Memories, Moments, Scenes: Fragmented Memoirs on Trauma

“My truth doesn’t travel in a straight line. It zigzags, detours, doubles back,” says Abigail Thomas, about her fragmented memoir, *Safekeeping* (“Getting Started”). While Peggy Shumaker was working on her memoir, *Just Breathe Normally*, she at first saw only a stack of individual short pieces. As the pieces continued to come, however, a shape eventually began to form. They began to exist “not as separate chunks, but as part of one vein, as story” (8). In *Disappearance: A Map*, Shelia Nickerson uses fragments, historical research, current newspaper reports, and personal experience to explore the notion of death and loss in the Alaskan wilderness, where she has lived with her family for many years.

In fact, all three of these writers tell stories of loss and grief. *Just Breathe Normally* spins from a bicycle accident in which Shumaker nearly lost her life and did, in fact, lose her way of life. *Safekeeping* came about after the death of Thomas’s second ex-husband found her “feverishly scribbling…memories, moments, scenes” (“Getting Started”).

Not only do these writers have tales of trauma in common, all three also use the fragmented form to present their experiences. The fragmented form is a departure from a traditional linear narrative. While all three writers focus on the theme of loss, they are not bound to write events in chronological order. Often, instead of chapters, writers using this form separate the moments in brief, titled, or untitled pieces. Shumaker and Thomas both followed this form. At most, the sections are a few pages; the shortest are
only a line. For example, in *Drifting Away*, Thomas presents only this simile: “You died, and the past separated itself from me like a continent drifting away” (142).

Untethered from a linear chronology, the sections move backward, then forward in time. Shumaker sometimes pauses altogether to explore the natural landscape and wildlife of Alaska and Tucson—her two hometowns—in lyrical prose. Of the three memoirs, Nickerson’s remains the closest to the traditional linear format. It is divided into chapters and maintains a loose sense of chronology. However, the way she weaves the strand of her own Alaskan journey, as well as that of a missing co-worker, into the historical and present state of loss and disappearance in the state’s rugged wilderness strays her into the category of the fragmented memoir. Nickerson pulls and releases these threads of story throughout her memoir, carefully crafting a tapestry that portrays her perception of loss in Alaska.

This format has been particularly useful in these three memoirs because they do not necessarily deliver a linear story. Instead they tell the story of emotions, and emotions are not bound by time and space. These memoirs work like a dot-to-dot of memory. By connecting the lines between each event, these writers reveal a larger truth that might have been at first unseen.

As Shumaker wrote the pieces that would eventually make up *Just Breathe Normally*, the emotion of her present situation led her back to the trauma she experienced during her childhood in Arizona. Shumaker’s young parents struggled with addictions and illness that left them unable to create a stable home for her and her three younger siblings. As Shumaker connected the dots between these traumatic experiences, “[a]
parallel,” she explains, began to emerge, “between the early life traumas and this actual physical trauma and getting through it” (“Peggy Shumaker: Just Breathe Normally”).

Shumaker is careful to make this connection strong, as one of the oversights that can befall fragmented writing is a loss of focus for the reader. No matter how far they stray from the chronology, all the pieces to the story must fit somewhere in the whole or the connection will be lost.

Once Shumaker had amassed a large collection of pieces, she sought fellow writer Judith Kitchen to help create an order for them. With the potential order, Shumaker says, “I could see gaps. I could see what I needed to fill in” (“Peggy Shumaker: Just Breathe Normally”). Shumaker then worked to fill in the gaps and ensure all the information was available so that the necessary connections could be made.

Conversations between Thomas and her sister helped Thomas fill in the gaps of *Safekeeping*. Thomas says this of the experience:

My sister and I drank a lot of coffee and I would show her what I was writing and when she thought there was more going on than I’d gotten out, she insisted I look harder. She was pitiless. She knew me, she knew how to corner me. She taught me that too much self-criticism makes for a narrow mind. She could put me in context, seeing me as part of the times we’d lived through, a perspective I didn’t have. I used our conversations verbatim. They provide a running commentary on the process of writing.

(“Getting Started”)

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In fact, Thomas did include several of these conversations with her sister in the final text of *Safekeeping*, including this first one, in which her sister insists Thomas clarify the chronology of three marriages, lest the reader get confused:

There are already a lot of husbands floating around, my sister says.

Well yes, I say. I married three times. (13)

Thomas’s sister continues:

That’s what I’m saying. A lot of husbands. Somebody is going to get confused. Maybe even annoyed. (13)

Which enables Thomas to easily clarify:

Well then I’ll spell it out. I got pregnant when I was eighteen, I got married . . .

That’s one, says my sister. That brings us to 1968.

. . . after two years I got married again . . . we had one child.

Then we got divorced.

That’s two, says my sister. Now it’s 1978.

…after eleven years I married again…we’re still married.

That’s three, says my sister. Now what was so hard about that? she asks. (13)

These writers’ careful awareness of where the gaps of information might exist prompted them to fill in these areas thus avoiding any confusion or frustration on the part of the reader. The flexibility of the format allows them to add a patch to the quilt of their memoir that quickly conveys the information and then move on without getting bogged down trying to fit the needed piece into a linear storyline.
While there are some pitfalls, the fragmented form also offers these writers benefits that aren’t found in the traditional, linear form. The first of these is the ability to break up the traumatic events in order to prevent the reader from becoming overwhelmed.

In work that deals with grief and trauma, there is always the risk of reader overload. This is when the subject matter is presented in such a way that there is little or no reprieve for the audience. We become numb to the material presented. This is a particular risk in a traditional linear narrative because the writer is restricted to the chronology of events. If all of the dire events occurred at once, or one after another, that is how they will be presented.

The fragmented form is less constrictive. The writer is able to break away from the trauma at hand if she chooses or if she needs to take a breath herself. This also allows the reader a break.

For Shumaker, striking that balance is part of what makes art. “If I were a painter, I would have painted,” she says. “If I were a chef, I would have created new recipes. We find our ways to transform—we transform what we cannot make better. And we transform it into art if we’re lucky. We transform it into something that is tolerable if we’re not so lucky” (“Peggy Shumaker: Just Breathe Normally”). What Shumaker might mean is that artists take these moments of grief and torment and present them in the form they know best—in a way they hope can be interpreted, used, and appreciated by others.

In these three memoirs, the transformation from tolerance into art happens in the balance of the trauma and the grace. The use of the fragmented form allows the writer more opportunity to strike that balance.
For example, if Shumaker’s memoir existed in a strictly linear form, the chance of reader overload would have been much higher. As Shumaker struggles through her tediously slow recovery, the dense heap of medical terminology might have piled up, distracting from the true story—the moments of despair, determination, but also joy.

However, the fragmented form allows Shumaker to break these scenes apart. Instead of lining them up in order, she is able to mix in memories from her childhood, landscape scenes, and moments of family history. In this way, the form perhaps presents a truer representation of how trauma affects life and memory. As life continues, past trauma may be stirred again and again and sometimes unexpectedly bubble to the surface.

At times, the fragmented form even allows Shumaker to stray from the chronology without departing from the subject at hand. Shumaker pairs moments of trauma, like when a medical emergency led to her unexpected return to the hospital, with moments of tenderness, like the memory of her husband Joe carefully feeding her ice chips or the recollection of his endless patience and concern as she struggled to regain her memory.

Shumaker also takes advantage of the fragmented form’s ability to help avoid reader overload when she writes about her childhood. This occurs when she pairs tragic moments, such as finding her mother passed out naked with a strange man in the hallway of the family home, with fonder memories, such as her mother negotiating a special library card for Shumaker, so she could take out as many books as she pleased, or when her mother showed compassion by having Shumaker and her siblings drop off donations for children in a poorer part of town.

This struggle to balance these moments is shown in her piece “The Apple”: 
Mother slices the apple without sawing, twirls out the blossom end, the seeds, with one crisp swipe. Cross-sectioned womb, one for me, one for sister. Mother with one hand open and one fist clenched. (24)

Shumaker strikes a similar balance when she walks the line between the joy and despair she feels after her bicycle accident. The joy is in her life, in being alive, and the despair is for what has been lost. The fragmented form allows her the freedom to move between the two.

The ability of a writer to continually return to the same subject, theme, or struggle is another benefit of this form. Not only can these writers jump from moment to moment, they can also return to these moments and memories as often as they like. This allows the events to be approached from multiple angles. This is particularly poignant in work about grief and trauma because these events often stick with those who experience them throughout their lives. The aftershocks of trauma may appear in unexpected moments, or create bonds or connections with earlier life experiences. The freedom from the linear form allows for the examination of moments that might not have fit into a traditional chronology.

When Thomas’s editor suggested she convert the material she collected for *Safekeeping* into a novel, she resisted. “My life didn’t feel like a novel. It felt like a million moments” (“Getting Started”).

Thomas continued with her memoir, unsure of its direction. “The only thing I was sure of was that I would stop with my friend’s death. Grief had been the catalyst, grief would be the end” (“Getting Started”). Yet, eventually, after examining the pieces
she had collected, Thomas began to change perspective. After the birth of her first
granddaughter, Thomas began to see that life continued around her. She began to think
of her memoir as an “emotional chronology” (“Getting Started”).

“I wanted the shock of truth,” says Thomas, when speaking about Safekeeping. “I
wanted moments that felt like body blows. I wanted moments of pure hilarity, connected
to nothing that came before or after. And I wanted the truth” (“Getting Started”).

Thomas followed the truth of her grief over the death of her second ex-husband.
She tracked it through moments of humor and moments of despair. She examined them
all. “I am remembering this time just before I knew you,” writes Thomas in the first
pages of Safekeeping, “and then I knew you, and then you died. It makes the parentheses
within which I lived most of my life. Not knowing you, knowing you, and then you
died” (3).

Thomas models Safekeeping in a similar sort of parentheses. Pieces fall into one
of three sections, titled: Before, Mortality, and After. Thomas examines her grief in all
three sections. She remembers the chaos in her life before she met the man whose death
would someday leave her so shaken, and her blunt search for a husband to be a father to
her children after her first divorce. She writes fondly of their arguments as a married
couple in “Fencing,” discussing their competitive nature and the engaging way in which
they argued. “[E]ven at our worst I always loved talking to you” (57).

In the final arc of the parentheses, Thomas laments not only her ex-husband’s
physical death but also the end of their friendship. As she writes in “The Animal They
Made”:
Not a real animal…but what they were, the two of them together. The animal they made. That’s the only way she can describe it. An animal with its own life, its own life history, its own life span. Its own intelligence. Its own memories and regrets. It own sins… Extinct now.

(141)

Nickerson also accesses the fragmented form’s ability to write a theme from different angles. While she utilizes it throughout her work, it is most present in the thread of her missing colleague Kent Roth.

She introduces this tragedy in the first pages of *Disappearance*, writing:

Somewhere in this unvisited place a colleague has disappeared. Kent Roth, a fishery biologist with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, has gone down with two brothers and two friends on a flight from Yakutat to Anchorage. It is an immense area, one that has swallowed people from the earliest times of its recorded history. (5)

Nickerson then suspends the storyline of Kent Roth’s disappearance and delves into the history of early expeditions in the Alaskan wilderness. Many ended badly. Expedition logs, discovered years after a ship’s crew had perished, revealed treacherous tales of a ship’s being stuck in the ice, of men going crazy, or committing suicide, or starving to death. There is also mention of Land Otter Men. Local legends claim that these beasts of half men, half otter would rescue the lost crewmen, only to pull them into a haunting shadow world. “Unless the unfortunate victims were saved by a shaman, they too became land otters, unable to return to their human world” (33).
If any of the crew did manage to survive the physical, mental, and spiritual torment, their remote location made rescue difficult. It might take years before they were discovered and returned to their families.

When Nickerson again picks up the line of Kent Roth’s disappearance there exists a new understanding of what disappearing in the Alaskan wilderness might entail for him. As the search parties continue to scour the potential flight path by both air and sea, there is an awareness of the harsh reality of what these missing men might now be enduring, if they are even alive.

Nickerson then again suspends the storyline and begins to relay the newspaper-style reports that perhaps fill the local television reports, newspapers, and radio airwaves on a regular basis. The reports are a more modern spin on the earlier theme. This time, however, instead of going missing on large expedition vessels, the missing are fisherman, adventurers, and small aircraft pilots and crew. Here is one such entry:

*After nine hours, a search was suspended for a crewman who fell off a crab vessel in the Bering Sea about a hundred miles north of Unimak Island.* Mike Ilti, twenty-seven, of Denver, fell overboard around midnight after his foot got caught in a crab pot. According to the Coast Guard, the water temperature in the area is about forty-one degrees, and survival time is about fifteen minutes. (272)

The report-style entries continue with the discovery of unidentified remains or include what little detail is known of a tourist who simply vanishes from the center of town. Though repetitious, the no-nonsense journalistic style with which Nickerson
approaches the drama allows the reader to comprehend its enormity without becoming numb to the magnitude of its tragedy.

When Nickerson picks up Kent Roth’s tragedy for the third and final time, she has again enhanced its depth. What finally shows is Nickerson’s struggle to endure against the constant tragedy of those lost. The fragmented form allows Nickerson to stretch the telling of Kent Roth’s story throughout the entire span of the memoir, thus allowing the reader to access it again and again, each time with a deeper understanding of what loss and disappearance means in the Alaskan landscape.

A third way in which the fragmented form is useful for writers tackling traumatic subjects is that it allows them to reflect on events from different angles, while allowing them to repeat an important event or theme. This repetition gives these themes more weight and dramatic effect.

I once heard that a significant image or idea must be presented to a reader three times before it resonates. While three may or may not be the magic number, it is certain that the more an image or idea appears in a work, the higher the chance it will clarify and deepen the writer’s subject. However, merely repeating an image or a significant point three times over in the same manner is a highly unlikely way to get the effect desired. Instead, it must be re-imagined or arrived at from a different perspective.

The freedom to patch together scenes, regardless of how they occurred chronologically, allows writers to carefully manage and pit particular pieces against one another. In doing this, the struggle of emotion can be portrayed, without overtly describing it again and again (and again).
Shumaker does this expertly. One of the themes she carries throughout Just Breath Normally is the tension between compassion and accountability. Shumaker experiences this struggle during the prosecution of the boy who injured her when he was illegally driving the ATV that crashed into her while she was bicycling. She also portrays this tension when she reveals her love for her mother while also holding her mother accountable for the unstable childhood Shumaker endured under her care.

Shumaker is able to subtly portray these tensions by aligning specific pieces next to one another. While a linear narrative would bind her in time and space, the fragmented form allows her to pick and choose and order those memories to her own purpose. Thus in “Pattern Pieces,” Shumaker is able to pair a piece in which her mother sews her husband a fine western shirt with a more present day conversation between Shumaker and her sister. In the first piece, Shumaker describes the shirt, which her mother sews in the hopes that her husband will accompany her square-dancing, as:

A work of art—pearl snap buttons, white arrowheads pointing both directions at the edges of his pockets, tall snapped cuffs. He tried it on, once. He had to find a reason not to wear it and told her finally, “A full pack of Marlboros won’t fit in that pocket.” He then dismissed square dancing, her one link with the adult world. (121)

Shumaker goes on to portray another attempt of her mother’s to connect with her husband, which Shumaker’s father also dismisses. The inclusion of these scenes shows Shumaker’s desire to present her mother in a sympathetic light. However, the conversation between Shumaker and her sister that immediately follows rebuts that notion:
Sue is adamant. “Of course she kept that stuff. That crap was her
evidence. It proved she was the victim. Oh feel sorry for me . . . Look she
CHOSE to be the way she was. She invited these men home. She drank.
She smoked. She hit us.” I try to make the case that perhaps some things
were beyond her control. (122)

Shumaker’s sister continues:

She abused you too, in an insidious way. She made you do her job. You
had to be the parent, even to her. (122)

Aligned next to one another, pieces like these show the tug and pull of emotions
that Shumaker feels in her relationship with her mother without having to state them
straight out. The ability to repeatedly create these types of pairings allows her to give
weight to the themes and imagery that best convey her experiences.

Nickerson also utilizes the fragmented form’s flexibility to add weight to certain
themes, but in a different manner. Because her memoir is a collage of her experiences
and research in Alaska, Nickerson is able to weave together several main themes—the
thread of a missing colleague, her own arrival and impending departure from Alaska,
historical disappearances and legend, and modern day disappearances. These four
themes bear equal weight as main ideas; however, with regard to actual page count and
content, they differ drastically. The story of Nickerson’s missing colleague, Kent Roth,
is actually quite short. He goes missing. There is a search. He is not found. Nickerson’s
own Alaskan story is presented in the form of short “Records” that follow each chapter.
There are fourteen of them, a page or two each. She also includes pieces of her story in
the main text from time to time. The rest, and the majority of the work, is historical and
researched accounts of disappearances and expeditions, found remains and early legend of what happens to those who go or have gone missing in Alaska. Though these last two threads make up the bulk of the page count, all four themes feel equally important. This is because of the manner in which Nickerson pieces them together. Pulling her own and Kent Roth’s stories through the heavier material gives them weight. These more personalized stories are returned to again and again.

The ability to break away and return to these storylines has a significant effect on the emphasis they maintain. If told in straight linear form, Kent Roth’s story may not have held as much weight. It may have blended in with the many other tales of missing persons that Nickerson presented. Further, the drama of Nickerson packing up her home and office in anticipation of leaving Alaska may not have gained the same amount of heightened anxiety and emotion had it been jammed together chronologically instead of solemnly marching the length of the memoir.

The fragmented form also allows a flexibility not traditionally found in the linear format. There is a freedom not only in the chronology of events, but also in the writing form. Because the writer can jump from scene to scene, she can also jump to different perspectives, forms, and styles.

Speaking about *Safekeeping*, Thomas says, “I changed voices from first to third when I felt like it. I mixed up past and present” (“Getting Started”). Thomas and Shumaker both play with point-of-view throughout their memoirs. Though mainly written from the first-person, neither writer shies away from switching.

In “The Provider,” Shumaker turns to direct address to write:
We sat on the red velvet overstuffed still shrouded in double-duty plastic. George Wallace, you said, the only clear choice. I left. Father, I am ashamed how ashamed of you I’ve always been when I know so little and that little learned by leaving. Your absence has carved in me a little place that hales like a cactus shell—hard fragile secret. The deepest gashes shelter for some bounding pack rat or startled cactus wren. (191)

The flexibility of this form allows Shumaker the freedom to turn to a second-person point of view for this section, and it enables her to write this difficult section that may not have been as powerful in another point of view. The fragmented form is also a good format to switch into a point of view like second-person because it need not be maintained for a significant period of time.

Meanwhile, Thomas plays with point of view to dodge ever naming any of her characters. Throughout Safekeeping she never reveals the names of any of her lovers, siblings, or family members. Instead they are you, he/she, they, or we. Her ability to continually switch from first to second to third person helps keep things feeling fresh and avoids the annoyance that refusing to name characters might sometimes cause.

For example, Thomas writes “The Stanhope” in third person. This is the story of the first time her second ex-husband met her parents. Choosing to write this piece in third person reduces the intimacy that might have been felt if she had chosen first or second person point of view. This emulates Thomas’s feeling of isolation in the scene:

Being no dummy, her second husband had introduced himself to her parents by taking them to the Stanhope for lunch. They liked him immediately. He knew art, which put him in good with her mother, and he
was a scientist, which gave him lots in common with her father. He showed himself to be witty and happy, he was successful and interesting, he was handsome and solvent and in love with their daughter. She didn’t even have to talk. (52)

Thomas immediately follows this piece with “We Had a Daughter,” writing:

We had a daughter together. You loved her. You were in the delivery room when she was born, something unheard of, undreamed of, when my first three babies came. (53)

Like Shumaker’s piece about her father, the switch to direct address gives “We Had a Daughter” a feeling of intimacy that reflects the subject matter. The continual switching allows Thomas to gain the maximum effect possible from each of the different forms of point of view.

Point of view aside, Thomas also uses the flexibility of the fragmented form in a structural way. The ability to play with time and space allows her to include present day conversations like the one with her sister previously quoted. These conversations work as slender scaffolding to help hold up the finer details of the work like the timeline of her marriages, and, later, the reasons why she was perhaps unprepared for the challenges of motherhood. The inclusion of these sisterly conversations into the text reveals details about the writing process in a way that is unique and uncommon in a traditional format.

Like Thomas, Nickerson also uses the flexibility of the form though in a more structural sense. For example, between each chapter, Nickerson inserts a brief “Record.” These short pieces are formatted with headings to replicate a ship’s log: “5 April 1989 LAT 61 DEGREES, 07 N LONG, 146 DEGREES 17 W” (133).
At only a page or two each, these entries include such personal details as Nickerson’s initial journey with her children up to Juneau in 1971, and that her son Sam was named for Samuel Nickerson, her 17th century relative who had been the first Nickerson to be born in North America. The lean record entries break up the heftier chapters on historical and modern day disappearances in Alaska with the thread of Nickerson’s own story.

As their individual placement allows each record to stand alone and shift freely in mood and subject, Nickerson is able to use them to convey important details to the reader. She utilizes the first few records to set the scene. She covers her childhood, marriage to her husband, and the beginning of her career as a writer. After the groundwork is set, Nickerson presents those moments that, as Thomas says, hold the “shock of truth” for her (“Getting Started”).

For example, in record thirteen, Nickerson remembers a trip to Texas for the funeral of an aunt and how struck she was by the words spoken by the priest at the ceremony. “There is nothing but for us to be kind to each other and love one another,” he said. (238). In using this fragmented format, Nickerson smoothly conveys an impactful moment into the work in a way that she may not have been able to do otherwise. For that brief moment, she abandons Alaska, where she had been steadily for nearly 237 pages, and quickly transports to Brownwood, Texas where, when the priest “[s]prinkled holy water on the coffin, the drops caught sun and filled with light and color” (238). Then, with the turn of the page, the next chapter returns to an Alaskan autumn, where one of the last cruise ships of the season is pulling away from the docks.
To maximum effect, Nickerson also plays with form in the final chapters. By this time, many grisly accounts have been shared of those who have gone missing in Alaska. The understanding of Nickerson’s presentation of what it means to be lost in Alaska is at its height.

At this point, Nickerson switches to list format. The paragraphs that follow describe details regarding missing persons or found remains. Each is headed with the date, to show how close together the discoveries fall. Though Nickerson uses this format in short bursts in earlier chapters, she uses it now consistently through the final pages. Her last description is of a military plane that has gone off the radar after an instrument-assisted approach. This is not the first flight that Nickerson describes going missing in this way, and so, in a sense, she is presenting the futility of it all—the fact that disappearance in Alaska has occurred for hundreds of years, and will continue occurring, even with new technologies that make travel safer, search parties more accurate, and mapping more exact.

This switch in format allows Nickerson to build momentum as she reaches the final pages. She need not be wary of reader overload in this situation, because that is the desired effect. The overload is the exact struggle that she has been trying to convey since the opening pages: the push and pull between a beautifully dangerous landscape—a place that gives and takes life with ease. To heighten that effect, she inserts more personal entries between the other purely journalistic reports.
Here are some of her entries:

November 5

*The search has widened for an airman missing for five days from the King Salmon Air Force Base, on the Alaska Peninsula not far from Lake Iliamna.* (272)

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November 6

I visit Maria. We discuss Gayle Roth. Maria knows that Jeff Roth, his brothers, and their friends are dead. When she is thinking of Jeff, an indescribable sense of coldness grips the upper part of her body. (273)

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November 8

. . . I look up. There, in an alleyway of berried mountain ash trees—a flock of bohemian waxwings. I look for their delicate crests against the sky. There is no mistake they have come early this year. I do not know what this means. I file it away for the map. It is the map inside my heart, the one that leads to heaven. (273)

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*Two men, near the city, have been killed in an avalanche.* (275)

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November 10

. . . in contemplation I ask for a sign. When I open my eyes, I see a robin on the crabapple tree outside the window. (275)
November 12

*Shortly after nine this morning the Juneau airport closes down. A military plane on final approach has gone off radar. (281)*

As the list continues, the sense of the continual loss is achieved. The dating of each entry helps visually cue the constancy of these events. People have gone missing in Alaska for many years and there is no end in sight.

Flexibility of format and of point of view, ability for repetition of themes and ideas, freedom to change perspectives, and free rein to stray from chronological order are several of the many reasons that the fragmented form lends itself to work centered around trauma. This is because the effects of trauma are long lasting, emotionally charged, and sometimes unexpected. As these writers work through the tragedy that has struck their lives, they use this format to show the events’ lasting effects, and to make connections to earlier experiences.

“Writing is the way I ground myself,” says Thomas, “what keeps me sane. Writing is the way I try to make sense of my life, try to find meaning in accident, reasons why what happens happens—even though I know that why is a distraction, and meaning you have to cobble together yourself” (“Getting Started”).

Thomas, Shumaker, and Nickerson make sense of their individual tragedies by piecing together mosaics of moments and memories. The resulting memoirs are not neatly arranged studies of a life’s lessons learned. Nor do they exist as a map for others
to follow so that they might avoid these writers’ pitfalls and skate through life unscathed.

Instead they present a reflection of the way traumatic events have shaped, and continue to shape, their lives and perceptions.
Works Cited


