

Describing the moment (or the scene) right after a life-altering event has happened

In this exercise, first imagine or remember a life-altering event (anything is acceptable—good or bad). Importantly, if you want to get the most out of this exercise, you should pick an event that has some value or significance in your memory or imagination, including your imagination about events in history.

Second, write down what visible signs would be there that point back to the event, but do not say what happened. Then write down all the other sensory traces or evidence of the event, but do not say what happened. (While you are writing down the details of the aftermath scene, you can change your mind about what actually happened.)

Third, envision all this material from the first person point of view and explain the scene to someone who needs to know exactly what your narrator saw, heard, felt etc. The “someone” could be any kind of authority figure, professional, official or other “public” person.

The final step is to re-envision or re-describe the scene (again as a first person speaker) as if the audience this time were someone able to understand exactly how you feel about each thing you are describing. This could be like a trusted friend, an ultimate “understander” who is always on your side.

In the end, you should have a scene described in a voice that reveals gradually what happened in a way that feels natural yet is more comprehensive or insightful than most spontaneous speech ever is.