



Healing Wisdom
for a *Wounded World*

My Life-Changing Journey Through a Shamanic School

Book 1

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*Healing Wisdom for a Wounded World: My Life-Changing
Journey Through a Shamanic School (nonfiction)*

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Chapter 1

“Were you abused as a child?” Lynn asked.

The temptation to hang up the phone burnt my fingertips as if I had touched a car bumper that had been sitting under a hot sun for hours. I wanted to end the call, but I did not want to lose the \$150 I invested into it. People screamed abuse irrationally and unjustly in the United States. In Iraq, where I grew up, people barely thought about this word. They were too busy understanding, abiding by, dodging, and doing cartwheels in front of Saddam’s laws, which he rolled, tossed, and flickered as if they were merely marbles.

Besides, I did not call Lynn Andrews, an internationally best-selling author with twenty books to her name, to talk about my childhood as if I was sitting in front of a psychiatrist or a talk show host. On a cold November morning, I drove to my sister’s house and locked myself inside her upstairs bedroom while she watched my two-year-old son and five-year-old daughter downstairs. I hoped that this one-hour phone session with Lynn could resolve some issues I had been having with my writing career. If she read the form I filled out when I scheduled a call with her, she would know this.

“I actually had a safe and healthy childhood,” I said, wondering if I was once again being stereotyped because of the origin of my birthplace, Baghdad, or if I had been swindled by a con artist.

Since Muslims were usually the ones who got a bad rap, I wondered if she would change her perception of me if I told her that I am Chaldean. Chaldeans are Christian Iraqis whose ancestors date back over 7300 years. Their bloodline is connected to Prophet Abraham, as he was born in Ur, land of the Chaldees.

“How do you say your name again?” she asked. “Wream?”

“We’am, without the r.”

“We’am. That’s a beautiful name. It’s Arabic, isn’t it? What does it mean?”

“It means peace, harmony, and unity, especially between nations.”

“So, We’am, were you happy to come home from school as a child?”

“Yes. I looked forward to eating my mother’s meals, then changing into my nightgown and running outside to play with the neighborhood kids.”

I grew up in Iraq during the 70s, and it was normal for people, including women, to go outdoors and hang out in their bedtime clothes, as long as it was not lingerie. When I came to America, I learned that pulling such stunts was scandalous. I was ten-years-old when I walked into my oldest brother’s grocery store one night in a pink Strawberry Shortcake ruffle gown that I was proud to show off. My oldest brother, who had arrived to the United States long before we did and then petitioned for us to join him, went hysterical at the sight of my Strawberry Shortcake gown. In an instant, he turned my proud experience to an embarrassing memory. That was pretty much the pattern of my life the first ten years of living in the US.

“So, you have pleasant memories of coming home after school,” Lynn said.

“Yes.”

“What I mean about abuse is any kind of abuse, whether physical, mental or emotional. Neglect, for instance, is a kind of abuse.”

Her deep and direct voice had the essence of antiquity. It sounded much older than she looked in her photographs. Lynn was a blonde haired, blue eyed woman. In Arabic, she would be described as *geimar*, or clotted cream, meaning attractive enough to devour.

“Well, my mom gave birth to twelve children and she took the best care of us she could, given the circumstances,” I said. “But naturally, there would be neglect.” I paused. “Having said that, I think there was the opposite of neglect. My siblings were mostly in their teens by the time I was born. They all played father-mother figures over me and my younger brother.”

“Did you have to be careful as a child?” she persisted.

I began to feel uncomfortable, and yet the conversation had an earthy and intimate hand that disrobed a garment off my character with each word. I lay down my resistance and said, “My parents never spanked me if I did something wrong. But yes, I suppose...I was careful.”

I remembered an incident as a child where I was washing dishes in our backyard. A faucet beside the patio stuck out of the ground like the neck of an ostrich. That was where we washed the pots and pans and large quantities of dishes. I was hardly ever assigned to do the dishes as a teenager, let alone as a child, but for some reason I was squatting there by the faucet and a plate or cup slipped off of my hands, landed on the ground, and broke. In my nightgown, I immediately got up and ran into the streets as if a wolf was chasing after me. I don't know where I ended up or how I returned home, but I had evidently overreacted. At such a young age, I was already a perfectionist and quite hard on myself.

“The first time anyone ever laid a hand on me was when I was in third grade,” I said. “I had missed Saddam's parade. It was mandatory to attend, but my niece, who was my age, begged me to spend the night at her house, and my family did not take the mandatory bit too seriously. The next day at school, as punishment, the school principal slapped me so hard I fainted.

“The second time someone laid a hand on me was that same principal. The teacher sent me to her office because I couldn't answer a question in science class. Other than these two

incidences, I led a pretty happy childhood in Iraq. I didn't know what unhappiness was until I came here and felt alienated and isolated."

A silence followed, as thick as *kashkee*, hard dry yogurt made from ewe or goat's milk.

"You were oppressed by and had to be careful of an entire nation," she said, "and then you came here and you had to be careful from another nation, in a different way. You had to be careful from two nations."

Her words pinched my waist so hard that it shook my roots. Growing up under Saddam's totalitarian regime, I learned that there was a boogeyman to fear and avoid through silence and good behavior. When I came to the United States, I discovered that it was best to remain silent in order to avoid ridicule.

"So, my dear, why have you called me?" Lynn asked. "What is it that you want me to help you with?"

We finally arrived at the subject I was anxious to talk about, writing, but now I was interested in further dissecting the role my two nations played in my life. *What did this all mean?* I wanted to ask her. Why was I born in Iraq, yanked out of my birthplace at the young age of ten, and placed in the United States? Being uprooted from my home was like taking a plant out of the soil. After repotting, plants often enter a state of shock as they adapt to the new environment and struggle to get over the shock of being uprooted and moved.

If only there was enough time. The clock on my sister's ivory dresser was ticking next to her organized display of jewelry and I could hear my children's footsteps downstairs. On a few occasions, my sister had stopped my son from climbing the steps by calling out his name and telling him to come down. I knew he was looking for me.

“I have lost my literary voice, and I want to get it back,” I said. “Last summer, I came across your book, *Writing Spirit*. I was in a really bad place with my work. I no longer loved it and half the time I woke up wishing I had the sense to quit and find a different profession.”

“Why had you lost your love for writing?”

“Too many things happened that turned my writing into the most unfulfilling chore,” I said. “I used to have a good New York agent. In 2003, she left the agency and I no longer had representation. That same month, the war in Iraq started.”

“That’s interesting that the loss of your agent happened around the same time as the 2003 war.”

There was another silence as thick as *kashkee* and another pinch on the waist. I often wondered whether my ethnicity held me back career-wise, especially since 9/11, and since I did not fit into the stereotypical image of an Arab woman who’d experienced an abusive childhood.

One New York editor who enjoyed my writing style suggested that I write stories that had bestseller potential, stories, for instance, about honor killing. But I knew nothing about honor killing, and the last thing I wanted to do was nurture people’s misconceptions of Iraq.

Throughout much of recent history, Iraq was one of the most progressive countries in the Middle East for women, with Iraqi women historically enjoying more freedoms than the women of neighboring countries. The wings of her civil and social rights were clipped off little by little over the years, particularly by the so-called new constitution in Iraq. No one knows how, when, or if they will ever grow again.

“It’s normal to experience a lack of interest in writing after losing your agent,” Lynn said. “I lost my agent not long ago. He passed away. The last book we worked on together was *Writing Spirit*.”

Writing Spirit had called for me to pick it up, as if it were a child, off the bookshelves. It was an odd-looking book about writing. On the cover, large palms came halfway out of the water, and in the table of contents, the chapter headings had words like power animals, shamanism, alchemy, and baptism. None of it made sense to me, and the last thing I wanted was a book on writing. I had been writing for over twenty years, and the journey had proven so futile, I wanted to bury the pits of this desire into someone else's backyard and start a new garden, one that resembled those in the *One Thousand and One Nights* stories, where the hero ends up with breathtaking trees bearing pears, apples, figs, pomegranates, and apricots made of real gold, diamonds, and rubies.

Yet the book stuck to my hands like glue. I bought it, even though I barely had time to take a shower or eat a meal sitting down, let alone read a book. I was raising two young children and doing a lot of freelance work as well as trying to write a book.

The moment I read *Writing Spirit*, the fragrance of that Arabian treasure garden raced out of the pages, and I remembered all the reasons I'd become a writer in the first place: the calling, the sacredness of storytelling, the freedom this profession provides, in my case allowing me to raise my children without having to abandon my career. I had scheduled a phone session with the author for a bit of literary advice, not realizing our conversation would lead elsewhere: how the Iraq war had badly bruised my heart; how the loss of my agent threw my career off track.

I sat on the carpet and told Lynn all about it, adding that shortly after these events, I got married, had kids, and attained journalism jobs and other writing-related opportunities. The jobs led to wonderful experiences, but they also scattered my thought process. Trying to return to my literary voice since then was like trying to get to a very faraway place on foot.

“Don’t get upset at some of your past mishaps,” she said. “They made you who you are today. This life is about curiosity and developing an extraordinary depth. This world we live in is not directed towards higher consciousness. People are usually mediocre. You wonder why people don’t know more. As for your stories, there’s a time for every story.”

“But I want to write and I’m having a hard time doing so!”

“Maybe you’re trying too hard.”

“I am afraid,” I said. “I want my mother to see who I am in my work before...” I choked up as I thought about my mother aging, her struggles and pains, our love and miscommunication.

My mother and I were so different. She was born and raised in Telkaif, once a Christian village in northern Iraq. Her parents lived on a farm and could not afford to send her off to school. I was born in the Muslim city of Baghdad and my attendance of school was as natural as learning jumping jacks. She married my father at age twelve. I married my husband at thirty-four. She never went anywhere alone and rarely left her home. I traveled the world alone.

“Hello?” Lynn asked loudly.

“Yes,” I said, trying to clear my throat.

“Sweetheart, are you crying?”

I began to sob, all the emotions harvested at the bottom of my soul spilling over like boiling water from a tea kettle.

“Oh, dear,” she said so sweetly, I wished she was sitting beside me so I could fall into her arms. “What you experienced was abuse of a loss of culture and country at a very vulnerable age. When you live through life-defying experiences somewhere in your life, you come out on the other side with incredible abilities, abilities to survive, abilities to comprehend a higher reality. The Mystery School could help you make the right decisions regarding your work.”

“What is the Mystery School?” I asked, wiping my tears with the palm of my hands.

“It’s a four-year school that will teach and awaken the beauty and power within you. It will give you the direction you need.”

Four years? It didn’t take me that long to get my bachelor’s degree.

“I have children,” I said. “I can’t leave my home to go study somewhere.”

“This is a school without walls. I created it so that anyone, anywhere in the world could do this work without having to move to a campus. I wanted to create a learning environment where people could learn through their own experiences, not to try to be their teacher.”

“I’ll check it out on your website and consider it,” I lied. Yes, she said some profound things that stirred me and yes, I cried, and yes, I felt a connection with her that was ignited as easily as one lit a match, like when two people fell in love at first sight, but no, I was not going to fall for this gimmick.

“Oh dear, my phone is about to die,” Lynn said. I realized this was her cue that our time was up. She said I was welcome to call her anytime, and before ending our call, she said a prayer. “Great Spirit, Mother Earth, Power of the Four Directions, my ancestors, show this girl why she chose to be born in the land she was born in and why she chose to come to the land she came to at the vulnerable age of ten.”

Her words wrapped around me like a blanket. I often asked God this question, and I never quite received an answer. Now here was woman, a total stranger, who asked God the same question on my behalf. *How did she know? How did she do that? How did she peel open my heart as easily as if it was a tangerine?*

After we hung up, I spent a moment staring ahead, as if mesmerized by a large field of lavender. I went downstairs and kissed and hugged my children, then stepped to the kitchen

counter. I rolled fried potatoes in pita bread and sat down at the table. My sister poured me a cup of cardamom tea.

“How was it?” she asked.

“It was good,” I said, not knowing how else to describe it because it felt unfinished.

I bit into the pita sandwich, my heart and mind wandering to thirty years ago, to February 2, 1981 specifically, when I first set foot in this country.