

Anna Spafford

ENG-361

Erica Reed

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Short Story Assignment

Part 1: Changes to the Short Story

The Hike

A short story by Anna Spafford

Standing at the bottom of the hiking trail at Red Rocks Canyon Open Space with my husband, I stare up at what seems like an endless trail that leads upward towards the mountain, it feels daunting. The trail is taunting me as I ready myself for this steady upward movement that I know will challenge my resolve to continue and will make me question why I am doing this, and can I make it to the top? I choose to take one step at a time, focusing on choosing the steadiest places to put my feet so I do not twist my ankles. Right away I realized that this hiking trail is not for the faint of heart just as being married and a parent is also not for the faint of heart. Choosing the next right thing when your marriage is struggling, or making the right parenting choices is comparable to the importance of choosing the perfect place to step on the trail which could have devastating effects or at least it can feel that way. There is much to behold around me as the trail

is surrounded by red rocks, pine trees, and beautiful scenery as I work my way up the difficult incline of the trail.

As I reach the first little summit, I pause to catch my breath, as my breathing is heavy, and my body is starting to feel the exertion of the hike. I see others who are making their way up the trail much easier than I am, and it is easy to compare my ability to hike compared to theirs. Maybe they have better shoes. Maybe they have done this before. Maybe they are wearing the right clothes for the journey. Clearly, they are more athletic than I am, and I can see their breathing is not as labored as mine. We are all on the same hiking trail, but others appear to be doing it better than I am. Just as I feel when it comes to marriage and parenting. The struggle to do it better and the right way is such a difficult feat to climb. I see others who appear to be better parents than I am, and I wonder if they have better tools, better attitude, or just easier children. The marriage and parenting trail holds many difficulties, and at times, it feels impossible to continue the climb, but we keep doing it because we hold onto hope about what our marriage will become and who our children will become as adults.

Now that I have caught my breath, I make my way upward again. I continue to notice how different areas of the path are well worn. Other areas of the trail show signs of damage from the last rains that fell and drained here. Colorado's unusually hard and heavy rains cause erosion and change the landscape. I am reminded that life seems to be this way as well with its unusually hard and heavy rains that come up which are unexpected and challenging to navigate, and they leave their mark on the trail and affect how we deal with life.

Reaching the second summit, I stop to rest and catch my breath. I feel a renewed desire to push past the pain I am feeling as my lungs are burning and so is my upper leg muscles. I decide to continue quickly rather than look around too much. I focus on my breathing and begin

concentrating hard on the next right step and look upward towards the final summit. I am internally cheering myself onward by talking to myself, “You can do this!” I am quickly transported to a time when I was trying to breastfeed my daughter, and I kept setting mini goals to get to because we were having a hard time. My mini goals were for two-week goals at a time, at which time I would decide if we could continue our journey, and by three months, it was so easy to continue to breastfeed her until she was 19 months. Then I remember how I pushed through the sleepless nights with young infants, and through the preschool years when kids had nightmares and kept waking up. I remember how hard it was to learn how to stop yelling at my children and learn how to talk in a calm voice when I wanted to lose my mind. My mother always yelled at me when I was growing up, and while I never wanted to behave like her, I did because parenting little children seems to bring out the worst in us at times.

“How are you feeling?” I hear my husband say, and for the first time on this walk, his presence really comes into view for me. Realizing I had been deep in thought rather than being present to him, I turn to look at him, and say, “I feel good. I am glad we have started taking these mental health walks together.” We refocus on the trail we are climbing, after all, it is hard to talk when you are breathing so hard. I think of all the times I have made up excuses on why I avoided these walks and how now I am paying the price for neglecting my own self-care, which makes me think of how much we as parents put aside our own health needs by putting our children’s needs above our own. I remember the what the flight attendants tell us each time we fly that we must put on our own oxygen mask first before helping those around us because you cannot help anyone if you cannot breathe first. Even though that analogy is true, we continue to put ourselves last.

As I reach the third summit, I feel myself slowing down and I begin to push through the resistance in my muscles. My husband and I laugh as we push on together, and then when we get to the summit, we pause to take in the surrounding view. We breathe in the fresh air and look out over the hills at the beautiful sun starting to lower beyond the mountain which is giving off hues of yellow, orange, purple, and pink across the clouds and sky. Our favorite views are sunsets and sunrises. We have seen many sunsets together over the course of the 26 years we have been married. It is one of the ways we feel connected, and yet on this hike, I feel oddly disconnected at this moment on this hill viewing the sunset. It could be that we are surrounded by physically fit women running circles around me as I struggle to breathe. Tears prick my eyes and even though he does not seem to notice anyone else, their presence is invading my heart and mind and causes me great insecurity in my relationship and myself.

Again, I am mesmerized by the mountains around me and the trail that continues to taunt me, reminding me that I am small and incapable at what is before me, which is exactly how I feel looking at my husband and children. I have not gone to college and got a degree. My husband says I am amazing and that my job is the hardest as a stay-at-home wife and mother, yet I feel so insignificant when I see other women that he works with who are college graduates and putting their minds to good use. They also love fitness and hike all the time, which is what my husband would like us to be like, but every time we go on a hike like this, I struggle so much that I never want to do it again. I continue to look up and I will myself to press on past the desire to quit. To quit this hike. To quit on my marriage and parenting. Sometimes it all feels like too much. I think about other women who have quit on their families, and I have compassion, and then I realize that I cannot do this alone and that is why we have husbands, family, and friends to rely on.

My husband is the kind of man who is dedicated to one woman, and he would never let another crowd his mind or heart. He believes in us, even when things are not perfect. We continue to walk up the hill and reach the final summit, and we realize now we can breathe freely as the rest of the hike is all flat or down hill. Is that the same with raising children and being married, do we reach a summit and then it is all easy after that? Or does life continue to give us things to work through?

Finally, I tell my husband how I am feeling. I tell him everything about how insecure I feel around all the fit women who love hiking, and how I feel insecure in rooms with women with college degrees and jobs, and how hard parenting is at this moment. He begins reassuring me that his eyes and heart are only for me, and then tells me that I do not give myself enough credit. He always sings my praises and tries to make me feel good about myself and what I do. He is so good to me. He reminds me how close we are to the end of the hike and how he is so glad that I have gone with him on this hike and that I shared my feelings with him. He sees me clearly, and he reminds me that I am not alone but that we are in this together. We hold hands as we near the parking lot, the end in sight, where we will get in our car and drive home to embrace what is our life together.

Part 2: Summary of changes

I chose to make mostly subtle changes to some of the elements I felt were already clearly there. I used imagery all throughout my story. I foreshadowed the theme of the story in the first paragraph by talking about how life is like the trail that the character was hiking. All throughout the story, I continued the theme of comparing marriage and parenting or life's challenges to the difficulty of the trail that the character is on. I use metaphor and simile all throughout also as a part of comparing parts of the trail to life, and

about how carefully the character places her steps like making the right choices in her marriage and in parenting. I also added a flashback to a time when the character is breastfeeding her daughter and how hard it was to continue that journey, but then ends up continuing that journey past the hard part and being successful in breastfeeding a long time. I also chose to clean up some language and to add to some parts where I did not feel I was clear enough or that I left the paragraph hanging abruptly and I felt it needed to have a better explanation of what it meant. The goal of the original writing was to use the place it is set as symbolic throughout the story, so I used an uphill hike that I knew of to describe the journey of marriage, parenting, and life. I chose elements that I felt would lend itself well to imagery and metaphor for what the character was going through and how she felt about it.