

Safekeeping

by Abigail Thomas

1. The book is written in several points of view, that shift throughout the narrative. Did you, as a writer, find this effective, or confusing?
2. The book also fluctuates between first, second and third person voices—once again, was this effective, and if not, why not?
3. As memoir and piece of creative nonfiction, did Thomas’s technique of varying lengths—several pages, a paragraph, a sentence—work?
4. There are some lapses of information throughout the book—for example—what happened to her first marriage and why did it end? Should there have been more about her mental illness during her second marriage? What attracted her to the third husband?
5. Did you find enough introspection throughout the book, or was the tone more “matter-of-fact.”
6. Comment on the organization of the book, going back and forth in different times.
7. Was there enough “showing” vs. “telling”?

Thank you *Irene Fick* for the previous questions.

8. How does Thomas use short, self-contained vignettes—some just a paragraph or sentence long—to build an emotional arc without a traditional linear plot? What holds the book together?
9. The book jumps across decades in single paragraphs. How does this mirror the “fluidity of memory,” and what risks or rewards does that technique bring?
10. Thomas described her process as “chipping away” at moments to “look for a shape.” How does that show up in the final book?
11. Why does she switch between first, second, and third person? How does each POV create distance or intimacy with her younger self?
12. The phone calls with her sister interrupt the narrative, with her sister saying things like “*You have to explain it better.*” How does this meta-layer comment on memoir as a constructed form?
13. Grief over her ex-husband’s death sparks many fragments. How does tight focus on one theme—like loss or safekeeping—give tension to such a mosaic structure?
14. Many vignettes end with a quiet epiphany or image that echoes across the book. How do those strong, poetic endings propel you forward despite the fragmentation?
15. Abigail Thomas has been called “the mistress of white space.” What does that mean and is it a good thing?
16. Abigail Thomas says this book “is meant to be an apology in the form of an explanation of what had made me who I was and who I failed to be and who I was becoming.” Knowing that, does it work? Does such an “explanation” have universal appeal?
17. Abigail Thomas says she is “bored with chronology, or even time.” Thus, her reflections are not in any chronological order. Does that work for you?

18. These pieces are written in three points of view—some first person, some second, and some third. Why do you think Thomas chose to do that?

*Thank you **Dame Judy Catterton** for these last four questions.*

19. She had two sisters, but she refers in the book to “my sister.” Do both sisters give her the same advice and respond in the same way?

20. How important was her relationship with her sister(s), over the course of her life?

21. What impact did her perception of her parents’ marriage have on her life?

22. Why was her first husband a student, and she was not? What was her goal in life when she first got pregnant?

23. Seems like her third husband treated her better than either of her two first husbands, yet it’s the friendship with her second husband that she craves.

*Thank you **Kathleen O’Connor** for these last questions.*