"The experience of suffering both provokes and resists narration. It is at the heart of many of the world's great stories (the Odyssey, the Book of Job, the Gospels, the Divine Comedy, Paradise Lost) and yet absent, in a fundamental way, from every story. Because intense suffering takes language away, retrospective narration can seem futile, even falsifying. Moreover, it often raises more questions than it answers. (Who or what is responsible for suffering? Is it merited? What ends it? How can it be made commensurable with the rest of one's life? What is its meaning? How does one cope with it?) In spite of all this, sufferers continue to tug at the shirlls/eeves of passersby, and passersby continue to stop, listen and fall into the sufferers's story. Why?"

My opening paragraph is a description of a course that I discovered in the Bard College Course Catalogue for the fall semester 2001 - the year of the falling towers. I was immediately intrigued by the description, having myself experienced great loss, and suffering from it again despite a long passage of time and coping. The course was called Narratives of Suffering, drew on literature from the American literary canon, and proved to be very enriching and inspiring. Starting chronologically with short stories of captivity and shipwreck narratives, we later moved onto the fugitive slaves narratives, and proceeded to the life experience of African Americans, Native Americans and various immigrants in the New World. However, it was while reading contemporary American novels that dealt with the loss of a dear one, illness or abuse that I decided to stick with the narratives of suffering in my future thesis.