

## ABSTRACT

### WHAT CAN'T BE ERASED

Memoirist Patricia Hampl once wrote, “Memory is not a warehouse of finished stories, not a gallery of framed pictures.” Her sentiment appealed to someone like me, a newspaper journalist who’d spent more than ten years telling the stories of others, because I sensed that writing personal narrative could unlock the significance of my remembrances, at age thirty-three, about family history, identity, and loss. The notion that memory was not fixed but rather a collection of loosely related snippets of scenes in my mind, begging for exploration and interpretation, made me want to report in-depth on myself instead of others. Like Hampl, I was shocked to realize that I don’t write *about* what I know, but rather to *find out* what I know. And through the process of telling these life stories, I have started to reach understanding, small insights into what my memories, added up and written down, might mean.

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