunk one night and had sex with her and got her pregnant.

Because this was a shameful marriage, Gretchen was kept in hiding. She was finally put in exile on a strange island.

The child of this shameful marriage was also called John. His mother, wanting to keep King John's love, thought he might take her back when he saw the little prince and heard that she had given him the king's name. So she visited the king to show him his son.

King John was furious. He knew that the little prince was of royal blood, but he hated Gretchen, for she reminded him of his shame. The king decreed that Gretchen and little John should be sent to a foreign country across the ocean hundreds of miles away. Gretchen was paid handsomely and was sworn never to tell little John about the secret of his birth.

Gretchen hated little John. He kept her from doing what she wanted. She wanted to drink and carouse with men. She blamed little John for her exile. Finally she paid an old woman in the country to take care of him. The old woman beat him and gave him only the bare minimum to eat.

Although he was truly a prince of royal blood, little John thought he was the bastard son of this old pauper woman. He was laughed at by other country children because of the rags he wore to school. He failed in school because he was terrified to answer the questions the teachers asked. He never had time to study because he was so busy with his chores at home.

When he grew up, he ran away from home. He had no money, and since he had dropped out of school, the only job he could find was to sweep the floors in a merchant's store. He went through one relationship after another. Each time he entered a relationship he was rejected. Each woman he picked was critical and humiliated him.

Once you've written your story, it's very important for you to read it to your support person. This story can help you get in touch with your feelings about your abandonment. It can also help you see the connection between the neglect of your unmet developmental dependency needs and your consequent life history.

We heal our toxic shame when we grasp that our “adult child” issues are about what happened to us, and not about who we really are! Seeing how we act out our unmet childhood needs helps to reduce our toxic shame. If you’re working with a partner, take turns reading to each other. When your partner reads you his story, give him your feeling response. Hold him and nurture him, if appropriate.

If you’re working in a group, let each person read his story to the group. When he’s finished, have him close his eyes while each person in the group gives him a heartfelt feeling response.