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Samantha McCourt

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Assignment 2

Throughout part three I was thinking about what every story had in common, and what this section had in common with the whole book. I believe this theme is coping. How each person is able to cope with the traumas that they faced. I chose this theme because of the tone of the voices I saw presented in each story. All of the people in these accounts sound as though they are explaining how they justified their own actions during this time, either in Vietnam or in America. Even though many of these people may not have known it, they were showing how they coped with their actions. Having to talk about their experiences again brought to the surface all the feelings they have been trying to deal with for years. How they cope is different for each person. They all have a little justification, some talk about how they entertained themselves and others about how they took action to help make things right. Coping is part of any war. Learning to live in any normal way after killing others or watching them be killed is always difficult. No matter which side of the fighting (even non-fighters like doctors and entertainers) they coped as best as they could.

Helen Tennant Hegelheimer did not have to fight on the ground, like many of the others in this book. "I never said "good-bye" or "good luck." I would shake their hand, look them in the eye, smile, and say, "see you later." (Appy, 108). She had an individual relationship with the men who fought in the name of the United States. This was both a way for others to cope with the idea of war and for her to find her own ways of coping with the idea of being a friend and confidant to men who may very well be traveling overseas to face their death, most certainly the death of others. "We were very aware we were sending them to war and that some would never come back. Threrin lies the guilt. I've spent a lot of time wondering if instead of distracting them I should have warned them." (Appy,109) One of her coping mechanisms is talking about what she did in order to try and make sure that she did what was right. Because she never sees the actual fighting, her version of coping is done in a way that deals with fear of the mostly unknown.

This means she copes by telling herself that she is going to be important, and she may well have been. Important to soldiers, which helped her deal with this job.

Chi Nguyen's story is similar to most of the doctor's whose accounts fill this book. He tells of saving the lives of people who had befallen immense harm. His story, on the surface, seems as though he is not talking about coping with the war, but in reality he is "Triage made me develop the bad habit of working very quickly. We neglected details. You asked yourself only one question: how critical is the wound?" He did everything quickly, only navigating by how critical the wounded person was. Horrible as this sounds for doctors to do, he was in a war zone and he coped by finding the best way to save as many people as he could, he says in the end of his section. "Our people endured so much over the years that being wounded was not considered the worst thing that could happen. We amputated the limbs of some men who even expressed relief. For them the war was over." He sees the wounds as a part of the war, the fighting of his people, he can cope by knowing that he is keeping these people alive by helping them, even if that is by amputating a limb, to help the war end for them.

Larry Heinemann speaks not only about his own experience before and after his time in Vietnam, but also about his youngest brother. Unlike many other people Heinemann doesn't cope by pretending things are justified, he tried to avoid talking about his own time there, instead he talks about what he did after to deal with what he saw there. He compares his own way of coping with that of his brother Philip Heinemann, who was wounded in the war, but had to return for a second tour, unlike Larry who managed to come home relatively unscathed. He coped with the war by coming home and trying to live. His brother did the same at first, but then disappeared. "It's not one of those things you like to dwell on. He was just not equipped to deal with this and took off." (Appy, 246) He says that everyone had to find their own way of coping, not everyone is made to deal with the kinds of horrors you see at war. There is a paragraph near the end of his story that I feel shows how he, and probably many soldiers feel after returning home and having to live in the world. "Something happened to him in the war that he just can't get around. There are a lot of guys like Philip who just bumped up against the war like a fly on a screen. The war was devastatingly brutal. This happens after every war and it really does depend on every individual's inner. After living in this wallow, how do you come out and reconnect with your own humanity? Is it possible to love someone knowing that you have done all these

things, and are capable of all these things, and have seen all these things?"(Appy, 247).No one is ever truly the same after and all that they can do is to find out how to cope and live on. He knows that this is possible, but that no matter what he does the war in Vietnam is always going to be with him, like a dark places on your heart.

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