

Tips for Writing Trauma & Examples

- Draw on the emotion more than the details of the trauma
- Give just enough information that the reader does know what happened
- Euphemisms are effective, but make sure they are not too vague.
- Disassociate from the feeling and concentrate on the ethics.

Genocide

[Suicide at the Euphrates River rather than be raped/tortured/murdered in the genocide] ...five or six beautiful girls came to the shore. They took off their scarves and shoes and put them on sand. Then hand in hand, they walked to the river edge and threw themselves into the water where they were caught by a whirlpool and were gone. I did not see them anymore. ... In the early morning a few mothers came and asked me, "Did you see five or six girls at the riverside?" I did.

"Where did they go?" the mothers asked.

"They took off their scarves and shoes and threw themselves into the river." You can imagine the tears that came as a flood, the sorrow and grief.

- Memoir of Mary B. Ouzounian

[All Armenian adults from the khan (inn) are march out of Deir el Zor, near to the Euphrates River. They are told their children will be put into an orphanage, and then they are shot. Mary, 9 yo, was locked in the house of Mother Fatma Faud, an Arab. It is early morning.]

I could not eat anything. All I could do was cry. The doors were still locked and no one came in. Finally, Fatma said to me, "Be quiet and stop your crying. Tonight I will show you something you will never forget in all your life."

All day I waited. Around 10 PM, Fatma took me to the roof of the house (all of the houses had flat roofs). Fatma mother said to me, "Look toward the khan (inn) where the village shepherds bring their flocks." That day, they did not bring their flocks.

All around the khan, was a very large field where they piled brush, thorns and wood. Over this, gasoline had been poured. Inside the khan, they had gathered all the Armenian children from ages two to ten, homeless, sick, their parents killed, some of them my cousins and friends. This was the orphanage the gendarmes had promised the parents before shooting them near the Euphrates River.

The wood was lit and a scene from a nightmare rose with the smoke of the fire. I think of the words of a lullaby I had heard sung by mothers and grandmother's many times in the khan as they put a crying child to sleep, "In the quiet tent of Christ, many little lambs live comfortably and there is no fear of evil."

In the morning, I could not stand on my feet, I was like a drunken man. I thought I had a nightmare. I went to mother Fatma, and said to her, "What was that? Last night, did I have a nightmare?" She took me in her arms and said to me, "My darling, poor girl, what you saw was the burning of the children. For that reason, I am telling you and your sister not to go out, for they may do the same thing to you. I want to protect you and keep you as my daughters."

Rape

"The Turkish soldiers would search for all Armenians and if they resisted, they would kill or crucify them. They would insult the beautiful girls and women, then as they killed them, they would say, "Now let your Jesus come and save you."

- Memoir of Mary B. Ouzounian

"I got somethin' to say an' then I ain't gonna say no more. That [man] yonder took advantage of me an' if you fine fancy gentlemen don't wanta do nothin' about it then you're all yellow stinkin' cowards, stinkin' cowards, the lot of you. Your fancy airs don't come to nothin' – your ma'amin' and Miss Mayellerin' don't come to nothin', Mr. Finch"

- Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*

I like to imagine a policeman coming onto the scene, saving Sue and taking Darron into custody. He would have been booked, charged, and sent to prison for ten years on assault charges. Sadly, this did not happen, and at the normal time, Sue gave birth to a son. The love and welcoming she hoped would surround the birth of her first child was replaced by pain and shame.

- Takouhie Jensen, quick example

Murder

[on the Euphrates River] As I remember, my father's beard was burned and gone, but only one person in our boat had been badly wounded, a beautiful, tall school teacher. Her name was Mayro. She stood on her feet and raised her hands to heaven and said, "Oh, God, that's enough. Take my soul into thy home." She fell on the ground and gave up the ghost.

- Memoir of Mary B. Ouzounian

Scenes of blood and cruelty are shocking to our ear and heart. What man has nerve to do, man has not nerve to hear. What brother-man and brother-Christian must suffer, cannot be told us, even in our secret chamber, it so harrows up the soul! And yet, oh my country! these things are done under the shadow of thy laws! O, Christ! thy church sees them, almost in silence!

But, of old, there was One whose suffering changed an instrument of torture, degradation and shame, into a symbol of glory, honor, and immortal life; and, where His spirit is, neither degrading stripes, nor blood, nor insults, can make the Christian's last struggle less than glorious.

Was he alone, that long night, whose brave, loving spirit was bearing up, in that old shed, against buffeting and brutal stripes?

Nay! There stood by him ONE, - seen by him alone, - "like unto the Son of God."

The tempter stood by him, too, - blinded by furious, despotic will, - every moment pressing him to shun that agony by the betrayal of the innocent. But the brave, true heart was firm on the Eternal Rock. Like his Master, he knew that, if he saved others, himself he could not save; nor could utmost extremity wring from him words, save of prayer and holy trust.

"He's most gone, Mas'r," said Sambo, touched, in spite of himself, by the patience of his victim.

- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*