#### **Repairing and Reforging** How Writing Can Heal Brain Injury

Michael Ramos, Assistant Professor of Creative Writing, UNCW Rhonda Waterhouse, MFA, M. Ed

#### **Brain Injury** Conference April 14-15th, 2025

Lumina on Wrightsville Beach

> BRAIN INJURY ASSOCIATION E NORTH CAROLINA

# **2025 North Carolina Brain Injury Conference**



**BRAIN INJURY** ASSOCIATION **OF NORTH CAROLINA** 

## **About Us**

#### MICHAEL RAMOS

- Iraq war veteran
- Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at UNCW
- writer, teacher, book designer, editor
- art director for *Ecotone* magazine
- focuses on dispelling myths about war, warriors, and veterans, and bringing military and civilian communities together through the power of art
- find his work in *Fourth Genre*, *Slice*, *PANK Daily*, and other places.
- His essay collection The After: A Veteran's Notes on Coming *Home* (UNC Press 2024) received a starred *Kirkus* review and is available now from UNC Press.

#### RHONDA WATERHOUSE

- project.

- Submariner among others

• B.S. and an M.Ed. from Penn State University, where she also worked as a research assistant for the Clearinghouse for Military Readiness on the Exceptional Family Member

 studied with John Evans at Duke Health in his "Transform Your Health: Write to Heal" program

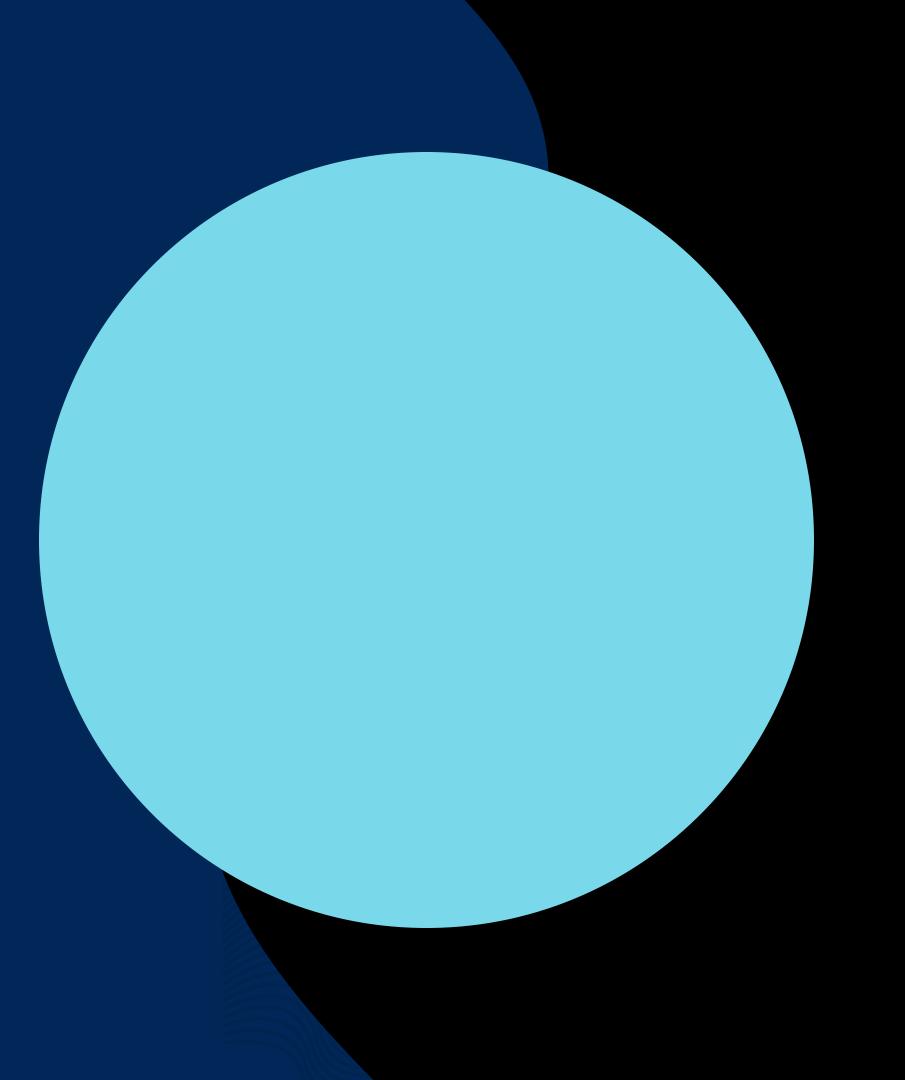
• more than 25 years of writing teaching experience

• MFA candidate and graduate teaching assistant in Creative Nonfiction at UNC Wilmington

• Work can be found in *Black Warrior Review* and *American* 

• Brain injury survivor since 2022 car accident

• memoir, Rooted in Resilience: A Field Guide to Finding Self after Brain Injury helped her heal her brain injury.



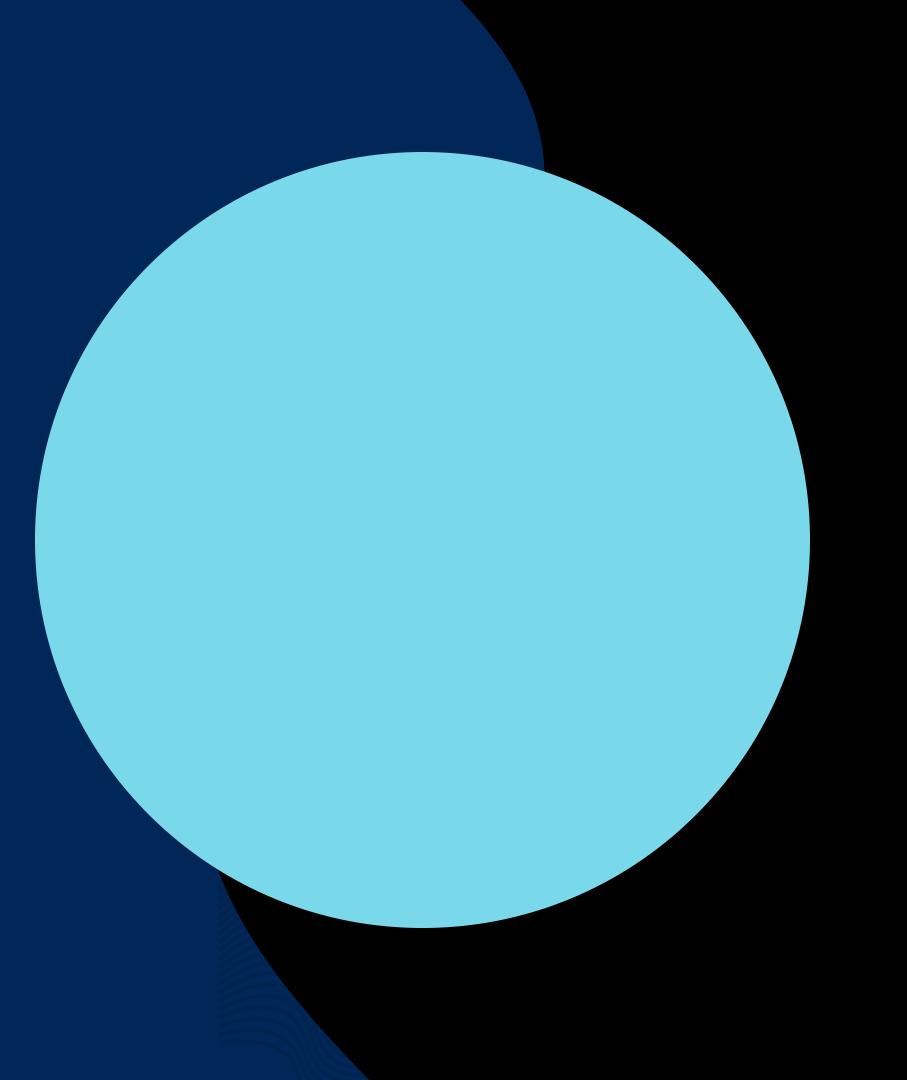
Physical symptoms Loss of mobility

Emotional symptoms Changes in mood

### **The Situation**

- "For many people with brain injury, the old story is gone or greatly changed."

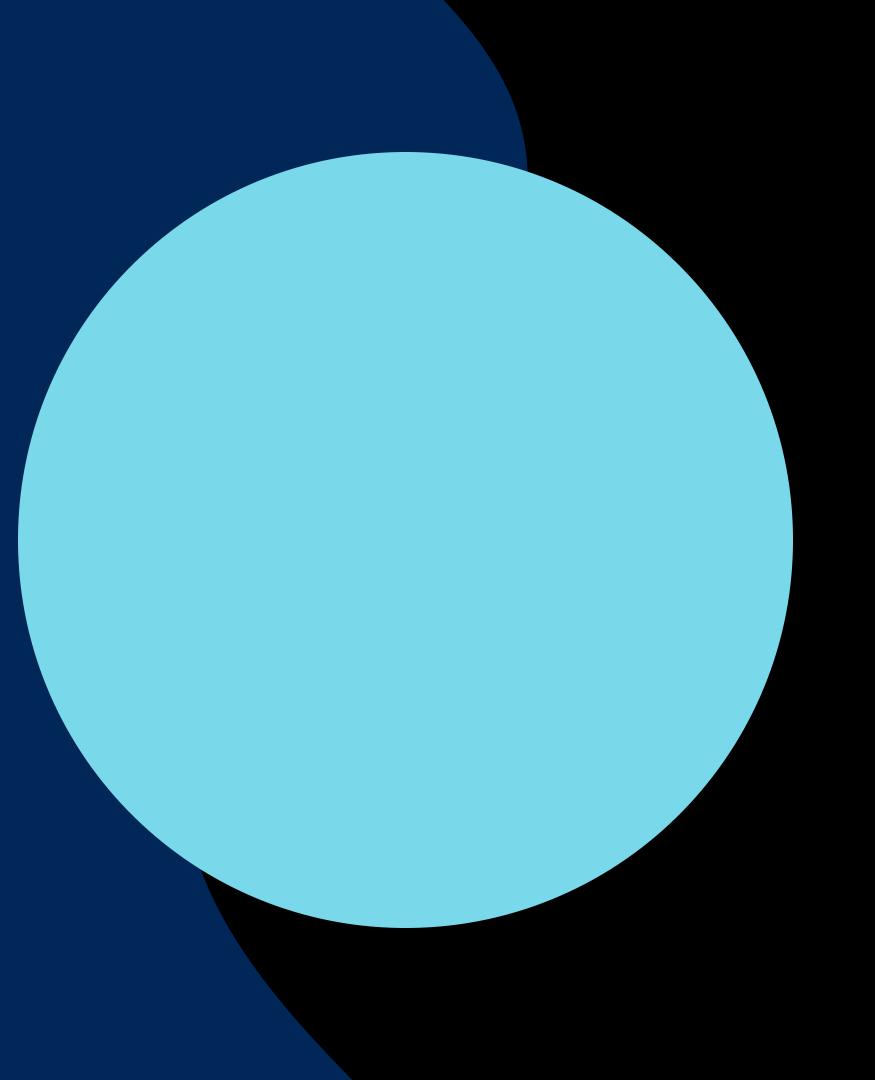
  - Loss of memory or speech
  - May feel grief for who they were
  - May have a loss of self-worth
  - May feel as if they have lost control



Benefits of writing

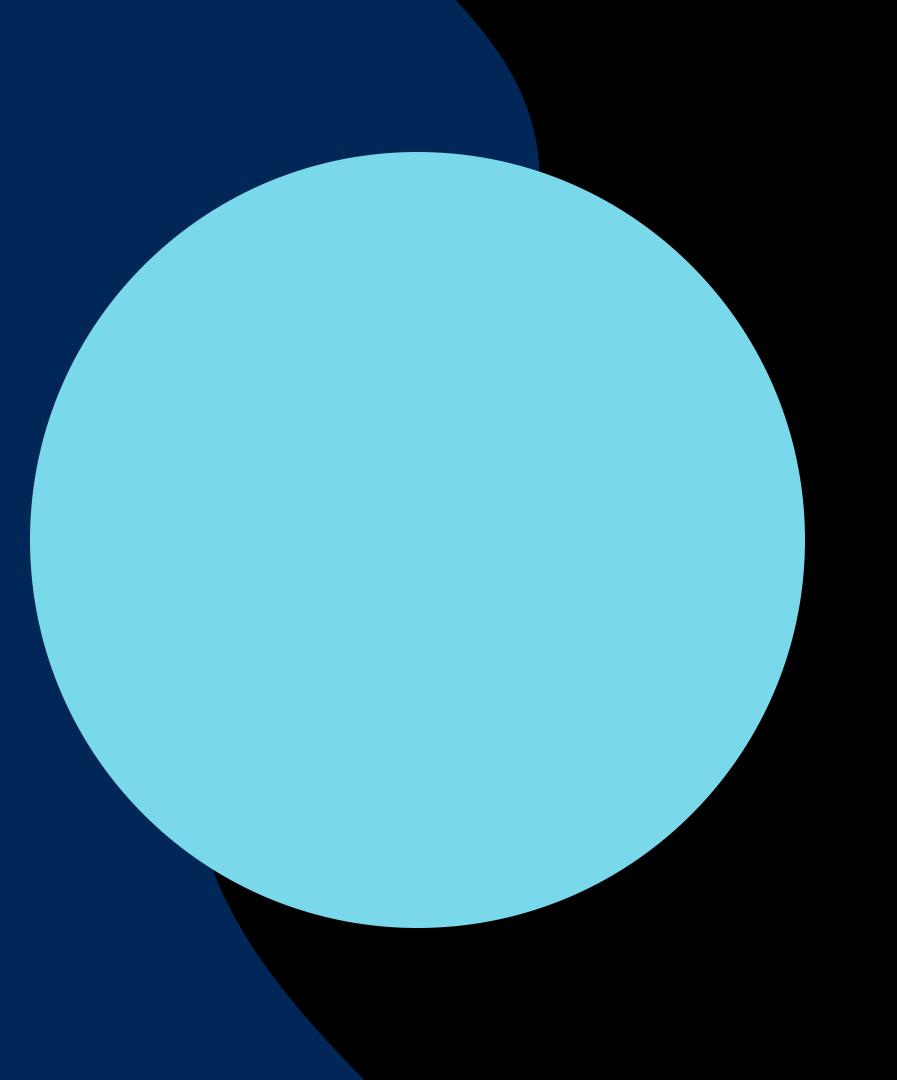
## The Theory

- Returns a measure of control
- 0 Rewires brain / creates neural pathways
- Can improve memory
- Can improves language skills
- Can improves critical thinking skills
- Can improve motor skills
- Can provide stress relief / mood boost \*



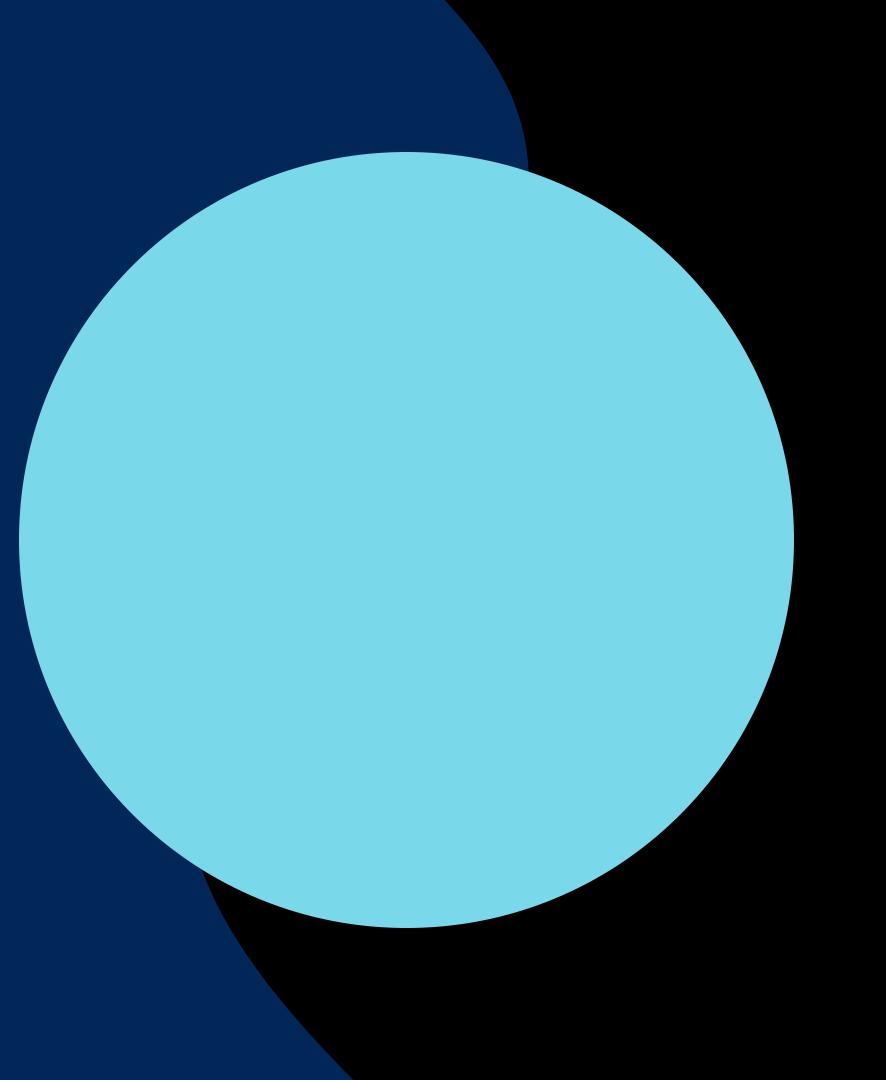
Daily Writing Morning Pages  $\circ$  15 minutes 0 No skill required

- Prompt from book or web (improve
  - creativity & problem solving)
- What happened (improves memory and processing, symptom tracking)



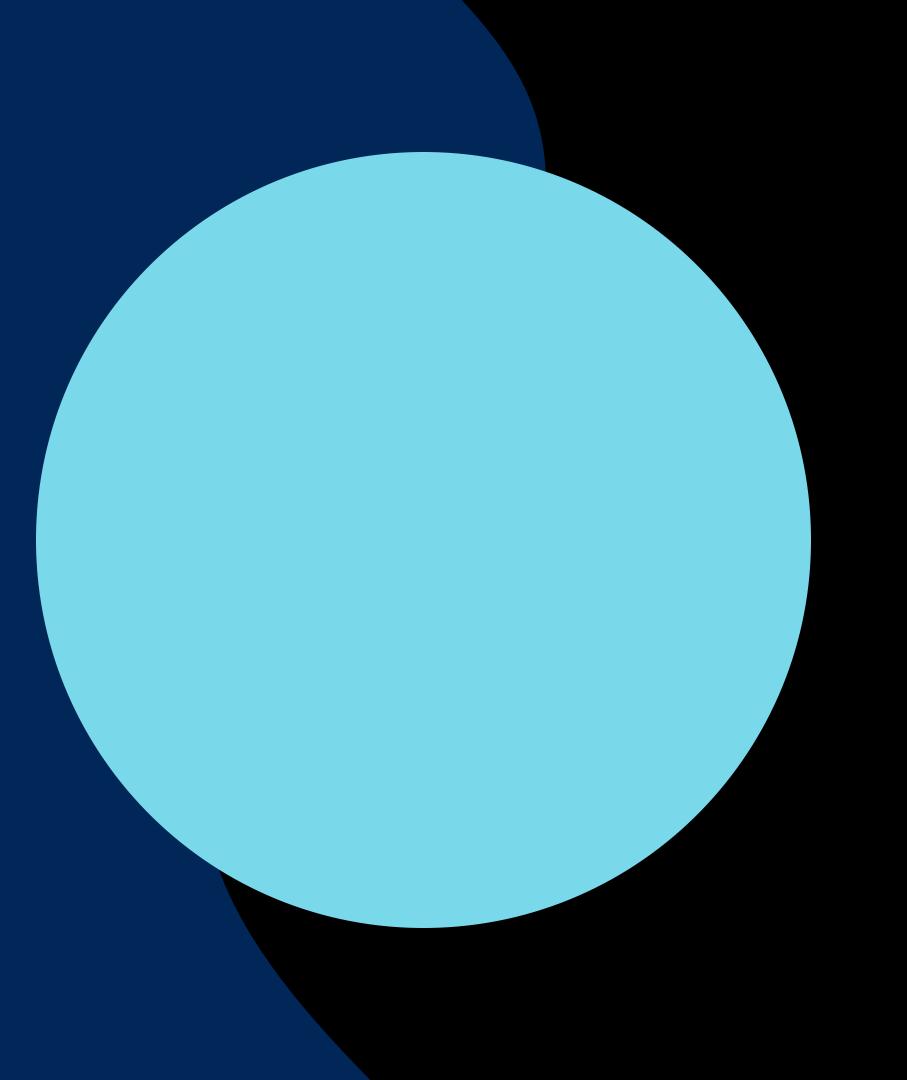
Bullet Journal 0 No skill required brain chemistry) outlook) setting)

- Journal with dots instead of lines
- Affirmations (improve mood & change
- Gratitude (improves mood and positive
- 0 To do list (improves planning & goal



Visiting Nature 0 No skill required

- Can write about it or not
- Awe (lots of brain improvement)
- Trees release healing chemicals (reduce
  - stress and lower blood pressure)
- Novelty, navigating, planning, sunlight exposure (all help with brain)



0 No skill required healing) Explore feelings

- Writing for Healing (John Evans)
- $\circ$  20 minutes/day for 4 days
- Write continuously
- Prompts to work through trauma (self-
- Expressive writing, poetry, affirmative writing, mindful writing

