

of, “Oh my god, someone really put that together beautifully.” It’s like, how bad was your life, rather than what kind of artful truth can you get from it. So I’m old fashioned on that.

One of the things I do look at directly in nonfiction is memory. In the story “A Child of Her Time” in *American Romances*, there’s a scene where the girl, it’s me, is talking to her mother: “Oh I remember this, I remember this,” and her mother’s like, “No, that didn’t happen.” It was so important to me, but she’s like, “Well that didn’t happen.” Why do we make memories certain ways? In an essay in *The Stranger*, there’s a scene where I’m saying something, and my wife is like, “That’s not what happened.” I’m like, “What?” and she’s like, “Honey, that didn’t happen.” I’d made up in my mind that I’d done this really stupid thing, and she’s like, “That didn’t really happen. You felt really bad, but you didn’t do that stupid thing.” Dealing with the issue of why we tell ourselves certain stories and what are the stories we want to project to other people is interesting to me.

DANIEL SPIRO

The Gifts of the Body has a really interesting structure. I’m wondering how you came to that structure—if it emerged organically as you were writing it or if you had it in mind when you started out.

BROWN

Organic sounds like it just kind of came together. But putting that book together was so hard. I worked as a homecare aid, a bunch of people died, and then I got a writing fellowship to go away to write another book that I proposed, but while I’m away I’m writing letters to Chris, to whom I am now married, about all these memories of people who’d died because I’m away from Seattle and I’m not with my buddies in our grief. I’m like, oh I remember this time, I remember this time. And it’s like, oh god, shit, I’ve got to get to work on my book, and all I’m doing is writing about these AIDS people. So I started thinking, why don’t I make them little stories? Some of them were in the first person, some were in the third person, some were present, some were past, some of them were kind of shaped like . . . there’d be an incident, like the incident of the guy with the bath and