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Picture This: Representation, Photographs, and the Contemporary American Memoir

A Thesis in English

by

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Introduction: The Function of Photographs in Memoir

"[...] the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no purely visual or verbal arts" (5). -W.J.T. Mitchell *Picture Theory*

A genre that falls under the larger classification of nonfiction, the term "memoir" usually indicates that the material contained in the text is not fictional or, in other words, that it is true. However, the idea of what "truth" means is not so simple, especially concerning memoir. Truth is a highly subjective term, which can become very complicated when discussed in relation to a genre as subjective as memoir is. Thus, while the idea of "truth" certainly raises representational questions for the genre, such as how "true" a story needs to be to be considered a memoir, it is not the only concern pertinent to representation in the genre. In addition to the question of how "true" memoirs are, or need to be, other questions to be explored throughout this thesis include what influence memory has on texts and how the depiction of trauma can complicate representation.

In this thesis, believability or "truth," memory, and trauma will be examined in addition to the concern about how photographs interact with these representational issues. I am especially interested in why photographs are used more and more frequently in the American memoir genre in the 21st century. Popular recent titles that have photographs in them include Dave Eggers's *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) and Julie Gregory's *Sickened: The True Story of a Lost Childhood* (2003) among many others. Simply by including photographs in their memoirs, these writers do something that differentiates them from more traditional memoirists such as Jeanette Walls who wrote *A Glass Castle*, a 2005 memoir about one slice of her life (her unusual childhood) that she tells using only her words. By including photographs in their memoirs, they raise questions about how they are functioning in and possibly influencing the

genre itself and how photographs interact with the way that memoirists tell their stories about the relationship between memory, trauma and the "truth" of experience.

As if matters were not complicated enough, pinning down a meaning for the term, memoir can be as difficult as trying to pin down the "truth" of a memory. According to the Oxford English Dictionary entry on memoir, it is a term with many variations and meanings. The first recorded use of memoir was in 1494 in a text called the *Loutfut Manuscript* from Scotland. In this instance memoir meant "a note, a memorandum; a record; a brief testimonial or warrant" (2). While the modern definition of memoir is linked to this definition, the meaning of the word has changed over the centuries and more recent definitions include "Records of events or history written from the personal knowledge or experience of the writer, or based on special sources of information," and "autobiographical observations; reminiscences" (*OED* 3). The *OED* also includes "a biography or autobiography; a biographical notice," and "an essay or dissertation on a learned subject closely studied by the writer. . .also (the record of) the proceedings or transactions of a learned society" (4). With all of these definitions it is evident why a clear cut meaning of "memoir" does not exist. The closest of the *OED* explanations of the term that would currently define the genre might be "Records of events or history written from the personal knowledge or experience of the writer, or based on special sources of information" (3). However, even this definition leaves something to be desired, more clarification. In other words, the question that arises is: is the memoir based on memories of the writer's experiences or is it derived from source material?

Typically, a memoir focuses on one aspect of the author's life to be explored in depth. In her book, *Writing a Life: Teaching Memoir to Sharpen Insight, Shape Meaning-and Triumph over Tests*, Katherine Bomer explains that memoir is "a mere slice of ordinary life-a certain

time period , a special relationship , a particular theme or angle on life" (4). Most memoirs follow this pattern, but it is important to note that this is not always the case. Bomer also says that memoir borrows "major elements from its larger relative the autobiography [... such as] honesty, self-analysis , and self-revelation" (4). Memoir differs from autobiography because it does not have to cover the scope of one's life, nor does it necessarily involve research as many autobiographies do. Autobiography and other forms of nonfiction tend to be considered more accurate than memoir because memoir is supposedly based not on facts, but on subjective experiences and on memory . Therefore, it would seem that memoir, as we think of it today, is written based the author's experiences and not necessarily based on information gleaned through research.

Because memoir is so subjective, the ability of memoir to claim to be truthful is certainly a concern for writers and readers of the genre. In fact, many infamous lawsuits have been pursued over things that have been written in memoirs . For example, one of the most public lawsuits involved Mr. James Frey, the author of a 2003 memoir about his rehabilitation from substance abuse titled *A Million Little Pieces*. After it achieved much success with the help of an endorsement by Oprah Winfrey, it was discovered that his now infamous "memoir" was not wholly true. In fact, as a result of a piece published by the "Smoking Gun" website in 2006 suggesting several parts of his so-called memoir were altered greatly if not completely falsified, numerous lawsuits were filed against the author and his publisher (Yagoda 23). As a result of the lawsuit, a disclaimer was added to the book explaining that it may not be entirely accurate (Yagoda 24). This is one example of the many lawsuits that have been filed against memoirists for falsifying parts of their memoirs, demonstrating that truthfulness is indeed a matter of importance regarding the genre.

If so much of his book was fictionalized, could Frey not have avoided this unfortunate debacle simply by publishing the book as fiction? If so, why didn't he? As Ben Yagoda explains in his book, *Memoir: A History*, "James Frey could not sell *A Million Little Pieces* as fiction. He took exactly the same book and changed the label to memoir and immediately it was snapped up" (266). As indicated by this quotation, publishers wanted nothing to do with Frey's book when he was trying to sell it as fiction. The moment he changed his text's label to memoir was when Random House became interested (Yagoda 24). The question is: why? Why would a change in category matter so much to a publisher or even a reader?

The idea that Frey's book was publishable as a memoir but not as fiction seems to suggest that American memoirist Fern Kupfer is right in her claim that what makes memoir so appealing to readers is the idea that what they are reading is true. The reader seems to need a certain "believability" factor. In an article titled "Everything but the Truth," Kupfer explains that it is the idea of truth that draws readers into reading memoir. She claims that "It is the authority of the truth-the idea of truth, anyway-that makes the memoir attractive to readers" (22). It is important to note that Kupfer does not claim that memoir is "true" so to speak, but she does argue that the idea that memoir is "true" is what makes people want to read it. For example, by pitching the "memoir" as nonfiction, Frey was finally able to publish his story. Considering that it was such a public debacle, the Frey controversy raised significant questions, echoing Kupfer, about how true a text needs to be in order to be allowed to be called a memoir. She argues that, "Lying-like cheating and stealing-is almost always wrong from an ethical perspective. But shaping the truth when writing memoir is an acceptable aspect of the craft," and she asks the following question "So where are the boundaries here?" (22). In the interview with Oprah, Frey admits to crossing that boundary by publishing his book as a memoir, knowing that it was not

factual enough to be considered nonfiction. However, the Frey incident and Kupfer both raise a very important question for the genre of memoir and one that might never have a clear cut answer: where are its boundaries?

As indicated by the question of where the boundaries of memoir are, one of most important issues of concern in the genre is the believability of memoir and the issue of "truth." Part of the reason that this is a controversial subject is that memoir allows for some leeway in the creative process of representation. Memoir is typically referred to as creative nonfiction because it permits the use of creative license or, in many cases, small changes of details like names in order to protect people. Memoir is subjective; it does not try to offer a supposedly objective account of the past. Rather than trying to represent the past accurately, it tries to represent memories, which are particularly subjective interpretations of the past. The memoirist does the work of reconstructing their memories on the page. However, others who experienced the same event the memoirist is describing would most likely perceive it differently. They might have a different perspective or disagree wholly with the memoirist just as the family Frey lived with, the Turcottes, did not agree with Frey's version of events (Yagoda 25). Moreover, memories are faulty. They simply are not reliable accounts of the past. Truth like memory is subjective and fallible and because of that, both create complications for one trying to represent memories in a memoir.

However, the troubles in representation do not end with issues of believability and memory but also include the challenge of writing about the traumatic experience from the author's past. This is not an easy subject; it confronts the fallibility of memory and truth and complicates it further. Yet, many memoirists have grappled with just this combustible combination. For example, some recent popular trauma memoirs include: Dave Pelzer's 1992

memoir, *A Child Called It*, about the abuse he suffered as a child, and Elie Wiesel's 1955 memoir, *Night*, about the author's survival of several concentration camps during the Holocaust. Thus, this combination of writing about memory and trauma illustrates that they are completely intertwined with one another, complicating matters further and requiring the memoirists to make difficult decisions about how to best represent their subjective truths accurately in their memoirs.

Central to probing the questions above about how "truth," memory, and trauma impact representation in memoir, I explore the function of photographs in some key texts. As previously mentioned, the use of photographs in memoir is becoming an increasingly popular trend in the genre. Because of this trend, it is necessary to consider possible reasons that memoirists are using photographs in their texts, how they function in those texts specifically in relation to the issues of representation impacting accuracy previously mentioned, and what implications the uses of the photographs could have for the genre. Are they helping to make the genre more accurate or are they muddying the waters of representation further with their own set of complications? Do they expand or limit representational options for memoirists?

One reason that photographs aid and complicate representation is that they are equivocal. Michael Lesy explains in an article titled "Visual Literacy," that photographs simply do not reveal unambiguous truths:

By now everyone knows that photographs do not tell simple truths. Especially if "truth" is defined as a state of certainty, a fixed point, [...] Photographs are [...] Paradoxical both/and creatures. They resemble Tweedledum and Tweedledee standing at the crossroads in Wonderland, pointing in opposite directions, [...] while Alice, as earnest as a historian, asks in which direction the truth, disguised as a white rabbit, went. (143)

If photographs are as paradoxical as Lesy claims, then the increasing presence of photographs in memoir certainly has the potential to raise concerns about the use of photograph in the genre. In particular, they make matters of representation even more complicated than they already are because it is never absolutely clear how they are functioning.

Because the aim of this thesis is to probe the ways in which photographs impact and are impacted by representational concerns in memoir such as "truth," memory, and trauma, several memoirs that use photographs will be scrutinized. The memoirs discussed in the following pages include the following contemporary American memoirs: *Let 's Pretend This Never Happened : A Mostly True Memoir* (2012) written by Jenny Lawson, *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate* (2012) by Judith Kitchen, and Dorothy Allison's *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* (1996). In each of these memoirs, photographs are spread throughout the texts and are used to supposedly support the narrative. Yet, using these photographs not only draws attention to representational concerns, but doing so also raises questions about why they are there and how they are functioning in these extremely subjective texts. To add to the complexity, the memoirs discussed in this thesis are what I would call "meta-memoirs" that include "meta-pictures," meaning that they think about and comment on pictures as much as they do about memoir itself. They have a performative use. The photographs are used in a way that theorizes representation by drawing attention to representational issues and addressing them by aiding and/or complicating representation in the texts. Thus, my objective in examining these memoirs is to consider possibilities as to what it is they reveal about the function of photographs in the contemporary American memoir.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I focus on issues of representing one's story "truthfully" and how the idea of "truth" is challenged with the inclusion of photographs in *Let 's Pretend This*

Never Happened: (A Mostly True Memoir) by Jenny Lawson published in 2012. I will explore reasons why the author, Lawson, feels the need to provide photographic evidence of her stories as well as whether or not those pictorial pieces of evidence prove any of the things that she tries to convince her readers they do. In regards to what photographs might be able to "prove," Susan Sontag, in her book, *On Photography* claims that "Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality" (4). Because photographs do not "seem" to be interpretations, but "miniatures of reality," people tend to trust them more than written accounts, paintings, and drawings even though they can be just as interpretive as these other mediums. For this reason, photographs tend to be accepted as proof that whatever is shown in the photograph happened or existed.

To further support my analysis of Lawson's use of photographs, I also discuss how Roland Barthes expands on the "proof" factor of photographs, in his book, *Camera Lucida*. Barthes argues that "Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence" (87). In other words, photographs can prove that a thing in a photograph existed; however, they can also lie about its meaning, especially because meaning is so subjective. Using Sontag's ideas on what possible "proof" can be offered in photographs and Barthes's ideas about how photographs can "lie," I will consider what the photographs might or might not "prove" in an attempt to understand how they relate to truthfulness and what they may or may not reveal about truthfulness in memoir.

The second chapter concentrates on issues of representing memory and the use of photographs in Judith Kitchen's 2012 memoir, *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate*. Memory is the foundation of memoir, but it muddies the waters of representation and in this chapter, I examine how memory can complicate issues of representation and truthfulness. In this

memoir, memory is further complicated by the fact that in much of the memoir Kitchen is trying to piece together the lives of family members, many of whom were dead by the time she wrote her memoir. She is reconstructing the memories of these people and often speculates about what may have been happening in the photographs she includes in her text.

The fact that Kitchen knows the future of the people in the photographs may impact her interpretation of the past. For that reason, I look at Marianne Hirsch's ideas about postmemory to consider how the present can impact the past and vice versa. According to Hirsch, "postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (22). Consequently, the experience of postmemory is not only delayed and second hand, it is also intensely subjective. Because of the distance from the past implied in postmemory, it is "mediated not through recollection, but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). In addition to investigating how "imaginative investment and creation" present in Kitchen's memoir, I also examine how photographs interact with memory and postmemory and how these theories impact the genre.

The major concern addressed in the last chapter of this thesis involves issues of representing trauma and the use of photographs in Dorothy Allison's *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure* published in 1996. In this chapter, I continue to ruminate on the complications of memory and truthfulness using Marc Auge's theories on oblivion and fictions in life narrative, especially as they relate to one another. I focus on how, in his book, *Oblivion*, Auge claims that "oblivion is the life force of memory and remembrance is the product" (21). I consider that, if this is the case, then memories are made up of not just what people remember, but what they forget. Therefore, the stories that people like Allison tell about their lives have pieces of them missing before they can even decide what they should include and leave out of their stories.

Furthermore, Auge states that "we are all living fictions" (38). He explains that the stories people tell about their lives are false because those stories they tell about their pasts are interpreted by themselves in the present, which means that they cannot be accurate (38). Based on Auge's theories and the idea that memory is faulty, I reflect on the ways in which memory and truthfulness function in Allison's text.

In addition to examining the function of memory and truthfulness in Allison's text, I consider Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma as it relates to memory in order to investigate how trauma is impacted by memory and vice versa. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative, and History*, Caruth defines trauma as the "response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated :flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (91). According to Caruth, trauma is not "fully grasped" at the time that it occurs because "traumatic experience [...] suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (91-2). This would suggest that directly experiencing trauma is what prevents the trauma survivor from being able to comprehend the traumatic event at the time it occurs and I explore how Caruth's theory of trauma unfolds in Allison's memoir.

In this chapter, I also examine how Allison uses photographs, specifically analyzing why she interrupts her story of being raped by her stepfather as a child with two full pages of photographs. I discuss what Jacques Ranciere calls photographs' "silent speech" in his book, *The Future of the Image* as it relates to these photographs. I also reflect on how Allison uses other visual markers not only to make various points but to demonstrate the narrative difficulties of representing her memories of a traumatic past. As Ranciere argues "the image is no longer the

codified expression of a thought or feeling[...]. It is a way in which things themselves speak and are silent. In a sense, it comes to lodge at the heart of things as their silent speech" (13). In this chapter, I consider the ways in which Ranciere's theory that photographs can speak silently and silently speak interact with issues concerning memory and trauma.

While analyzing the problems of representation connected to the works in each chapter and the memoirists' varied responses to those difficulties, particular attention is given to what role these photographs play in the narratives, why they are there and how they are functioning. The ways in which photographs help memoirists address issues of representation is discussed. Furthermore, complications of using photographs are also explored, especially in terms of how they relate to issues of representation present in the texts. For example, the ever present issues of truthfulness can become even more complicated with the use of photographs because photographs are often supplied as proof of events, but they can only prove so much. Moreover, photographs have the potential to affect memory and thus the story that can be told. Furthermore, the relationship between photographs and trauma can have complicated implications for representation. Therefore, this thesis is concerned with the ways in which photographs can help memoirists navigate through issues of representation even as the photographs further complicate matters of representation.

By examining the function of photographs in contemporary American memoirs as they relate to the representation of "truth," memory, and trauma, I simultaneously investigate why it is that photographs are becoming more popular in memoir and why they play such an important role in storytelling. Part of this examination is dedicated to reflecting on the idea that memoir is based in memory and that pictures are a lot like memories because they are personal and fragmented, meaning that they are highly subjective and only encompass part or pieces of an

event. Perhaps this is why they are becoming so prevalent in memoir, genre based on memory. Perhaps they have the potential to represent memories better than words can. Having additional representational options, especially ones that are similar to memories, might be the reason photographs are so appealing to memoirists whether or not they aid and/or complicate representation. As W.J. T. Mitchell states in his book, *Picture Theory*, "the interaction of pictures and texts is constitutive of representation as such: all media are mixed media, and all representations are heterogeneous; there are no purely visual or verbal arts" (5). If this is the case, it is also possible that the increase in photographs in memoir is not just a trend, but a potential new staple that is fitting for the ever evolving genre we call memoir.

Chapter One: Even Though There are Photographs, *Let's Pretend this Never Happened* (A Mostly True Memoir)

"Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world. People believe them, but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths." (19) -Eddie Adams, "Eulogy: General Nguyen Ngoc Loan"

I. Introduction: Believe it or Not, "Truth" and "Proof"

People who write memoirs are often those that have lived an extraordinary life, one that others would consider interesting or disturbing enough to make them want to read about it. One popular memoir fitting this description is the 2012 memoir, *Let's Pretend this Never Happened* (A Mostly True Memoir) by American Jenny Lawson. In this memoir, Lawson relates several odd, sometimes shocking, and often funny events and family stories ranging from childhood to adulthood that many would not only consider to be abnormal, but also hard to believe. That being said, Lawson uses photographs in her narrative in an attempt to convince her readers of the "truth" some of these stories. She also uses photos to toy with notions of what is "true" and "provable" in her text. Considering all of the ways in which Lawson uses photographs alongside words, questions arise such as: are her methods of using photographs and narrative successful in helping tell her story clearly, or does her story become more clouded by ambiguities? Do the photographs ultimately help legitimize her story, or do they fail to legitimize it because, like language, photography is a fallible medium?

In addition to some of the odd stories she tells, another thing that makes Lawson's story hard to believe is the subtitle she chooses for her memoir. Her subtitle, *(A Mostly True Memoir)* would suggest that some of her story is not true at all, making it even harder for people to believe what she says in the memoir. Lawson explains her reasoning for including the subtitle as follows: "[...] my story is ninety percent accurate [...]. The reason this memoir is only *mostly* true instead

of *totally* true is that I relish not getting sued" (1). As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there have been many memoirists like James Frey who have been sued for fabricating details in their memoirs. By including this subtitle, Lawson is trying to protect herself from sharing their fate. She also explains that she wants her "family to be able to say, 'Oh, *that* never happened'" (1-2) in order to protect them, presumably from embarrassment or incrimination. How, then, is her reader to know how much of her story is "true?"

Considering that Lawson has alerted her readers to the fact that some of her stories are not wholly true, at times, she also helps her readers figure out what she considers to be true. Sometimes she does this by including a footnote indicating that what she has just written is not exactly true or that it is very true. For example, in her introduction, she includes a footnote regarding a story she tells about being thrown from a moving car as a child. She writes:

When I read these stories to friends I'm always shocked when they stop me to ask, "Wait is that *true?*" during the most accurate of all the stories. The things that have been changed are mainly names and dates, but the stories you think couldn't possibly have happened? *Those are the real ones.* As in real life, the most horrible stories are the ones that are the truest. And, as in real life, the reverse is true as well. (2)

This footnote serves as a somewhat reliable guide for Lawson's readers because it indicates that the stories one would find most unbelievable are the ones that she considers to be the truest. Here her desire to protect herself and her family seem to be conflicting with her desire to be believed. On the one hand, by using words such as "most accurate" and "truest", she avoids claiming that any of them are absolutely true, allowing for some leeway in her narrative and/or deniability

from family members . On the other hand, Lawson makes it clear that "the most horrible stories" (2) are the ones that she wants readers to believe the most.

While some readers may accept Lawson's word that her most horrifying or embarrassing stories are the truest, others may take more convincing. Perhaps this is why she chose to include photographs in her memoir. Lawson introduces the idea that her photographs are evidential early in her book, and she continues to use them as "proof" of the validity of her stories throughout the memoir. Some of her more outrageous stories are told using photographs to supplement her text because frankly many people just would not believe that all of these unusual and sometimes horrible things could have possibly happened in one person's lifetime. Lawson understands this perhaps better than anyone because she has been doubted in the past (as indicated by the footnote above) and it is why she continues to use photographs as "proof" throughout her memoir.

II. The Believability of Photographs

To explore the ways in which photographs can potentially convince readers that something transpired or existed, it is necessary to examine what Susan Sontag writes in her book, *On Photography*. She explains that "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (5). Sontag claims that photographs can convince someone that something has, in fact, happened . She does not claim that the photograph actually "proves" anything, but that it can convince people that something existed or happened and so they consider it "proof." Because photographs can work to provide "proof" that something happened or to document an event, Lawson can use them in her narrative to potentially convince her readers that some of her less believable stories actually happened.

In a world where photoshopped images are as common as lies told by criminals, why do people tend to believe what they see in photographs over what they are told using words? This phenomenon occurs for several reasons according to Sontag who asserts that what is in a photograph is more believable because:

[t]he picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. Whatever the limitations (through amateurism) or pretensions (through artistry) of the individual photographer, a photograph- any photograph- seems to have a more innocent, and therefore more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects (5-6).

Here Sontag explains that even though photographs may "distort" reality through the inexperience of the photographer or through the photographer's artistic ability and choices, it seems to be a more innocent distortion than in other mediums. Because it seems to be a more innocuous "relation to visible reality," people tend to believe what they see. Sontag continues on this vein when she explains that "while a painting or a prose description can never be other than a narrowly selective interpretation, a photograph can be treated as a narrowly selective transparency" (6). If a prose description can only ever be an interpretation of reality and a photograph has the ability to be a transparency of it, then prose is to be trusted less than photographs. Photoshopped images aside, if this is true, then photographs can be used to provide "proof" to convince someone of something when and if it is in doubt.

As previously mentioned, many of the stories Jenny Lawson tells in her memoir are so outlandish that some of her readers might doubt their factuality, thus she uses photographs to aid in supporting the validity of her narrative. She is able to use the photographs to potentially convince her readers of the "truth" of her stories because, as Sontag would argue, even if they

are distortions of reality, people tend to believe photographs over words. For example, in the beginning of the memoir, when revealing "several key differences between [...her] childhood and pretty much everyone else in the entire fucking world" (12) Lawson claims that her family kept a pet raccoon that they named Rambo. Not many people keep raccoons as household pets. The story is certainly an unusual one, and to try to ensure that her readers believe that this actually happened, she provides evidence in the form of the photographs.



Figure 1. Page 19. (top and bottom) Pictures of Rambo in his pajamas. Scanned from *Let 's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

The caption Lawson provides for these photographs reads: "*Photographic proof of Rambo in his Jams. Also pictured: Teen Beat magazine with Kirk Cameron on the cover, records, and VHS tapes. It's like the eighties threw up all over this raccoon. I couldn't even make this shit up people*" (19). As evinced by this caption, Lawson acknowledges the fact that her story might be hard for her readers to believe probably because it is so unusual and peculiar. That is why she provides what she calls, "photographic proof" of it. By doing so, she can try to assure her readers that this did happen. She also draws the readers' attention to things such as the magazines that

help date the photograph in the eighties to substantiate the timing of her story. Furthermore, when she says that she "*couldn't even make this shit up,*" (19) she essentially claims that it is such a ridiculous story that she could not possibly have fabricated it.

Clearly, Lawson is trying to convince her readers of the truth of this story by including the photographs as evidence, but to what extent is she successful? Sontag suggests that photography "seems to have a more innocent, and therefore more accurate, relation to visible reality than do other mimetic objects" (6). If this is true, then Lawson can potentially convince her readers that her stories are true by using photographs because they are "more innocent" and therefore more trustworthy and convincing than words alone.

However, just including the photographs does not seem to be enough in this instance. She also announces that the photographs serve as proof. Is she simply introducing the idea that the photographs are evidentiary? Or does stating that they are proof somehow convince the reader that the photographs prove her story? Upon close examination, one realizes that this photograph is not capable of proving Lawson's entire story, nor is any photograph for that matter. A photograph cannot provide proof of an entire story because a photograph only represents part of one frozen moment. Perhaps this is why she supplements the photographs with a statement claiming that they are proof, to convince her readers to be convinced by the photographs.

Another instance in which Lawson uses photographs to supply evidence in order to convince her readers of the truth of her story is when she reveals another out-of-the-ordinary event in her childhood. She relates a story of going into the woods with her father to catch armadillos so that he could "race them professionally" (21). She claims when she tells people about how her father is a champion of armadillo racing, "they assume I'm exaggerating, but then I pull out his silver armadillo championship ring [...], and then they're all 'Crap on a cracker,

you're actually serious" (21). This means that in her own personal experience with people not quite believing her stories, providing physical evidence helps them to believe what she is saying.

Based on her experience with people having trouble believing this particular story in the past, her readers might struggle to believe her as she recounts this event in her memoir as well, which is probably why she decides to include photographs in this section. Knowing that her story will likely be doubted, she uses the "photographs [to] furnish evidence" (Sontag 5) to prove that not only was her father a champion, but also that there was a ring that she used to show others to convince them of her story as well. She states that "the gold armadillo championship ring would be more impressive to show off, but we don't have it anymore because my father traded it for a Victorian funeral carriage. And no I'm not joking, because why the fuck would I joke about that? But I do have photographic proof" (21) of the existence of the ring. Again, Lawson uses the words "photograph" and "proof" in an attempt to reassure her readers that by looking at the photographs (included below) they can see that despite any doubts they may have about her story, it did actually happen much like she convinced others who doubted her by showing them her father's actual ring.

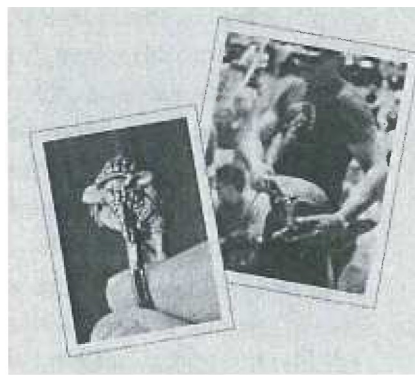


Figure 2. Page 21. (left) Armadillo racing championship ring; (right) Jenny Lawson's father with an armadillo. Scanned from *Let's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

One of the many times Lawson uses photographs in this way is when she reveals that she lost children in two different pregnancies before finding out that she has a condition called "antiphospholipid antibody syndrome [...] a rare autoimmune disease that causes blood clots, and worsens during pregnancy" (143). She started receiving treatment for the condition so that she could have a child, but she miscarried again. Because of the severity of her condition when pregnant she had to give herself twice daily stomach injections of blood thinners to be able to carry to term (144). She provides a photograph, of course, as proof of her story.



Figure 3. Page 146. Jenny Lawson injecting herself with blood thinners while pregnant. Scanned from *Let 's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

Lawson probably includes this picture as "evidence" that this happened to her because some of her readers might find her story hard to believe on top of all of the other horrible and strange things in her memoir. As Sontag writes, "Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (5). The photograph does seem to corroborate much of Lawson's story. With that in mind and considering the fact that she works to convince her

readers that her photographs are convincing, the photograph provides compelling evidence of her story that her readers are likely to believe.

Another instance in which Lawson uses photographs as "proof" to help her readers believe a hard-to-believe story is when she tells the story of being mauled by a dog as she simultaneously saves her daughter from sharing the same fate because of said dog (335). She uses photographs of her injuries from this event in the memoir to help her reader believe her telling of the story, but she also reveals that she used the photographs to convince her sister that the story actually happened. She does admit to some initial exaggeration about the nature of the dog that attacked her, but eventually reveals that it was the neighbor's pet (335). She also labels herself a martyr/hero in the photographs seen in the memoir and shown below, but this exaggeration has the presumably intentional effect of being humorous. The other labels are also worth noting because they too might work to convince her readers that these injuries resulted from this attack and not something else. Even though she may have admittedly exaggerated parts of the story of her mauling probably for humor's sake, as the photographs below show, her injuries were not at all exaggerated.



Figure 4. Page 334. (left) Jenny Lawson's back after being bitten by a dog; (right) Jenny Lawson's arm after being bitten by a dog. Scanned from *Let 's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

As demonstrated by the photographs included in this section, Lawson uses photographs to try to convince her readers that her stories are "true." While they do not necessarily "prove" that what she has written is "true," they have the potential to help her readers believe her. Her readers might take them as "proof" when they struggle to believe some of her more outrageous stories such as having a pet raccoon, helping her father finding armadillos to race, having to inject herself with blood thinners throughout her pregnancy, or being attacked by a dog. Because her stories tend to be so unusual, Lawson uses the photographs to increase the believability of her memoir.

III. Substitutes

Lawson uses photographs as proof of something many times in her memoir; however, it is not the only way that she uses photographs in the text. She also uses photographs to fill in gaps left behind by photographs that she could not provide. When she doesn't have a photograph to use as "proof" of something she thinks her readers may struggle to believe, she then uses another photograph as a substitute that does not do the job of providing "proof" like in the previous examples. This substitute does not necessarily have anything to do with what she is addressing in her text, but is related tangentially. It is worth noting that this seems to be the case with some of her most outrageous and hard-to-believe stories. However, including a substitute photograph serves to fill the gap left by the photograph she does not have while allowing her to include a different aspect of her story.

One instance of Lawson using a substitute photograph rather than one that "proves" her story is when she tells the story of her father scaring her with a squirrel that he told her was

magical, but in reality it was a dead squirrel in a cracker box that he was using as a hand puppet (32). After she finished telling the story she writes:

As an aside, I could not find a photo of Stanley the mutilated squirrel (probably because no one ever thinks to take pictures of a squirrel carcass until it's too late), but I do have a picture of my dad bottle-feeding a baby porcupine in a spare tire, and that seems somehow fitting and slightly redeeming [...]. (34)

As Lawson explains, the photograph in no way proves the validity of the story that she has just told. She could not find a photograph that would do that in the way that some of her other ones attempt to do. However, the photograph that she chooses to include serves to help her readers in another way. It helps paint a more complete picture of her father, one that has potential to redeem him by showing softer side of him, one that readers might struggle to believe if Lawson had only told her readers rather than shown them. This is especially true considering the fact that she has just told a story about being given "post-traumatic stress disorder" (33) by him as a child as a result of his antics. This is probably an exaggeration for the sake of being humorous, but nonetheless the story has not painted him in the most positive light. That is why the choice of including the photograph below is so important. If she wants to protect her family as she claims that she does in her introduction when she says that she wants her "family to be able to say, 'Oh, *that* never happened,'" (1-2) it might even be more important for her to prove that her father has this gentle and caring side to him than it is for her to prove that the story is true about the dead squirrel hand puppet. However, this photograph does not actually show that it is in fact her father in the picture, so it might not even be him at all.



Figure 5. Page 34. Jenny Lawson's father feeding a baby porcupine . Scanned from *Let 's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

Another instance in which Lawson uses a substitute photograph rather than one that potentially strengthens the "truth" factor of her story is in one of her most disturbing and hard to believe sections of her memoir. This substitution occurs when she tells the story of the time she got her "arm stuck in a cow's vagina" (63) by helping a teacher artificially inseminate a cow at the teacher's request. Ironically, Lawson finds herself in this situation because she follows her sister's advice to try to fit in with her peers. This horrifically embarrassing event has no photograph to accompany it as proof that it happened. Lawson explains that "when [...she] first wrote this chapter [...she] realized that people would have a hard time believing it" (65), so she even tried to get a photograph from her high school principal, but she was unable to find one which is not surprising and calls into question the "truth" of her story. Instead Lawson provides a substitute in the form of the following photograph of her sister, Lisa.



Figure 6. Page 65. Jenny Lawson's sister, Lisa in her mascot uniform. Scanned from *Let 's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

This photograph clearly does not serve as evidence of Lawson's cow story, which is something that she addresses in her caption. The caption that supplements this photograph is as follows: "There are no known pictures of me with my arm stuck up a cow's vagina, but my parents own tons of pictures of my sister dressed as poultry [...]" (65). Rather than using the photograph as a way to protect a family member from judgment as she did earlier with the photograph of her father feed the porcupine, this time Lawson does something completely different with this photograph. By including this comical photograph as a substitute for the one she was not able to find, Lawson is potentially able to take a small, but innocent enough, revenge on her sister, Lisa perhaps by embarrassing her. This is fitting because Lawson found herself in the embarrassing situation with the cow because of the advice her sister had given her. This photograph does not prove her story about the cow and it is a substitute for a missing photograph, but it still serves a purpose in the memoir by filling that gap with another piece of Lawson's story. However, even

though the substituted photographs serve a purpose, they call into question how much of her story is provable and/or, for that matter, believable.

The substituted photographs discussed in this section make it evident that Lawson is unable to provide photographs as "proof" of some parts of her narrative like she is able to with the examples in the previous section. The parts of her memoir for which she cannot provide photographs happen to be some of her most hard-to-believe stories such as her father traumatizing her with a dead squirrel puppet and getting her arm stuck inside of a cow's vagina. Rather than serving as "proof" of these outrageous stories, the substitute photographs work to make an indirectly related point. However, the substitutes also call into question to what extent her stories can be "proved" and how "true" it may be.

IV. Photographs and Lies

In addition to the fact that Lawson is unable to provide photographic evidence to support the "truth" of some of her stories and chooses to include substitutes for those photographs as a way to make a different point than the one made by the story she has just told, she also includes some photographs that might be particularly misleading to a reader. Using photographs to help tell a story is not without its problems because photographs are far from being an infallible medium. In his book, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* Roland Barthes states that "the important thing is that the photograph possesses an evidential force" (88-9). Here Barthes explains that photographs have evidentiary power because they are "certificate[s] of presence" (87). Because photographs certify presence, they can authenticate the existence of something photographed.

However, Barthes take this idea a step further when he argues that "Photography never lies: or rather, it can lie as to the meaning of the thing, being by nature *tendentious*, never as to its existence" (87). In other words, photographs can prove that a thing in a photograph existed; however, they can also lie about its meaning, especially because meaning is so subjective. If as Barthes argues, photographs do not "lie" about the reality of the presence of the things within them, then they can "prove" that something Lawson discusses existed. However, that is the extent of their capacity to prove anything because they can also "lie" about the meaning of the things that are photographed. Because people tend to believe what they see in photographs and because they can "lie," photographs can be misleading.

Some of the photographs that Lawson uses are especially problematic because they might be particularly misleading to her readers. In other words, some of her photographs "lie" in a way. One of these slightly ambiguous photographs is included when she writes about her wedding to her husband, Victor. Rather than choosing a photograph taken at the chapel during the wedding (perhaps because none were taken), she chooses to include her official wedding photograph that was taken at the mall presumably after the wedding.



Figure 7. Page 112. The official wedding portrait of Jenny Lawson and her husband, Victor.

Scanned from *Let's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

The caption for the photograph of the newlyweds helps to explain why the photograph is so misleading. It reads: "Our official wedding portrait. If you didn't know us you could almost imagine that we're whirling around a candlelit ballroom instead of standing in front of the Sears Portrait Studio backdrop at the mall [...]" (112). As indicated by the caption, the photograph does not accurately represent the couple. It also doesn't reveal any details about the wedding that they had at the church chapel. The photograph is a posed and contrived picture that makes the couple seem other than they were and the wedding seems other than it was. A portrait such as this wedding photograph lies because of the nature of portrait pictures. Barthes explains the phenomenon of the portrait picture as follows:

The portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art. In other words, a strange action: I do not stop imitating myself, and because of this, each time I am (or let myself be) photographed, I invariably suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity. (13)

Barthes argues that there are four different forces that are at work in portraits that not only work against one another, but also "distort" one another. These forces are the subject's idea of the subject's identity, the subject's desired perceived identity, the photographer's idea of the subject's identity, and the version of the subject the photographer desires to depict. As a subject, Barthes is self-conscious of this and it makes him feel as if he is imitating himself and being inauthentic. This imitation could certainly lead to the photograph being inauthentic, but even if a

subject were not self-conscious, there would still be something inauthentic about the photograph because of the forces that are working against each other that also distort one another. These forces are inevitable in the portrait-pictures, and therefore the portrait is inevitably inauthentic. As demonstrated by the wedding photograph, portraits lie, and if it were not for Lawson pointing it out in her caption, her reader may have taken the photograph as an accurate representation of the couple when it is not.

Another example of Lawson using a photograph that is potentially dangerously misleading to her readers is one she includes of her sister Lisa as a child. As the sisters discuss whether or not they should be concerned about the possible damage that could ensue because of their father playing with their children, Lisa comes across the photograph of "herself as a one-year-old surrounded by empty beer bottles" (238) shown below and frowns at it. Apparently, she is not happy about what she sees in the picture. Lisa then tells her sister a story about her father making a mess in the house by dumping live ducks on the floor to show to her children, a harmless enough but certainly not a responsible act.



Figure 8. Page 238. Jenny Lawson's sister, Lisa as a child. Scanned from *Let's Pretend This Never Happened (A Mostly True Memoir)* by Jenny Lawson, © 2012 by Jenny Lawson.

Considering the context that the photograph is placed in (it appears in the midst of a story about the girls' father being irresponsible), a reader would probably be inclined to believe the worst about the contents in the photograph of Lisa and probably about the girls' parents as well. However, the caption provided for this photograph helps explain why it is misleading. Lawson writes: "The weird thing about this picture is that my parents don't drink. I can only assume Lisa had some sort of problem" (238). As indicated by Lawson's words, one might assume that alcohol was a problem growing up in the family's household. Furthermore, a reader might believe that it was being given to the child by the parents. Lawson's caption would suggest otherwise. As Barthes would say, this photograph "lies," not about the fact that Lisa as a child held a bottle or beer to her mouth, but about what the photograph means. The photograph suggests something other than what Lawson claims to be true. If it were not clear already, with her ironic use of this photograph and her commentary on it, she is clearly toying with the idea of "truth" and photography and the believability of her memoir.

It is apparent that when Lawson believes her words are not enough for her readers to be certain of her, she incorporates pictures to serve as "proof" for any doubters. However, when her pictures are especially problematic, paradoxically she tends to fall back again on her words like she does with the captions in these misleading photographs. In other words, when they are insufficient for her purposes, she supplements her words with photographs and her photographs with words.

However, there is a problem with this kind of cyclical supplementation. As Barthes argues:

It is the misfortune (but also perhaps the voluptuous pleasure) of language not to be able to authenticate itself. The *noeme* of language is perhaps this impotence,

or, to put it positively: language is, by nature, fictional; the attempt to render language unfictional requires an enormous apparatus of measurements: we convoke logic, or, lacking that, sworn oath [...]. (86-7)

Here Barthes explains that language is not capable of confirming itself. Even when people endeavor to validate their words with "logic" or "sworn oaths," these are merely attempts that fail because as he says, "language is, by nature, fictional" (87). Therefore, Lawson's supplementary explanations for her photographs can be humorous, and/or they can direct her readers as to how she would like them to be interpreted; however, they cannot confirm or deny what is present in the photographs with any certainty on the part of the reader.

This use of captions to explain ambiguous photographs is the opposite of what Lawson does earlier with the photographs she uses to confirm her stories. In some cases, using the photographs as evidence works for her because, unlike language, photographs can serve as "proof." Barthes explains this phenomenon by stating that "the Photograph is indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent, it is authentication itself [...]" (87). If photographs are "authentication itself," as Barthes claims they are, then they have the ability to authenticate, the power to substantiate Lawson's words at least to some extent, to the extent that the things and/or people photograph existed. However, as previously mentioned, Barthes also claims that photographs can "lie". He claims that while photographs do not "lie" about the existence of the images they present, they can "lie" in regards to their meaning (87). This idea was demonstrated by the examples of Lawson's misleading photographs just shown.

The photographs that are especially problematic because they suggest something other than what Lawson writes call into question the "truth" of her narrative. On the one hand, using words to point out the faultiness of her photographs may raise doubts about those that she used

as "proof" of her stories. On the other hand, it may lead her readers to feel that she admits where her photographs fall short of providing convincing "proof" of her stories. Either way the photographs shown in this section clearly complicate the idea what photographs are able to "prove" and questions how much they should be trusted.

V. Conclusion: The Trustworthiness of Photographs

In regards to the trustworthiness of photographs, a well-known photographer named Eddie Adams wrote in a 1998 Time magazine piece entitled "Eulogy: General Nguyen Ngoc Loan" that "Still photographs are the most powerful weapon in the world. People believe them, but photographs do lie, even without manipulation. They are only half-truths" (19). Adams claims that photographs are weapons because people believe them. He also argues that while people believe what they see in photographs is "true" that even when they have not been manipulated photographs "lie," stating that "they are only half-truths" (19). If photographs are indeed "half-truths," then they are not to be trusted, not completely.

Because photographs are, as Adams explains, a "powerful weapon" Lawson uses photographs as a tool in her text to try to convince her readers that her stories are true. However, the potential of photographs to serve as "proof" of something is certainly limited. One cannot have photographs of every moment of his or her life, much like one cannot remember every moment of his or her life. Therefore, the absence of photographs may limit their ability to prove something. For example, if Lawson is not able to provide a photograph of an event is it less believable than the ones for which she is able to provide them? Furthermore, the ability of photographs to serve as "proof" of a story is also limited by the fact that they are misleading. If

photographs "lie," as both Adams and Barthes claim they do, then how much are they really capable of proving?

With that idea that photographs are "half-truths" in mind, the ways that Lawson uses photographs work to help substantiate her claims partially, but not completely. Even aided by photographs the completely accurate representation of the past is simply impossible. Luckily for Lawson, that is not what memoirists endeavor to do; they strive not to represent the past, but to represent memory which is different because memory is highly subjective. Even though truth-telling is a major concern in the genre called memoir, because memoir is subjective by definition, the truth does not necessarily have to equal accuracy.

Chapter Two: *Half in Shade*: Memory, Postmemory, and Photographs

"The past is gone for ever. We cannot return to it, nor can we reclaim it now as it was. But that does not mean it is now lost to us. The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed is unrecoverable, its traces still remain. From these traces [...] a (re)construction, if not a simulacrum, of the event can be pieced together." (4) -Annette Khun, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*

I. Introduction: Photographs, the Link between Memory and Postmemory

Photographs feature prominently in American memoirist, Judith Kitchen's 2012 memoir *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate*. In this memoir, Kitchen writes about sundry family photographs that she inherited from her mother. She uses the photographs, her memory, and a certain amount of speculation to compose the short essays that form this memoir. In addition to ruminating about the subjects in the photographs, Kitchen also reflects on her personal experience with illness throughout her memoir. In the introduction to the memoir, Kitchen states that she has never had any great interest in photography and that she has always relied on her memory to write (xi). She states that "it was neither the curiosity of a photographer, nor some literary need to imagine visual images, that drew me to the haphazard collection of boxes and albums scattered on the bottom shelves, the ones my mother had managed to save from the floods" (xi). If it wasn't curiosity or need for inspiration, what was it then that drew her these photographs, many of which she chooses to include in her text? Furthermore, what effect do they have on representation in the memoir? In other words, do these photographs help shed some light on the past and present in the memoir or do they leave more hidden in the shade than they reveal? Do they provide an aid in representation? Or do they present even more complications than those already existing?

Memoir, because it is based on memory, has many uncertainties prior to any inclusion of ambiguous photographs. Some of these uncertainties stem from the idea that, as John F.

Kihlstrom states, "memoirs are, almost by definition, literary representations of memory. And so, like memories, they may be inaccurate or willfully distorted" (1). According to Kihlstrom, memories are not entirely reliable accounts of events because they can be "inaccurate" or even "willfully distorted." If memories are often unreliable and memoirs represent memory, then memoirs too are not necessarily dependable representations of events. This means that even if a memoirist is faithful to his or her memories, that a reader cannot be certain that the memoirist is being faithful to events as they actually happened.

The first potential representational concern to be considered in this chapter is memory because it is necessary to understand the complications posed by memory in order to understand those associated with postmemory. Marc Auge, who is a prominent memory theorist, claims in his book *Oblivion* that "an individual feels the need to recapitulate his existence, to tell his life, to give it some coherence" (43). In other words, human beings have a natural tendency, a need even, to make stories out of their lives. Doing so allows them to make meaning of the things that happen in their lives. However, the stories that people tell themselves and others about the past could never succeed in representing their lives with any certainty. People simply do not remember everything that happens in their lives, nor would many of them want to. If "oblivion is the life force of memory and remembrance is the product" (Auge 21), then memories are made up of not just what people remember, but what they forget. If people remembered everything that happened in their lives, then nothing would seem important. As James E. Young writes in the foreword of Auge's book, "in forgetting nothing, we cannot know the meaning of anything we've remembered" (vii). In other words, it would be difficult to make a sense of one's life if he or she did not forget some of the things that have happened to them. The stories that people make of their lives necessarily have pieces of them missing. This matters because the things that

people forget because of oblivion shape the kind of story they can tell before they are even able to decide what should or should not be included in those stories or memoirs.

In addition to oblivion, there is another reason why Kitchen's stories fail to represent the past accurately. As Auge says, "we are all living fictions" (38). He explains that people live multiple tales and that "we do not always resist the desire the reinterpret them, remodel them, in order to adapt them to the one we are in the process of living" (39). He also claims that:

written or not, these tales are always (even when they are not "fabrications," "products of the imagination," "exaggerations" likely to arouse smiles from other witnesses) the fruit of memory and oblivion, of a work of composition and recomposition that translates the tension exerted by the expectation of the future upon the interpretation of the past. (39)

Auge explains how both the present and the future shape how people interpret the past. This is an unavoidable phenomenon that makes the stories people tell about their past fictional. Who people think they are and who they want to be impacts their understandings of their past, thus causing them to construct a story that fits with their images of the present and future that explains how they got where they are and where they are planning to go. Both oblivion and fictions make life narrative inaccurate. Therefore, memoir too is unavoidably inaccurate because it is a form of life narrative, thus creating uncertainties about the text.

Oblivion and fictions call into question the validity of one's personal memories; however, these are not the only things complicating representation in Kitchen's memoir. Her memoir's accuracy is also thwarted by the fact that she not only is also recreating the memories of others, her family members. In a book entitled *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, written

by Annette Kuhn, Kuhn writes that family memories are much like personal memories in that they are shaped by what is missing from the story. She asserts that:

Telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves. To the extent that memory provides their raw material, such narratives of identity are shaped as much by what is left out of the account-whether forgotten or repressed-as by what is told. Secrets are the other side of the family's public face, of the stories families tell themselves, and the world, about themselves. Characters and happenings that do not slot neatly into the flow of the family narrative are ruthlessly edited out. (2)

The editing that Kuhn refers to in this quotation is not the editing of the published text of the memoir. This editing occurs long before a memoir would be written because it is the editing of memory. Just as is the case with individual memory, the collective family memory is also [inevitably affected by oblivion and fictions or as Kuhn says what is "forgotten or repressed" (2). It is perhaps more complicated than individual memory by the increased number of people involved these fictions, and it is just as, if not more, unavoidable for this reason.

As if involving others in her memoir was not problematic enough already, many of the family members Kitchen includes in her memoir are dead and/or much of what happened to these people occurred before she was born. That is precisely why this memoir could be called a work of "postmemory." In her book, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* Marianne Hirsch defines postmemory as a "powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (22). This is certainly the type of memory Kitchen uses when speculating about the lives of the people in the photographs about whom she

knows very little. To expand on this definition, Hirsch explains that "postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (22). Therefore, postmemory is not only delayed and second hand, it is also intensely subjective. Because of the distance from the past implied in postmemory, it is not negotiated through remembrance, but "imaginative investment and creation" (22). This means that because Kitchen is displaced by time, she must speculate to some extent if she is to "animate and resurrect" (Kitchen xii) the past pictured in the photographs, which, in her introduction to *Half in Shade*, Kitchen claims to be her aim.

In addition to the idea that postmemory requires "imaginative investment and creation," Hirsch also discusses the idea that photographs are a link between generations and that they are leftover works of postmemory. She claims that "Photographs in their enduring 'umbilical' connection to life are precisely the medium connecting first-and second-generation remembrance, memory, and postmemory" (23). The idea that photographs are the link between generations becomes abundantly clear with Kitchen's use of photographs in *Half in Shade*. To expand on this idea, Hirsch also explains that photographs "are the left overs, the fragmentary sources and building blocks, shot through with holes, of the work of postmemory, They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable gap" (23). This generational gap cannot be bridged literally or accurately by these "fragmentary sources;" however, through "imaginative investment and creation," one can attempt to bridge the gap as Kitchen attempts to in her memoir.

II. Photographs and Motives

In regards to the photographs, Kitchen claims that by the time she had any real interest in them that it was too late for her to ask any questions about their subjects. She writes, "By then I realized I didn't know *who* they really were-these strangers we call family-lost now, slipping into the shade. But I wasn't done with them-or rather, they weren't done with me. Their stem faces kept turning in my direction, asking me to bring them back to light" (xi). According to this quotation, it would seem that once she had looked at the photographs, she was bothered by the fact that these people were strangers to her. The people in the photographs are family, but she knows so little about them that she feels compelled to bring them "back into the light" and not let them slip "into the shade."

In addition to the unanswered questions Kitchen had about the subjects in the photographs, she also became interested in the question of "how to give 'voice' to what is inherent in the visual" (xii). The idea of giving voice to the visual is a question of representation the author explores throughout the text. She explains that her "challenge as a writer was not to describe, but to interact. Not to confirm, but to animate and resurrect. The past became [...her] subject, and memory [...her] lens" (xii). However, she also admits that with memory alone, she could not "animate and resurrect" the past in the photographs. She confesses that "memory was often insufficient. [... She] frequently had to rely on probability, supposition, intuition, the half known, the partially knowable. Sometimes out of desperation-or desire-[...She] resorted to fantasy" (xii-xiii). By admitting that she sometimes uses fantasy or, in other words, her imagination, it becomes clear that *Half in Shade* is not the typical memoir which would be based upon the author's memories and would focus on some aspect of his or her life. Even though she uses imagination in her memoir, she warns her readers about it in the introduction when she says

that she "resorted to fantasy" (xiii) and calls their attention to it later when it is used in the text as well (86). By doing so, she can potentially protect herself from being accused of misleading her readers.

Aside from protecting herself, by drawing attention to her use of fantasy, Kitchen also points out how impossible it is to be certain of the meaning of the information contained in the photographs. It is precisely this uncertainty that drew her to the photographs in the first place, and her interest in the photographs and the uncertainty surrounding them became even more pronounced when she became ill. She writes, "*Halfin Shade* was written over a ten year period. But it took a serious illness to make me realize that, like the people in the snapshots, none of us knows what lies beyond the moment, outside the frame" (xiv). She reveals that she identifies with the subjects in the photographs because, like them, she cannot know what the future holds for her because no one can.

III. Linking the Past and Present with Photographs

To understand some of the ways in which Kitchen uses her imagination to create a bridge from the present to the past, it is necessary to examine her use of some of her photographs while considering the ways in which memory and postmemory impact representation in the text as well. One picture that demonstrates the link between the present and the past is the picture of her childhood home after a flood. Ironically the family moved so as to avoid another flood, but as Kitchen says, "The damage to this photograph almost certainly comes from the flood of 1972. Another time, another place, and still water found its way into the bottom drawers of memory" (142). In this quotation, she acknowledges the probability that this photograph was damaged in another flood. By doing so she points out that she is not certain about this, but is relying on what

probably happened. She has also called the drawer containing photographs belonging to her family a drawer of memory, meaning that she feels that these photographs are material memories.

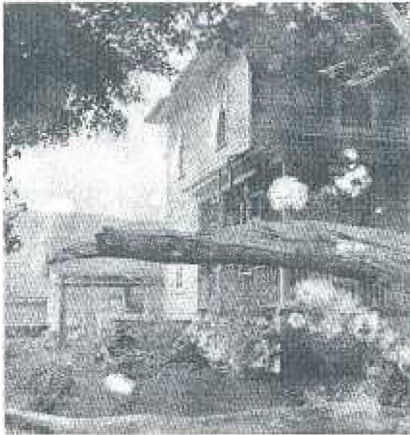


Figure 1. Page 143. Picture of childhood home after flood. Scanned from *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate* by Judith Kitchen, © 2012 by Judith Kitchen.

Kitchen highlights the link between present and past in the above photograph when she writes "I stare at the ragged perforations that spray the paper like gunshots, trying to penetrate the past. And they gaze back, with their flat white eyes, as though they could open the aperture on the present, looking through each unplanned moment to where it slips into and out of significance" (142-3). This photograph has significance because it makes her wonder about and try to connect to the past that is represented within its frames. However, it is important to note the words "try" and "as though" as they are used in this quotation. This means that while the photograph serves as a link between the past and present it is not a bridge. As Hirsch would say, "They affirm the past's existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable gap" (23). It is as though the "flat white eyes" of the people who cannot even be seen in this photograph could

"see [...her] now, peering past her childhood home, [...] probing time's fluidity" (Kitchen 143) but in reality they cannot.

Kitchen also emphasizes another way in which this photograph serves as a link from the past to the present, from generation to generation. After describing how it is as if the gap between the past and present could be bridged, she uses some "imaginative investment and creation" to fill in some of that gap. When she imagines her mother finding the photographs after the second flood, she writes, "She makes no fretful peace as she tugs at the pages of her life and they resist-leaving multiple wounds that will fester here in yet another century, record of what might have been called regret, what might be legacy" (143). She cannot know for certain whether or not this happened because she does not know if the photograph was even damaged in the second flood. However, she can say that it is the most likely scenario, allowing her to imagine what else probably happened based on what she knows of her mother's character. She can tell a story that fits with her image of her mother.

She can also use imagination to create a figurative bridge because she feels the wounds of these floods in the present, which is a staple of postmemory. As Hirsch explains, "Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (22). In Kitchen's description of the photograph, she does not include her own memories of her childhood homes because her memories are "evacuated by the stories of the previous generation" and are replaced by those stories. Because of what she has been told about these floods, and because she is aware that they have left wounds that are still felt in the present, reverberating through time, her stories are replaced by the one she creates for her family in her description of the photograph.

Considering that Kitchen creates parts of her memoir based on how she imagines her family to be, what does she do when there is a photograph that conflicts with her perception of a family member? To begin to answer this question we can look at the section titled "Sense of Play," in which Kitchen recalls a time that her father explained why he married her mother. He had to choose between Kitchen's mother and her friend. She explains that he told her that he chose "the one with the greater sense of play" (118). This was troubling to Kitchen because she did not see her mother that way at all. She describes her image of her mother as follows: "Whenever I make an effort to picture my mother, she seems lost in the cloud of her circumstances: a voice calling us to dinner, the click of high heels on the stair, sound of sheer efficiency. The years blend to one long chore. I remember her as tone. A chide. A disappointment. A silence at the core" (118). This bleak depiction of her mother does not align with the description provided by her father, so it is easy to see why she found the photograph possibly taken by her mother below surprising as well.



Figure 2. Page 119. Picture possibly taken by Judith Kitchen's mother of a friend outdoors surrounded by various objects. Scanned from *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate* by Judith Kitchen, © 2012 by Judith Kitchen.

When explaining this photograph, Kitchen writes, "imagine my surprise at the snapshot I've rescued from whatever obscurity it was enjoying [...]. Dead center, a young woman wearing a dark hat-not my mother, no, I've never seen *this* woman before-is sitting on what, under very close examination appears to be a sled" (118). This photograph is shocking to her because she has never seen her mother as a woman who would be frivolous enough take this kind of picture. She is surprised that there is a version of her mother like the one her father described. The photograph is perplexing and Kitchen's notes try to fill in the answers to some of the questions it poses by speculating about what is happening in the photograph. She guesses that her mother and whomever she was photographing were trying to be puzzling (120). Based upon the fact that there is a woman sitting outdoors surrounded by a collection of odds and ends with seemingly no purpose, it makes sense that the photographer and the subject were playfully trying to baffle anyone who might see the photograph.

Underscoring the stark contrast of the image of her mother as a woman that would take this photograph and the one in her mind, Kitchen writes, "If there were secret compartments in my mother, they were far too deep for us to penetrate. You've seen it though. You've seen the photograph: its amazing contrivance, its definite lightness of being, its seventy-some years of play. So tell me why am I so certain she was there?" (123). In this quotation, Kitchen asserts that she never saw her mother as playful, but this photograph would suggest otherwise. With these two juxtaposed images in mind, she questions why she feels so certain that her mother took the photograph. Why does she believe that her mother has taken this photograph when she cannot even see her and it does not fit with what she knows about her mother? Perhaps she suspected her mother had secrets. Perhaps it makes the most sense to her because she feels that she knew her mother little. Whatever the reason, she writes, "in her invisibility, she is everything at once:

ringleader, instigator, hidden director of the play. Offstage she snaps one answer to her mystery" (123). As indicated by this quotation it is clear that she does believe it and that this photograph has impacted her memories of her mother, making her uncertain and complicating representation in her text.

All of these ideas that Kitchen brings up in her memoir lead me to ask how is it that photographs have the ability to alter perception or do they? In her book, *On Photography*, Susan Sontag explains that "Images transfix. Images anesthetize. An event known through photographs certainly becomes more real than it would have been if one had never seen the photographs" (20). Sontag claims that when people see photographs of events they hear about, they believe that the event is "more real" than they would if they had never seen those photographs. If this is possible, then perhaps it is also possible that photographs can become more real than memories as well. If this is true, then it makes sense that Kitchen's father telling her that her mother has a playful side was not enough to convince her that she did. It was the photograph that made it seem real to her probably because, as the saying goes, "seeing is believing." However, there is still no proof that her mother was there. Hearing her father's version of her mother was not convincing enough to change Kitchen's view of her mother, but somehow the photograph that did not even show her mother was.

Was it really the photograph that convinced Kitchen that her mother took it or was it the story she created to make sense of it that convinced her in the end? To begin to answer this question it would be helpful to return to Hirsch who explicates that "Our memory is never fully 'ours,' nor are the pictures ever unmediated representations of our past. Looking at them we both construct a fantastic past and set out on a detective trail to find other versions of a 'real' one" (14). Constructing a "fantastic past" while trying to detect "other versions of a 'real' one" is

exactly what Kitchen is doing as she tries to interpret the photograph. The photograph along with her father's depiction of her mother prompted her to reevaluate her preexisting image of her mother using fantasy to try find a "real" version of her mother. Thus the photograph had an impact on her memory, convincing her that her mother must have secrets because she was there. As Sontag would argue, seeing the photograph made her father's image of her mother seem more real to her than if she had not seen that photograph. In her interpretation of the photograph Kitchen believes to have been taken by her mother, the memoirist's present knowledge intrudes on the past depicted in the photograph and it is not the only time that this happens in the memoir.

Another instance in which Kitchen's knowledge of what has happened between the time a photograph was taken and the present affects her interpretation is during her commentary.



Figure 3. Page 36. Martha's wedding photograph. Scanned from *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate* by Judith Kitchen, © 2012 by Judith Kitchen.

Above is the wedding photograph of a German woman named Martha, a friend whom Kitchen's aunt, Margaret, met as a child when visiting Germany in the 1920s. In regards to this photograph, Kitchen writes, "It's clear isn't it? The camera does not lie. Martha does not know; her unnamed

husband does not know; the photographer [...] does not know. Juni, 1938. But they must all suspect. Only four months to go until that infamous night of broken glass. They need flowers, and music. They need to turn their backs and dance" (35-6). As Kitchen states in this quotation, the people involved in this photograph did not know what the future had in store when this photograph was taken. When she refers to the night of broken glass, she is alluding to *Kristallnacht*, an event widely considered to be the beginning of the Holocaust. Kitchen assumes that these people must have suspected that the Holocaust was looming. Furthermore, she accuses them of turning a blind eye to it when she says that they need "to turn their backs and dance" (36). It is very possible that this is the case. However, she takes her preconceived notions from the present and imposes them on the past with assumptions that cannot be substantiated. In other words, Kitchen lets her knowledge of History heavily impact her interpretation of the photograph.

Kitchen describes this phenomenon of knowing, to some extent, the future of the subjects in the photographs, but not knowing much about their pasts when she writes, "I became aware of a kind of triangulation: me, the photograph, and its subject(s). From my temporal advantage, I found I could supply what my subject would never know-the future. I found myself in a kind of time warp in which I knew more *than* my subject, but less *about* my subject" (xiii). Knowing the future of her subjects means that she can fill in details about their lives that cannot be provided in the photographs alone. However, it can also complicate her interpretations of those photographs as well, leading her to make assumptions that may or may not be true just as she does with Martha's wedding photograph.

The intrusion of the present upon the interpretation of the past might be unavoidable, but it is certainly one reason why memories are complicated. This phenomenon experienced by

Kitchen is what Auge describes as "fictions." In regards to the stories people make out their lives, Auge states that "we do not always resist the desire the reinterpret them, remodel them, in order to adapt them to the one we are in the process of living" (39). He claims that people interpret the past based upon who they currently are. Because of this, he explains, the stories people shape out of their pasts are always "fictions." Therefore, who Kitchen is and what she knows at the time she writes this story influences the interpretation she has on the past.

Similar to what Auge claims about the present influencing memory, critic Annette Kuhn argues that we interpret photographs based upon the present as well. She states that "Family photographs may affect to show us our past, but what we do with them-how we use them-is really about today, not yesterday. These traces of our former lives are pressed into service in a never-ending process of making, re-making, making sense of, our selves-now" (19). In other words, even though pictures seem to show an accurate representation of the past, the ways that people interpret them are based on who the viewer is, what knowledge he or she possess, and even his or her mood of the at the time of the viewing. Consequently, it is not only Kitchen's interpretation of the past that is influenced by her present state, but her interpretation of the photographs is skewed by this as well. Having information from the present can be helpful in her interpretations because she is missing a lot of information about the subjects in her photographs; however, her interpretations are also complicated by her present knowledge as well.

Knowing the future of the people involved in the photographs is not always helpful in Kitchen's mission to "animate and resurrect" (xii) the past. Sometimes she must rely on the photographs and whatever other information she has access to for her interpretations. However, for example, when she is provided with an explanation written by her mother of a photograph her

mother father took on their way to Santa Fe, she questions what she reads based on what she sees in the photograph.



Figure 4. Page 117. Picture of children taken by Judith Kitchen's parents on their way to Santa Fe. Scanned from *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate* by Judith Kitchen, © 2012 by Judith Kitchen.

After looking at this picture, she says that she turned "it over to see the past recorded in her mother's words: *Three little Mexicans in their adobe house (made of mud). We gave them pennies and they let us take their pictures- they could speak English- (on our way to Santa Fe)*" (116). After reading her mother's record of the past, she finds herself questioning it. She writes, "Suddenly a chasm of doubt. Surely we should take her word for it. The photo spells one thing, but she spells another. Once you ask questions, nothing makes sense" (117). Clearly the description of the photograph and the images in the photograph do not agree with one another and this bothers Kitchen because it doesn't make sense to her.

While she acknowledges that in the big picture the answers she might get from this particular photograph do not matter much, she also points out the ambiguity of the situation because she is searching for answers that may not be there. She says, "Let's agree that pictures speak more than a thousand words, that words are fickle, subject to revision. That the past can be

altered, resurrected, expunged. They stare back at us, [...] revealing the patterns inside that could-if they would-give us answers" (117). As evinced by this quotation, even though the picture above does not give her any unambiguous answers, Kitchen still believes that there are answers to be found in her photographs if the patterns "would" reveal them.

There are other pictures in the memoir that do not provide much in the way of answers for Kitchen or her readers. One of them is a picture of an unknown girl and her dog. What is perhaps most puzzling about this picture is that, according to Kitchen, someone saved it not knowing who the subject of the photograph was.



Figure 5. Page 152. Picture of a girl who is not aunt Gretta. Scanned from *Half in Shade: Family, Photography, and Fate* by Judith Kitchen, © 2012 by Judith Kitchen.

When explaining this photograph Kitchen writes, "'Not aunt Gretta.' That's all it says on the back, so what are we to do with this? Someone knows only the negative. [...] There's nothing to make of this fancy but fancy" (152). If there is nothing to make of this photograph, why include it at all? Kitchen provides a possible answer as she continues to expound on the photograph. She writes, "Let her wave her baton at the future, filling us up with the lack of her name" (152).

As indicated by this quotation, her inclusion of this photograph in her memoir serves to highlight the "lack" of information or gap in memory left behind by some of them. Kitchen wants her readers to feel what the photograph leaves out of the picture, her name, her story. By including this photograph, Kitchen draws attention to the limitations of photographs.

Highlighting this gap is fitting because even though the photographs can reveal some information about the past, they are sure to leave mysteries as well. Like memory the information in photographs is fragmented and uncertain. There are things left out of photographs much like, as Auge explains there are things left out of memories when he argues that "oblivion is the life force of memory" (21). Perhaps that is one reason why she has used them and why they are becoming so popular in memoir. Photographs are a lot like memories, subjective pieces of a past reality that can, in a way, represent memory perhaps better than text alone can. Because they articulate the representation of memory, photographs are a highly suitable medium for memoirists.

IV. Conclusion: The Ambiguity of Photographs and the Representation of Memory

As evident in the uncertainty surrounding these photographs, it is clear that the work of postmemory is complicated. The photographs that Kitchen uses in her text are representations of the past; therefore, they serve as an aid to representation in the memoir. However, it is also clear that photographs are not unambiguous portrayals of the past and that they complicate representation as well. The idea of what photographs can reveal about the past is linked to the idea of accuracy of representation and what photographs can "prove" that were discussed in the last chapter. As Hirsch argues, photographs "reveal as much as they conceal. They are as opaque as they are transparent" (2). In other words, they show as much as they hide, leaving the past, as

Kitchen might say, *Half in Shade*. If the photographs leave the past *Half in Shade*, then photographs are not only half-truths as discussed in the last chapter, but they are also half-shaded windows to the past.

However, even though photographs vacillate between what they reveal and conceal about the past, they are not rendered useless as modes of representation, particularly for memoirists such as Kitchen. The reason for this is that Kitchen is not trying to represent the past accurately; she is trying to represent memories, many of which are not even her own. As Annette Kuhn states "The past is gone for ever. We cannot return to it, nor can we reclaim it now as it was. But that does not mean it is now lost to us. The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed is unrecoverable, its traces still remain. From these traces [...] a (re)construction, if not a simulacrum, of the event can be pieced together" (4). In other words, the past cannot be reclaimed, but a representation of it can be pieced together by the traces left behind, like photographs. Rather than trying to reclaim the past "as it was" (4) Kitchen is trying to use "imaginative investment" to "animate and resurrect" (xii) her own version of the past that is laced with fact and speculation in order to bring the subjects of the photographs "back into the light" (xi). Because she is attempting to represent things that are themselves imprecise, the ambiguity of the photographs is fitting.

Therefore, rather than having that uncertainty be a problem of representation, the photographs, with their benefits and drawbacks, serve to be an articulation of the representation of memory and postmemory. They did not merely inspire the story, nor do they simply help tell the story. No, they are an integral part of the representation of memory, familial memory, and postmemory as they converge on and diverge from the past and the present. They are the pieces of postmemory that help tell the story, not only of Kitchen, but of memory itself.

Chapter Three: Surviving through Storytelling in *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*

"There is visibility that does not amount to an image; there are images which consist wholly in words. But the commonest regime of the image is one that presents a relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship that plays on both the analogy *and* the dissemblance between them. This relationship by no means requires the two terms to be materially present. The visible can be arranged in meaningful tropes; words deploy a visibility that can be blinding." (7) -Jacques Ranciere, *The Future of the Image*

I. Introduction: Two or Three Things about the Text

In her text, *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* published in 1996, Dorothy Allison explains why she tells stories by stating the following: "Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that to go on living I have to tell stories" (72). In this short but complex text, the author reflects on both her life experiences and, as she indicates, the art of storytelling and her need to tell stories in order to "go on living" (72). As a victim of rape when she was a child, she recounts in her memoir that many of her family members did not believe her when she finally spoke out about the repeated physical and sexual abuse she was subjected to by her step-father. Thus her family silenced her voice, like her rapist did, again by not listening to her, leading her to reconstruct her story in this experimental memoir?

Because Allison's voice has been silenced repeatedly by her rapist and family members who would not listen to her story, telling it can potentially be an empowering experience for her. However, like any memoirist, she faces the possibility of encountering many obstacles in her storytelling including challenges associated with memory that impact the issues of representation she inevitably encounters as well. These representational concerns include problems of how to tell the story truthfully and difficulties of representing trauma. These challenges also have the potential to further traumatize Allison as they could stifle her voice again by making her story difficult to tell. However, she chooses to address these concerns by drawing attention to them

and especially by incorporating photographs into her narrative in a self-critical way. Telling her story despite the difficulties she faces is a potentially empowering experience for Allison especially because she has been silenced repeatedly.

To understand Allison's text as a narrative of silence, as I frame it here in this chapter, it is necessary to explain where it fits and/or does not fit within the category of memoir. *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* is categorized on the jacket of the book and most commonly referred to as a memoir which is a genre that falls under the larger classification of nonfiction, a word indicating that the material contained in the text is true. Typically, a memoir focuses on one aspect of the author's life to be explored in depth. In her book, *Writing a Life: Teaching Memoir to Sharpen Insight, Shape Meaning-and Triumph over Tests*, Katherine Bomer explains that memoir is "a mere slice of ordinary life—a certain time period, a special relationship, a particular theme or angle on life," and that it borrows "major elements from its larger relative the autobiography [... such as] honesty, self-analysis, and self-revelation" (4). If memoir is, as Bomer claims, an honest slice of the author's life, then what Allison does in her so-called memoir certainly stretches the definition of the genre.

Allison's text then is a work that pushes the limits of this definition of memoir in at least two ways. First, Allison toys with the idea of what is absolutely "true" in this text, calling into question how much of her story is factual. Secondly, she includes much more than a mere slice of her life, as is common in a traditional memoir, because she does not want trauma to be the sole focus of her life or her text. Thus, because Allison pushes the boundaries of memoir, her text is difficult to classify. In fact, Timothy Dow Adams has an entirely different name for the genre in which she is writing. In his article, "Telling Stories in Dorothy Allison's *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure*" Adams asserts that "*Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* is itself somewhat

illegitimate, a kind of bastard genre whose literary ancestors are ambiguous" (84). If a bastard is a child of unmarried parents, then Allison's writing stems from genres that are unmarried and, as Adams suggests, ambiguous. Furthermore, if she is writing in a "bastard genre" as Adams claims she is, then that means that she is less constricted by genre conventions and can be more creative with the means in which she tells her story.

Allison's text diverges from the typical memoir because the story she tells is not one small piece of her life, but multiple pieces that span her life and that are interwoven throughout her text. She begins her story by discussing what it was like growing up poor in South Carolina with her family, focusing mainly on the hardened woman who raised her. She also divulges that she was physically and sexually abused by her stepfather from the age of five through much of her teen years (Allison 39, 67-8). Then she includes moments of her life as a young adult exploring her sexuality as a lesbian, taking up karate, and learning to think of her body as her own and to enjoy sex. Later in the memoir, she incorporates moments of her adult life with her son, Wolf, examining how that relationship has changed her as well. In this text, Allison also explains how she transformed herself from a victim to a survivor. She does so by telling her story. In order "to go on living," (Allison 72) she has to tell this story; however, as previously mentioned, she does not tell it without having to navigate her way through some obstacles.

To understand the roles that trauma and silence play in *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*, it is essential to examine the obstacles that might be posed by things such as memory, "truth," and trauma. It is also necessary to consider the ways in which they would challenge a trauma survivor whose voice has been silenced repeatedly. Furthermore, it is important to contemplate how facing these obstacles and finding ways to narrate through them would be a potentially empowering experience for a trauma survivor such as Allison .

II. Working from Memory

The first set of complications Allison encounters stems from putting the experiences of one's life into narrative form, as Allison does in this memoir. These issues partially consist of lapses in memory and knowledge about one's past. The concerns associated with memory impact how a story can be represented, shaping the kind of story that can be told before representation of those memories can even be considered. John F. Kihlstrom, states that "memoirs are, almost by definition, literary representations of memory. And so, like memories, they may be inaccurate or willfully distorted. Memoirs are representations of memory, not of history" (1). This means that memories are not entirely factual or reliable accounts of events. If memories are often unreliable and memoirs represent memory, then memoirs too are not necessarily factual representations of events. This is why it is crucial to take into account the issues memory may pose to a memoirist such as Allison. I ask, might she be accused of being inaccurate or worse untruthful?

Considering that her own family members did not believe her when she finally told her them the story of her rape, it certainly has the potential to be a concern for Allison. She explains what it was like not to be believed when she writes, "I need to say that when I told, only my mamma believed me, only mamma did anything at all, that thirty years later one of my aunts could still say to me that she didn't really believe it, that he had been such a hardworking, good-looking man. Something else must have happened. Maybe it had been different" (42). Here Allison claims that only one person believed her when she spoke up about the rape. She explains why she decided to speak about it when she writes, "This was a wall in my life, I say, a wall I had to climb over every day. It was always there for me, deflecting my rage toward people who knew nothing about what had happened to me or why I should be angry at them" (43). In other

words, she wanted those around her to understand why she was so angry. Her mother believed her story, but, according to Allison, she was the only one. The rest of her family silenced her by not believing her. In fact, she claims that she has an aunt who still cannot accept her story as the truth. Allison chooses to see this as her aunt being in denial and believing "what she needed more than what she knew" (43). Even though she is "strong enough to know" (43) that her aunt is in denial, she is still subjected to the feeling of not being believed. Because she has already experienced not being believed by those close to her, not being believed by her audience might be a concern for her as she writes her memoir.

Faced with the possibility of not being believed, why would Allison subject herself to potential scrutiny? In regards to the reasons why people like Allison feel a need to make narratives out of their memories, one way to begin to explain this is through the work of Marc Auge who asserts in his book *Oblivion* that "an individual feels the need to recapitulate his existence, to tell his life, to give it some coherence" (43). In other words, human beings have a natural tendency, a need even, to tell the stories of their lives. Doing so allows them to make meaning of the things that happen in their lives and of their lives as a whole. For Allison, telling her story is what allows her to survive.

However, as is evident when reading Allison's memoir, the stories that people tell themselves and others about the past could never succeed in representing their lives accurately, not by any means. There are several reasons that these stories, even when they are relayed with the best of intentions, fail to represent the past accurately. One reason is simply that people do not remember everything that happens in their lives, nor would many of them want to. If "oblivion is the life force of memory and remembrance is the product" (Auge 21), then memories are made up of not just what people remember, but what they forget. If people remembered

everything that happened in their lives, then nothing would seem important. As James E. Young writes in his foreword of Auge's book, "in forgetting nothing, we cannot know the meaning of anything we've remembered" (vii), meaning that it would be difficult to make a sense of one's life if he or she did not forget some things. The stories that people make of their lives have necessarily have pieces of them missing. This matters because the things that people forget because of oblivion shape the kind of story they can tell before they are even able to decide what should or should not be included in those stories.

III. Trying to Tell the Truth

In addition to Auge's theory of oblivion, there is another reason why these stories may fail to represent the past accurately. As Auge says, "we are all living fictions" (38). In other words, the lives that people tell themselves they are living are fictional. He explains that people live multiple tales and that

we do not always resist the desire the reinterpret them, remodel them, in order to adapt them to the one we are in the process of living[...] written or not, these tales are always (even when they are not 'fabrications,' 'products of the imagination,' 'exaggerations' likely to arouse smiles from other witnesses) the fruit of memory and oblivion, of a work of composition and recomposition that translates the tension exerted by the expectation of the future upon the interpretation of the past. (39)

Auge explains how both the present and the future shape how people interpret the past. This is an unavoidable phenomenon that makes the stories people tell about their past selves fictional. Who people think they are and who they want to be impacts their understandings of their past

selves, thus causing them to construct a story that fits with their images of the present and future that explains how they got here and where they are planning to go.

In Allison's case, she is no longer the child she was when she was victimized by her rapist. As a child, Allison may not have had the words or the wherewithal to express what has happened to her. As an adult, Allison had the ability to tell her story; however, she is distanced from the experience by time and the events that have happened since she was raped as a child. The story of her past self is shaped by the version of herself when she wrote this text. Allison states that as she tells her story, she "become[s] someone else, and the story changes. [She] is no longer a grown-up out-raged child but a woman letting go of her outrage" (44). This means that as she is telling her story, it transforms her and she becomes someone else and her story becomes something else as well as a result of this transformation. Not, only is she a different person when she begins writing this story than she was as a child experiencing these events, telling the story changes her perspective and the story that is told.

In addition to the idea of oblivion and fictions as discussed previously according to Auge, memory also involves issues of perspective that complicate any possibility of an accurate representation of the past. Adams claims that "Memoir, like all forms of autobiography, is on the border between fiction and non-fiction, and all autobiographers are unreliable narrators" (85). This produces an interesting paradox. An audience must consider the ways in which an author may be biased on the subject of his or her own life, but at the same time the author is certainly the primary source one would seek on the topic. The author is the supposed expert on his or her own life, but others may remember events differently than he or she would.

To examine the ways in which perspective impedes accuracy in representation, it is necessary to note that Allison states she is "the only one who can tell [...her] story and say what

it means" (70). Based on this statement, it is clear that the author believes she is in control of her story and that she is the only person who can say what it means. On the one hand, it is important for her audience to listen to her in order not to silence her voice yet again even though she may be biased and her memories may be unreliable. However, on the other hand, her story can never be entirely accurate because she is inescapably biased and her memories are undoubtedly unreliable, not to mention that her story is complicated by all of these ideas before she even gets to make any representational decisions about her story.

In addition to the fact that Allison is not capable of controlling the meaning of her story due to the fact that previous to any representation by the author, her story is already limited by obstacles like oblivion, fictions, and perspective, her story is also out of her control because meaning is subjective and cannot be restricted by authorial intention. In his book, *Image-Music-Text* Roland Barthes explains that "We know that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (146). According to Barthes, a text has multiple meanings. Moreover, he claims that "there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author" (148). In other words, it is the reader that makes meaning of the text, not the author. The author creates a text perhaps intending a certain meaning, but once another person read it, that meaning is subject to that other person's interpretation. Complicating matters further, the author also does not have the ability to control his or her meaning because language is so slippery. Therefore, Allison cannot dictate how her readers interpret her words.

IV. Troubles of Representing Trauma

Even though Allison's story is already partially defined and shaped by its limits due to memory, perspective, and language before the author is able to represent anything, her story is also shaped by the representational difficulties she must contend with once she starts telling her story as well. The obstacle that presents probably the most substantial difficulties for Allison is the question of how to represent the trauma she experienced as a child. Having experienced this trauma makes her vulnerable to suffer more traumas through the continued suppression of her voice that she may experience from the storytelling difficulties she faces and from potential judgments about her representation. In her book *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Leigh Gilmore clarifies this idea by explaining that in regards to trauma survivors telling their stories "the judgments they invite may be too similar to forms in which trauma was experienced. When the contest is over who can tell the truth, the risk of being accused of lying (or malingering, or inflating, or whining) threatens the writer into continued silence" (3). In other words, a trauma survivor worrying about how the representation of his or her story might be received has the potential to silence that survivor's voice.

Concern about how her representation will be received does not silence Allison; however, the repeated rape Allison experienced at the hands of her stepfather raises questions about how to represent it in her memoir. Trauma is not something easily represented, but Allison's trauma is perhaps even more difficult than other circumstances because she was raped as a child. In her article titled, "Limit-Cases: Trauma, Self-Representation, and the Jurisdictions of Identity," Gilmore explains that:

Crucial to the experience of trauma are the difficulties that arise in trying to articulate it [...]. Indeed, the relation between trauma and representation, and

especially language, is at the center of claims about trauma as a category. The consensus position argues that trauma is beyond language in some crucial way, that language not only fails in the face of trauma, but is mocked by it and confronted with its own insufficiency. Yet even as the view that one cannot speak about or represent trauma prevails, language is asserted as that which can and must heal the survivor and the community. (132)

In this passage, Gilmore explains that representation of trauma is clearly at best problematic; however, it is also necessary if there is any possibility for healing to take place. She notes articulating the experience of trauma is so problematic that the majority of people hold the position that trauma is "beyond language" (132). This is especially challenging for the trauma survivor because language is also generally believed to be what can heal the survivor.

Additionally, Gilmore claims that "Language is asserted as that which can make trauma real even as it is theorized as that which fails in the face of trauma. This apparent contradiction in trauma studies represents a constitutive ambivalence. For the survivor of trauma, such an ambivalence can amount to an impossible injunction to tell what cannot, in this view, be spoken" (133). Faced with the problem of representing what some may call unspeakable trauma, it can seem impossible for a survivor like Allison to do her story justice.

Even though representing trauma may seem impossible, there are those who would argue that representing anything is possible. For example, Ranciere in his book, *The Future of the Image* claims that "In order to assert an unrepresentability in art that is commensurate with an unthinkability of the event, the latter must itself have been rendered entirely thinkable, entirely necessary to thought. The logic of the unrepresentable can only be sustained by a hyperbole that ends up destroying it" (138). In other words, when someone claims that an event is

unrepresentable because it is equally unthinkable, the event is made thinkable in the process. Therefore, the event is thinkable and it can be represented. By exaggerating the problem of unthinkability, the logic behind the argument that events are not representable is nullified. Therefore, as indicated by Ranciere, anything can be represented. If anything can be represented that means that even the most traumatic events such as rape can be represented. However, that does not mean that representing traumatic events is not complicated or difficult. Nevertheless, just because something is problematic that does not mean that it is therefore impossible.

Perhaps the challenge posed by representing the trauma she experienced is why Allison chose to write the fictionalized version of her story, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, before writing this memoir. In fact, in regards to Allison's response to an interview question that Adams uses in his article, he says that "she seems to be telling us that in a fictional format she can best avoid what she calls 'pseudo-porn,' a narrative which produces a pornography of victimization through graphic and gratuitous detail [...] (83). Evidently, the representation of the trauma is a concern for Allison, but it is not one that deters her from eventually writing her story as a memoir. It is merely one of the many narrative issues she faces working to potentially further stifle her voice that require her to make decisions about representation.

V. Navigating these Obstacles with Text

Confronted with the narrative difficulties associated with representing memory, truth, and trauma, Allison still attempts to "tell" her story. Not only is telling this story a potentially empowering experience for her because her voice has been continually silenced by her rapist and her nonbelieving family members, but navigating through the obstacles she encounters is also potentially empowering because she is able to find a way to tell her story even when these

difficulties challenge her by threatening to stifle her voice yet again by making it more difficult to tell her story. She addresses the issues she faces by self-critically drawing attention to them using text and family photographs as narrative tools in her storytelling. By doing so, Allison is able to benefit from her awareness of the issues. Furthermore, she does not allow the storytelling obstacles she faces to continue a cycle of silence even though they might be particularly daunting to a trauma survivor such as herself.

Allison attends to her representational issues in several self-critical ways. To begin with, the issues associated with lost memories and lack of knowledge previously discussed is something with which Allison is both concerned and that she addresses directly in her memoir and even in her title. As Adams suggests, her title, *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*, demonstrates that "even the number of things about her past she knows for sure is not certain" (90). Allison returns to this idea time and time again because her Aunt Dot would often say to her, "Two or three things I know for sure. Of course it's never the same things, and I'm never as sure as I'd like to be" (Allison 5). Allison takes her aunt's saying and makes it all her own in this text. She uses it several times in the memoir to make various points including that she knows "two or three things for sure, and one of them is just this-if we cannot name our own we are cut off at the root, our hold on our lives as fragile as a seed in a wind" (12). This indicates that she understands the limitations of her narrative, which have been made even more limited by the lack of and unreliability of her family stories, stories that help people define who they are. Her memories and her knowledge of her own background are uncertain, creating gaps in her story that result from both her and her family's oblivion, shaping the kind of story she can tell.

The uncertainty and unreliability of the memories that Allison has also calls into question how "true" this story might be. From the first page of her text, it becomes apparent that she is

aware of this problem in her narrative and is using that awareness to her advantage. She even plays with the idea of what is true in her storytelling. One way that she does this is demonstrated by her provocative beginning to her memoir. "Let me tell you a story" (1), she begins. It is important to note that in this initial sentence the word, "let" is a plea from the author for an audience who will listen to her story, which is particularly significant for those whose voices have been silenced. It is also worth noting that she chooses to use the term, story because as Adams states, "the word story also suggests a wide range of activities, including reports, deliberately false tales, and lying. Children are often asked, following an obviously untrue account, 'Are you telling a story'" (84). By using the term, story, Allison invites questions from her audience about how much of this narrative is factual.

This is something that she continues to do as her narrative progresses. In the pages that follow Allison says, "I'll tell you a story and maybe you'll believe me" (3), setting the stage to her believe-it-or-not approach to her memoir. She then continues as follows:

I'm a storyteller. I'll work to make you believe me. Throw in some real stuff, change a few details, add the certainty of outrage. I know the use of fiction in a world of hard truth, the way fiction can be a harder piece of truth. The story of what happened, or what did not happen but should have-that story can become a curtain drawn shut, a piece of insulation, a disguise, a razor, a tool that changes every time it is used and sometimes becomes something other than we intended.

The story becomes the thing needed.

Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is what it means to have no loved version of your life but the one you make.

Let me tell you a story. If I could convince myself, I can convince you. (3-

4)

Allison claims that as a storyteller she is willing to work to make her readers believe her. She also reveals that she is willing to make changes that will probably outrage a reader as well (3), again calling into question how much of her story is "true." As Adams states particularly about the beginning of this passage, "Here she seems to be saying that her need to tell her basic life story again, in a new and factual genre, is coupled with another autobiographical impulse-her need to thwart those readers looking for some definitive and absolutely accurate version of her family's story" (85). By doing so, she shows that she is aware of her narrative issues and that she has no qualms about using her truth versus what is absolutely factual. However, this passage also shows that the author, as previously mentioned, wants an audience who will listen and that she will work to make this audience believe her story, this story that she needs in order to survive.

After toying with audience expectations, Allison reveals that when she begins telling her story she senses that it is what allows her to survive. She exclaims, "When I began there was only the suspicion that making up the story as you went along was the way to survive" (4). This is not only the story of Allison's survival, but it is also the means of her survival as a survivor of trauma as well. Her storytelling is a tool that she uses to make a version of her life that she can love (3). Because she uses methods of storytelling in this text that stretch beyond the realm of typical memoirs such as toying with truth and including multiple stories in her prose, she is better able to tell her story and create a version of her life that is acceptable to her. By drawing attention to and addressing the fact that there are issues with her storytelling, she is able to use her awareness and creativity to tell her story.

VII. Navigating these Obstacles with Image

Another way Allison tells her story creatively and self-critically is with the use of the photographs that she chooses to include with her text. Just by choosing to include the photographs in her memoir, Allison demonstrates her use of distinctive modes of storytelling to reveal and address certain issues of representation. Including these photographs is a decision that Allison makes for several reasons. One of the reasons Allison is so interested in photographs is because her mother had so many of them. She describes them by explain that "the faces in Mama's box were full of stories- ongoing tragedies, great novels, secrets and mysteries and longings no one would ever know" (17) because so many of those faces were anonymous to her and her mother. Noticing that "It was the ones no one remembered who pulled at [...her]" (18), she realized that she wanted to discover the mysteries inherent in these photographs to better understand the people from whom she comes because she lacks stories about them. She tried to get her mother to tell her about them and write down what she could remember so that their stories would not be lost. However, her mother never did hold up her end of the bargain. She "would touch the pictures tentatively, as if her memories were more real than the images, as if she did not want to look too hard at the reality of all those people lost and gone" (19). That being said, the mystery surrounding many of the photographs is the reason why Allison is so interested in them and why she chose to include so many of them in her text.

In addition to her interest in the mystery of the photographs, the idea that perhaps memories might be more real than the photographs is worth noting because photographs are so often used as "proof" that something happened or to document an event. As mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, Susan Sontag writes in her book, *On Photography*, "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a

photograph of it" (5). Allison may toy with what is "true" in her text, but she also claims that she is willing to work to make her audience believe her. If the "truth" of her text is in question, then the photographs she uses to help narrate her story could serve to legitimize it by providing photographic "evidence."

In contrast to the idea that photographs can "prove" that something has happened, Sontag also explains that they can only "prove" so much. Sontag argues that "photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal" (9). The version of the past displayed in photographs is not real because photographs are merely representations of the real cut off at the frame. They only show part of the picture in one frozen moment. Therefore, even though photographs can furnish evidence to establish reality and truth, they also have limitations and problems of their own. This idea is apparent when Allison uses the photographs in her book in a way that might continue to frustrate an audience looking for pure facts. As Adams claims, "the family photographs she includes are not always intended to provide unambiguous documentary evidence" (90), which becomes evident when "the author's prose description includes numerous details which cannot be verified by checking the image[s]" (94). By including details in her descriptions that can and cannot be verified, Allison shows that photographs can provide "evidence," but she also shows that what they can verify is limited.

However, the photographs serve another purpose aside from supplying evidence. As Ranciere claims, they can silently speak (13). Photography, he writes, became an art by "exploiting a double poetics of the image, by making its images, simultaneously or separately, two things: the legible testimony of a history written on faces or objects and pure blocks of visibility, impervious to any narrativization, any intersection of meaning" (11). In other words images represent "relations between the sayable and the visible" (12). By doing so, images can

silently speak, meaning that these objects can provide narrative information encoded in silent images and that even in their silence, when they no longer communicate a message, that something is said about the profoundness of the silence or the thing causing the silence itself. Because images have the ability to speak silently, Allison is able to offer up the photographs to perhaps say certain things that she may struggle to say using only language.

If Allison's photographs can silently speak, then what is it that they say? To begin with, the idea that the silent can speak is representative of Allison's journey from a victim with a silenced voice to the speaker of her own story. In regards to this journey Allison writes, "I am supposed to be deeply broken, incapable of love or trust or passion. But I am not, and part of why that is so is the nature of the stories I told myself to survive" (69), emphasizing the idea that telling stories is what allowed her to be unbroken by her rapist. The photographs work to highlight the ideas of silence and speech that are at the very core of this text. Moreover, the photographs say things about her family and life that are hard to articulate like the level of their poverty and the depth of the impact of the trauma she experienced. The photographs say that she has difficulty expressing certain things, and they say some of the things that she has difficulty expressing for her.

As Adams explains, Allison strategically uses the photographs "to illustrate her narrative difficulties" (92) and "as a way to bridge her narrative dilemma" (87). In other words, she draws attention to and addresses issues of representation with the photographs she includes in her text. He notes that when she "describes some of the apparently normal childhood pictures in narrative terms" (Adams 92), that Allison says, "Behind the story I tell is the one I don't. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear. Behind my carefully buttoned collar is my nakedness, the struggle to find clean clothes, food, meaning, and money" (Allison 39).

Unfortunately, she cannot make her audience hear the story she wants them to hear because language is limited, meaning that communication of her story is limited as well. She may not be able to make them hear the story she wants them to, but perhaps with the help of the photographs and their silent speech she can help them see at least some of it.

The photographs Allison uses help draw attention to and fill in the gaps that language leaves behind and vice versa. Allison seems to be aware of both the positives and the negatives of visual and textual representation. Because she tells her story self-critically (in a way that anticipates criticism in relation to issues of representation, drawing attention to and addressing them with her modes of storytelling), she is able to use the photographs along with her text to help tell her story. Understanding the limitations of both image and language allow her to use her understanding of the drawbacks to her benefit rather than ignoring them and pretending they do not exist.

When Allison discusses the trauma she experienced, she continues to employ narration techniques using both text and image to help tell her story in ways that warrant closer examination. Just before she tells this part of her story, she states, "behind this moment is silence, years of silence" (39). Then following this statement is an extra line of space before her next paragraph begins. There is a pause, a moment of silence even, before she talks about the rape. She does this in other places of the memoir as well, but it is important to note in this instance specifically because she creates a visual pause and by doing so places an emphasis on the silence she was subjected to before the telling of this story. After Allison pauses, she starts telling the story of the rape when she says, "The man raped me. It's the truth. It's a fact. I was five, and he was eight months married to my mother. That's how I always began to talk about it-when I finally did begin to talk about it" (39). This statement is then immediately followed by

two pages of photographs that interrupt her prose. She continues by stating, "I'd say, 'It was rape, the rape of a child.' Then I'd march the words out-all the old tearing awful words" (42). In this part of the passage, Allison discusses how she began speaking about it to show how she learned to talk about it the way she does now, "adamant, unafraid, unashamed" (44). By learning to talk about the rape "adamantly," she learns to not let the words control her so that she can talk about it.

Theorist Cathy Caruth in her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative, and History* explains the difficulties of telling such a story. She asserts that trauma is "[...] the story of a wound that cries out [...]" (4). In other words, it is a painful story that wants to be told. While Allison eventually learns to talk about the experience "adamantly," her description of how she would march out "the old tearing awful words" (42) when she began to talk about it would suggest that her trauma is not only "a wound that cries out" (4). It also implies that it is a wound that she has been hurt by speaking about as well.

Even though her story might be painful to tell, Allison feels it is also necessary. Allison explains why she feels it is so important to talk about it when she exclaims, "My theory is that talking about it makes a difference-being a woman who can stand up anywhere and say, I was five and the man was big. So let me say it" (44). This disturbing statement is not typically the kind of language people like to hear. Some people may not want to hear her story at all, but it is important not to silence Allison's voice to avoid hearing a harsh truth because she needs to tell her story to survive her trauma. The quotation above contains one of the most outrageous statements she makes about the rape, but even these words fail to express everything she wishes she could as indicated by her statement that "The words do not explain [it]" (44). Here Allison

acknowledges that her words have failed her. The words are not capable of communicating her experience.

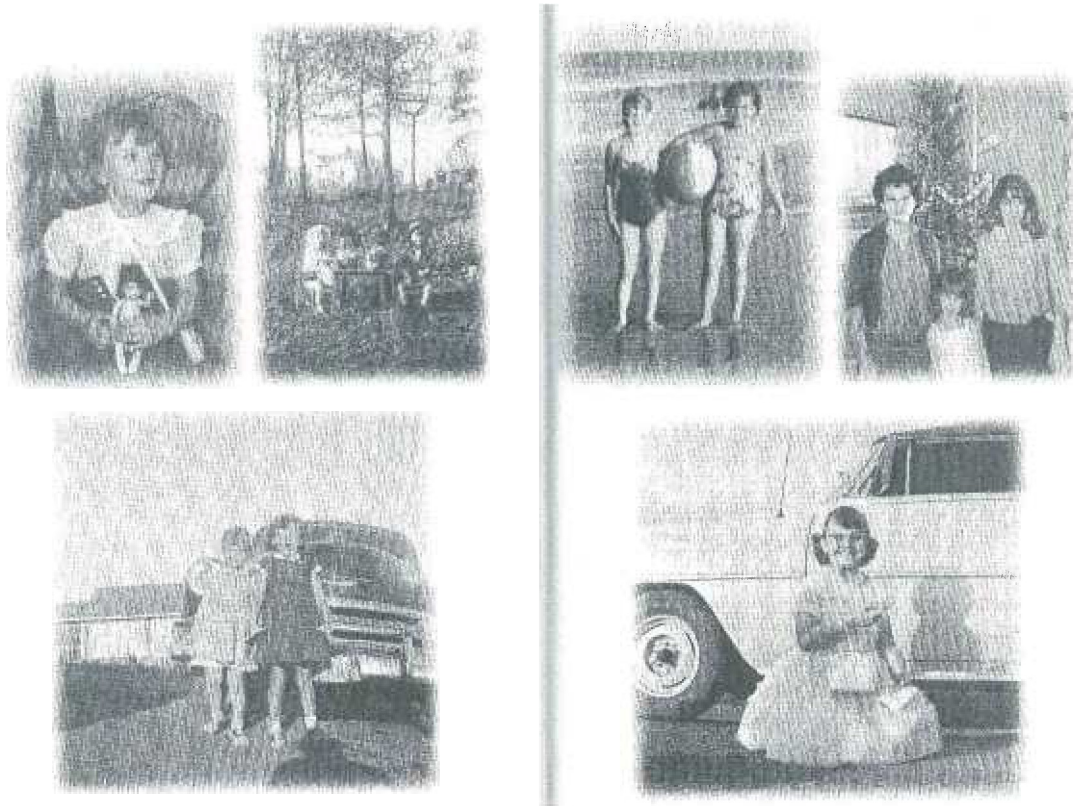


Figure 1. Page 40. (top left) Dorothy, 1954; (top right) Dorothy and Anne, 1954; (bottom) Dorothy and Anne, 1956. Page 41. (top left) Dorothy and Anne, 1960; (top right) Dorothy Wanda, and Anne, 1963; (bottom) Dorothy in Easter outfit. 1957. Scanned from *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* by Dorothy Allison, © 1996 by Dorothy Allison.

One reason that Allison chooses to interrupt her prose with her family photographs is probably that words fail to express her experience satisfactorily. Because the words leave a gap, Allison draws attention to it by including the photographs while simultaneously filling that opening with images in the process. By drawing attention to this gap using photography, she once again illustrates her narrative difficulties (Adams 92). Considering the extra space before

she begins telling this part of her story and the interruption of the photographs, it is as if she hesitates, then starts and stops and starts again. It seems like she is stammering out the story of the rape, perhaps taking deep breaths before she can speak. Using these visual markers of speech, Allison highlights the gap that language leaves her with and the difficulty she experiences telling this story. She is using visual narration techniques to tell the story of her storytelling difficulties.

In addition to the fact that language is limited, a gap is also created by the traumatic experience itself. According to Caruth, trauma is defined as the "response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (91). According to this definition, trauma is something that is not "fully grasped" at the time that it occurs. Caruth clarifies this when she explains that "traumatic experience [...] suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (91-2). This would suggest that directly experiencing trauma is what prevents the trauma survivor from being able to comprehend the traumatic event at the time it occurs. How then does one describe an experience that one did not "fully grasp" when it occurred? This is precisely the problem Allison faces which is likely why she draws attention to that gap with visual markers.

By attempting to fill in the space left behind by trauma with the photographs, Allison allows the photographs to legitimize aspects of her story and to silently speak for her. However, the photographs she chooses to include in this section are not images that one might expect. The six photographs on these pages showing the family smiling, playing, joking, and celebrating interrupt her discussion of the rape. Adams states that this section results in an "odd juxtaposition, the images belying the confession," (92) meaning that the images and the text

seem to contradict one another in an odd way. If that is true, then what are the photographs doing there? What do they reveal?

While the photographs create a juxtaposition that leaves the reader with questions like those just mentioned, it is a juxtaposition that is quite fitting for this story. As Allison says, she refuses to tell the story "the world wants, the story of us broken, the story of us never laughing out loud, never learning to enjoy sex, never being able to love or to trust love again, the story in which all that survives is the flesh" (72). Allison explains how that version of her life is a lie (71). She proves that it is a lie by allowing these photographs to speak silently with the information encoded in them, legitimizing her story of becoming a survivor rather than the story that is a lie.

In this memoir, Allison rebels against the idea that the sole focus of her life is rape. She refuses to let herself "be made over into [... her] rapist's creation" (71). "My theory," says Allison, "is that everything that is said about [... rape] is assumed to say something about me, as if a thing I never wanted to happen and did not know how to stop is the only thing that can be said about my life" (44). By refusing to let trauma dominate even this section of her memoir by including these photographs of her family, she calls attention to the fact that her trauma is just one part of her story, albeit an important one, just as it is only a part of the difficulties she faces in telling this story.

VII. Conclusion: Two or Three Final Things

In fact, Allison encounters many obstacles while telling her story. These representational concerns are often connected to one another. The narrative difficulties she faces include issues related to memory that influence problems of representation, shaping the kind of story she can

tell before she can even make any decisions about what to include in her story and how to tell it. Because it is often inaccurate, memory also raises questions about how true her story is. To complicate matters further, she is also faced with difficulties of representation, including problems of how to best tell her story truthfully and difficulties of representing trauma.

Rather than succumbing to the storytelling challenges Allison faces and letting them silence her voice, she chooses to address these issues by drawing attention to them and incorporating photographs into her narrative self-critically. While the photographs are also a fallible medium, they allow her to say more than she can with words alone. Combining images with text allows her to exploit "a relationship between the sayable and the visible, a relationship that plays on both the analogy *and* the dissemblance between them" (Ranciere 7). By choosing to make these narrative moves, Allison is able to acknowledge the fact that she does have narrative issues while addressing them with her text and the photographs at the same time. Bearing in mind the difficulties she faces and the trauma and silence she has been subjected to, it is as empowering for Allison to navigate her way through these issues as it is for her to tell her story. Telling her story is so empowering because her voice was repeatedly silenced for much of her life, both by her rapist and by those who would not listen to or did not believe her story.

Allison may not rid herself of all of the narrative issues she encounters in her memoir, but she certainly does acknowledge them and tells her story the way that she wants to despite her narrative's limitations. By telling her story, Allison shows that even though some may say it is impossible to recall the past accurately and to represent traumatic events justly, it is empowering to tell one's life story the way one chooses to, especially for those whose voices have been silenced in one way or another. Furthermore, it is imperative that people listen to these voices certainly for the sake of those who have been silenced, but also for the sake of society should

society hope to be civilized and not allow victims of rape to be repeatedly traumatized by squelching their voices with unreasonable criticism or to avoid hearing an ugly or inconvenient truth.

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