

# Unremembered Loss

*For all the news and information from the world of Rathrae, and for the story Unremembered Loss.*

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Over the last three years I've written about my grief, my memories, Annay's grief, Hector's torture, being called to serve God, a father and his daughter who ran away and became a prostitute, two rats that are fleeing the terror of wolves, and many blog entries about God speaking to his people.

Now for something completely different - some stories for kids.

Last month I started working on a computer program for 4 to 11 year old girls which involves dressing up characters (paper dolls) and then telling a story that is changed based on how the girl dressed the doll. This month I started writing a picture book for 3 to 7 year old boys and girls, which asks the question, "Am I too little to serve God?"

So with little kids in mind, let me share with you some of the journey I've been going on looking at books for people who don't know how to read yet.

## **The first question - Why**

Why would I decided to write two different stories for little kids? Like most of the things that I've done since I started writing three years ago, it wasn't the plan.

Maybe I figure my novel is targeted for 18 year young adults and subconsciously I figure it will be another 10 to 15 years before I publish the novel, and so I need to target my audience now so that when they grow up they will know who I am.

Actually for the game, I was brain storming with my friend Jessie about how we could develop a game together. She's an artist and I want to do an iPad application. We decided that a paper doll app would fit both our strengths. In talking we wanted some 'hook' to separate our app from the rest. The idea of a story came up and we ran with it.

In doing research for wiring the story for the game, I found the book, *Writing Picture Books*, by Ann Whitford Paul. The author

asked me to write a story and then do some exercises with it while reading each chapter. Because of the disjointed nature of the game story, allowing multiple paths and options depending on how the character is dressed, I decided to write a 'simple' story first to learn how to do it.

The inspiration for the new story came from a desire I've had now for several years. Our family enjoys serving others as a family. We have packed bags at the food bank, cleaned up beaches, and built houses in Mexico (three to date and another one coming in May). But I see many families, especially ones with younger children, who feel like that can't serve as a family.

For several years I've wanted to get five families together for dinner and a time of sharing where we can talk about serving God as whole families.

I finally got the ball rolling this month and hope to hold the first workshop next month.

With the idea of families serving floating in the back of my head, and the desire to write a young children's picture book in the front - the two came together and out came a 24 page story.

Now when I say 24 pages I mean one sentence on each page with a big colorful picture that is really telling the story. Over the next five days the story grew to 36 pages. The target for page count is 32 so I'll have to cut four pages at some point, but for now I'm happy with 36.

Having read the first two chapters and written the first draft of my story, I was ready to start the exercises. Chapter two said that a picture book has to have one simple question at its core. It has to have at least one questions and it shouldn't have more than one. So the first exercise was to write the question on paper.

*Can a 6 year old child serve God?*

Great, I have my question. The second exercise was to write out the answer to the question.

*Yes.*

And through the book I give some examples. Knowing the question and the answer, then the story should introduce the question and then answer it.

*Great*

The first half of the book has a little child seeing how people do things for her and then how they do things for other people. The second half of the book repeats the examples of helping others and shows how she can help, too.

Feeling pretty good I headed off to chapter 3. This chapter talks about point of view. I say to my self, “no problem, I know about POV.”

Chapter 3 covers:

**Third-Person, Single POV** - where someone is telling us about some characters but where we can only see what one of the characters is thinking. (A form I used a lot in my novel.)

**Third-Person, Omniscient** - where someone is telling us about some characters and we can see what all of them are thinking .

**First-Person Story** - where the narrator becomes one of the characters in the story. (A form that I’ve used in my character blogs.)

**One Long Letter** - where the story is in the form of a letter being written to someone else.

**Journal or Diary** - where the story is several short entries written by one person over time. (A form I used in my novel.)

**Second-Person** - where the narrator is talking to the character in the book, turning the reader into the character with words like ‘you.’

“Alright,” I said to my self. “I knew all of those except the second-person.” Now came the exercise at the end of the chapter. Rewrite your story in at least three of these different forms.

Okay, so what did I start with? A quick look, and ‘yes,’ I wrote my story in first-person. No big surprise since I’ve been writing most of my blogs and my second novel are in first-person.

Here is the list of choices:

- 3rd person - single POV
- 3rd person - multiple POV
- 1st person, a different POV
- 1st person letter
- 1st person - journal
- 2nd person

The easiest form to rewrite it in was third-person, and I took off, fixing many of the mistakes I made in the first version.

Still planning on doing at least two more, I skipped ahead to chapter 4 and found out that there are more ways to tell you story:

**Apostrophe Voice** - where the writer speaks to something in the story that can’t speak back - like “Hello sun. Good night moon.”

**Mask Voice** - where an inanimate object in the story is talking - like a tree or desk.

**Conversation Voice** - where the whole story is a conversation between two characters with no description or action.

**Correspondence** - where the story is a series of letters between

two characters.

Rewrite the story in at least five of these styles, and chapter 5:

**Past tense** - telling things that already happened.

**Present tense** - telling things that are happening.

**Future tense** - telling things that will or might happen.

**Different Time Period** - where the story happens in a different time.

**Different Location** - where the story happens some place different.

**Animals as characters** - where you change the characters to be animals instead of people.

Over the next three weeks I wrote a version of the story in

- 1st person - future tense
- 1st person - past tense
- 2nd person - present tense
- 3rd person - present - country
- 3rd person - past tense
- Journal
- Letter

I tried to do some of the others, but didn’t see how it would work and lost my motivation.

Chapter 6 talked about how to make a compelling character. The highlights are:

- Someone you can care about
- Likable
- A child, animal, or childlike adult
- Imperfect
- Behaves in a believable way
- must be active
- solves their own problem

I think I did pretty well with the character. She is young, has a good imagination, can play by herself, but doesn’t think to help. In the end she sees that helping is good.

Chapter 7 is about story, chapter 8 is about strong first lines, and chapter 9 is about having a three act story.

Here is where I started having problems. My length was okay, if on the short size. With a rough range of 100 to 1700 word, my 350 is on the shorter side. Not really a problem - it just means I only have one or two lines per page.

The problem is the “strong opening.” I really don’t have an opening. The first 14 pages show scenes where the child is enjoying being served and then sees others being served. Each scene is different, but where is the “WOW” talked about for in chapter 8?

Three acts? Well yes, but not in the ratio suggested. Act one should be the first 1 to 5 pages. Act three should be the last three or four pages. In my book, act one is the first 14 pages. Act two is the 16th page. Act three is the rest of the book.

So can my story still hold together? I think my original question, “*Can a child serve?*” turned into seven little questions. Can I serve at the soup kitchen? Can I serve at the park? ...

The main question is answered on page 16. The seven sub-questions are answered on pages 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, and 30.

Chapter 10 and 11 talk about keeping the story going and getting to the end. My format keeps the story going and the fact that an answer is presented every other page keeps the pages flipping. I get to the end with two pages left to wrap it all up.

Chapter 12 covers scenes and “showing instead of telling.” Each two page spread is a new scene and

there is only one line of “telling,” so I feel pretty good about that.

Chapters 13 and 14 are about rhyme and rhythm. Rhyme I understand and this book doesn’t feel like one that should rhyme. Rhythm, which all children’s books should have is a tough one for me. I’m not sure if it is related to my dyslexia or if it is a different problem, but I have a hard time hearing the rhythm. Which are the hard sounds and which the soft? Which syllables are accented?

Chapter 14 also covered Alliteration - repetition of initial consonant sounds, Assonance - repetition of vowel sounds, Consonance - repetition of beginning and ending consonant sounds, and Onomatopoeia - words that sound like the sound they are describing, along with Metaphor and simile,

I looked through my story and I have a lot of repetition in my phrases, which give it a bit of a poetic fell.

I’m still working on Chapters 13 and 14 and think this is currently my greatest opportunity for improvement.

Chapter 15 focuses mostly on word count and how to make you story shorter. I didn’t think that really applied to me since I was already on the short side, however as I took my story and put it into the 32 page format, I found several of my phrases were too long to fit on one line.

I went through and shortened things a bit - all those 140 character lines I’ve done for the line a day stories helped here - and shrunk the story to 315 words from 350.

Chapter 16 is on the title, which I’m still working on, and chapter 17 says make a, “mock book,” which I did as part of chapter 15.

And so the story is done.

Now of course comes the hard part - finding an illustrator. A picture book is not much of a book without pictures. I’ve started my search and have contacted on illustrator. I sent him a copy of the book three days ago, so it is a little soon to be asking him for feedback.

After getting the illustrations done, it is time to publish. Since I’m looking at this book as part of my mission outreach, I’m thinking of self publishing. I could send it to a Christian publisher, but I’m not sure I want to wait that long.

We will have to see how this all falls out. I am excited.

Meanwhile I’m continuing on the story for the game. Near the end of month it took a sharp turn. The original plan was for a fantasy setting for the story - modern day girls goes to some fantasy world and has to find her way back.

Now the story is going to be science fiction - girl starts out at home, planning her trip to the space station. Once there she is wowed by the wonders. However, she is somehow teleported to an alien world. There she meets strange and cute aliens and has to figure out why she is there and how to get home.

In some ways this makes the story telling easier, but in other ways harder. I have to tell a cute and fun science fiction story - not scary or overly strange - where a nine year old can figure out the problem and solve it.

It should be another fun month as I write this story, finish the picture book, continue to write a line a day for my online story, and try to find time to blog and work on the program.