***All The Broken Pieces***

***Summary***

The novel begins with Matt stating his name and relaying his experience of the Vietnam War. In 1975, Matt was airlifted away from the rest of his family from Vietnam. He feels guilty that his younger little brother, who was maimed from several bombs, wasn’t rescued by US soldiers because his mother believed he wouldn’t be adopted in the US and would stand no chance of survival over there.

Two years after his adoption, Matt is 12 years old and in seventh grade. He frequently relieves the trauma he experienced during the Vietnam War. His father, a US soldier, abandons the family. Matt witnessed his younger brother leave the house one day during a bombing and be hit by shrapnel that cleaved off his arms and legs. The constant smoke and sound of bursting grenades haunt his dreams.

He loves his adopted parents (who he calls his “now” mother and father), especially his younger brother, Tommy, he feels like a foreigner in America. He learned English quickly, but still finds some American customs to be odd. He experiences the many thoughts and feelings refuges of any war-torn nation experience. Matt has many nightmares, and his “now” parents have to come in frequently to comfort him. He tries not to tell them anything about Vietnam because he’s convinced that if they knew everything he saw, they wouldn’t want him in their house.

In America, he tries out for a baseball team. Though he’s physically talented, he appears to be rejected by the other boys and is hurt by this. Many of the people in his new community feel resentment toward him; they illogically blame him for the Vietnamese-US war. The provincial town is not very understanding that he has nothing to do with the conflict.

Matt discusses the Vietnam War with two US veterans, Jeff, a piano teacher, and Robinson, his baseball coach. They explain that when his mother pushed him through a crowd of people to hand him to US shoulders, she did so not to abandon him or to save her own skin, but with the hope that he would survive the war.

As Matt hears more and more from those affected by the war, he gains some reconciliation with his new life, and feels forgiveness toward the seemingly callous acts of his birth family. However, he still faces much conflict on the baseball team. Many of his fellow players take pleasure in picking on him. One teammate, Rob, even whispers “My brother died because of you.” He loathes Matt and encourages the others to tease him without mercy.

Even though he senses antagonism between Matt and the other boys, Coach Robinson, who knows about ostracism having been in a wheel chair for some time, forces all of them to work through their differences.

In Jeff’s understanding class, Matt feels comfortable enough to relate some of his experiences with the war. Matt learns that the Vietnam War has affected everyone including US citizens. Matt finds great comfort in music; it distracts him from flashbacks of the horror of war he witnessed. Throughout All the Broken Pieces, it’s clear that baseball and music are the only activities that are keeping Matt sane.

More than halfway through the season, Coach Robinson asks the boys if they understand what baseball is all about. They claim to. But he insists that they don’t. He suggests that the layer of a baseball can always be peeled back to understand it even more. He tells them that thoroughly understanding what something is is important. Matt takes this moral to heart and considers what “all the broken pieces” of his life mean. If he can understand them and put them back together, he can gain some peaceful understanding of his past.

His adopted parents remain a strong support for Matt, and with their persistent love, he feels more and more accepting of his past. As the town grows to know more about Matt, they are more welcoming toward his joining of their community.

Toward the end of the novel, the entire team goes out for pizza. Matt is awarded Most Value Player (MVP). Coach Robinson joins them.

After Matt’s narrative finishes, All the Broken Pieces includes historical information about the Vietnam War. It is noted that the war had some of the lowest levels of support among Americans ever. Nearly 60,000 US soldiers, one million Vietnamese soldiers, and four million Vietnamese civilians died.

Of its many **themes**, several prominent ones are forgiveness, overcoming fear, and reconciling with feelings of displacement.

The novel is told in the first person.