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Assignment 1

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George Watkins

Part I

“He stepped on a land mine. He lost both legs and both eyes” (Appy 21). Immediately George Watkins is of interest because of what he lost in the war, doing what his country told him. Not asked, as Watkins was drafted into the war. Interesting more than that is the fact that he had a blood pressure condition that could have kept him from the draft and inevitably the war. It seems almost intentional that he would be monitored, *resting*, for three days to ensure his blood pressure could in fact be brought down to a level that would allow him entrance. The impact from Watkins’s story comes from his realization of the extent of his injuries, mostly the lack of concern or awareness he had about his lost legs. “I’ll tell you what’s surprising, I didn’t think about my legs. Legs was a second thought” (Appy 24).

Watkins laid back story telling leads to a relaxed trustworthiness. He laughs through his reminiscing and speaks in poor English that opens the heart. One wonders what his life could have been if he hadn’t gone to Vietnam, or at least not stepped on the mine. He becomes likeable and easy to relate to. Like an every-day blue collar American, you find yourself having more questions and wanting to know him personally for reasons other than the war. Credibility comes from almost emotion-less speaking. It feels as if he loses himself in the story and just breezes through telling it without much thought or pulling for important facts. For parts of the story it feels like you’re right along with him, learning, losing and accepting.

He speaks of the Vietnamese with a soft respect and almost nostalgia, “They had to be some good people to withstand all that. . . They’ some of the most determined people I’ve ever run into. I don’t hate them.

They did what they had to do” (Appy 23). Watkins displayed complete objectivity in that statement alone. Showing that he has an understanding of why they were fighting for their country, and never appearing to give up or falter from what he could see. The main point of the story is supposed to be about the land mine and how he lost his legs and eyes, but if you read between the lines you find so much more and it’s deep and very real.

Part II

Daniel Redmond, “The doctor who won the war in Indochina”, and the events surrounding their stories respectfully are disappointing. To hear that a man who was so respected and idolized by multiple sides of this war was basically a lying quack is sickening. Redmond leads the story through a positive experience in supporting and transporting the North Vietnamese to South Vietnam. However, this Operation “was our first commitment to the disaster that happened in the sixties” (Appy 48). The story goes into the anger Redmond clearly has towards what he was a part of and the people exploiting the situation. Tom Dooley wrote a book that many assumed was an accurate account of what happened and how the Vietnamese were affected. Using a photograph of a beggar to tug at America’s heart strings, claiming the man was actually a victim of torture is insulting and painful to those who actually were tortured.

“There were no nice guys in Vietnam”-Malcolm Browne (Appy 66). The description of torture that Browne brings to the table is gut-wrenching and sickening, but his story is that of an American immersed in the Vietnamese culture and tales. Unique in the way that American stories were usually those told of the men fighting in the war as soldiers and not as journalists. Definitely it seems that he had a deeper relationship and understanding of the Buddhist movement in the war. The idea of a martyr is not one that is normally looked at as instilling a sense of hope, but Thich Quang Duc does ignite inspiration. After being doused in gasoline and inflicting a painful, drawn out death on himself he had the attention of his peers and others. He set an example by protesting the Diem government, who announced (but never implemented) reforms regarding the treatment and unification of Buddhists. Even though the change he had hoped for didn’t happen he is immortalized in history and for the people especially of his time. There

may not have been any nice guys in Vietnam, but there were definitely those who tried. That one man can indeed motivate change is inspiring, and hopeful.

REFERENCES

Appy, Christian G. *Patriots*. New York: Penguin Group, 2003. Print.