

Spirit catches you  
and you fall down  
persuasive essay



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Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down Journal #2 In The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down, by Anne Fadiman, Lia Lee is a very sickly child, and is now unfortunately a “vegetable.” Much to the hospital's chagrin, they in fact are the reason why Lia is in a comatose state. The Lee's argued with the doctors throughout Lia's entire 4 years of medical strife with epilepsy about the medication and the way they were treating Lia. Fadiman juxtaposes the differences of the Hmong way of healing people: spiritually, and the American way: medicinally.

In chapter 18, Fadiman titles the chapter “The Life or the Soul”, the title portrays a serious debate throughout the reading; is the body or the soul of the person more important. The Hmong's way of healing the sick, no matter what the sickness is, is spiritually. “Treatment Plan: The Neng called upon Neng spirits to effect a cure and release the pain... used a bowl of water to spray from the mouth over the infected area... spirits were offered payment... to release the pain and relieve the swelling... Result: Client got better after treatment. (pg 270) Fadiman pulls the report summaries from the txiv needs healings to convey that it is possible to heal someone spiritually rather than medicinally. In fact, Fadiman uses surprising diction in chapter 17, when Dr. Hutchinson admits the hospital's faults. “Driving back to Merced, I was in a state of shock myself. I had known about Lia's sepsis, but I had always assumed that her seizure disorder had been the root of the problem.

The Lee's were right after all, I thought, Lia's medicine did make her sick! “(pg 255) By using words/phrases such as: shock, right after all, did make her sick, Fadiman shows not only were the doctors surprised by the outcome

of Lia's life, but she herself was, too. It illustrates the idea that not ALL Western Medicine techniques are healthy for the problem. In this case, the best thing for Lia would have been to give her the anticonvulsants and that was it.

At the end of chapter 18, Fadiman goes out to eat with Bill Selvidge and Sukey Waller, and she includes Bill and Sukeys conversation in the end to really exemplify the juxtaposition of how certain people feel about life; death, and the soul; and to connect it to the title of the chapter. "You have to act on the most vulnerable person in the situation... that's the child. Childs welfare is more important than the parents' beliefs. "' Said Bill. "'Well," Sukey said tartly. "'What if they see...possibility of eternal damnation for their child if she dies from surgery?

Next to that, death might not seem so important. Which is more important, the life or the soul? "' "'I make no apology," said Bill. "'The life comes first. "' "The soul," said Sukey. The name of the chapter is specifically "The Life or the Soul" because of this passage. Bill, as a doctor, strongly believes that the life comes before the soul, because the life is what's living. Sukey, on the other hand, disagrees strongly and thinks the soul is of much more importance. Fadiman conveys their feelings and thoughts creatively with Bill and Sukey's conversation.

She also does this by using the verb "said tartly" implying that Sukey obviously disliked Bill's idea thinking the life is more important regardless of what the parents have to say. Overall, the Hmong and the Americans have distinguished ideas about how to cure a sickly person; either with a txiv neeb, or with loads of meds to help clear the system and cure the patient.

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Fadiman juxtaposes the two, showing that the Hmong are neither right nor wrong with their method, and same for the American Western Medicine way.

The other difference between Hmong and American is their value for life. Most Hmong believe that the soul is more important, whereas Americans believe the life is more important. Fadiman demonstrates in chapter 19 the complete polar opposites of the two cultures. They are both simply ways of life, and the natural bridge between the two cultures needs to be broken so people understand both sides, instead of choosing the one they know best.