

Erdrich's "the red convertible": america after the war in vietnam essay sample

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"The Red Convertible" by Louise Erdrich is a story about two young brothers named Henry Junior and Lyman Lamartine that have a strong relationship until Henry junior is drafted and sent away to the war in Vietnam. "The Red Convertible" shows that returning veterans face troubles, such as problems with family relationships; war changes Henry's his personality and causes him to have PTSD. The war has messed up Henry Junior's and Lyman Lamartine's family relationship. Lyman talks about how Henry is when he gets back from the war in Vietnam. Lyman says, "Henry was very different, and I'll say this: the change was no good.... But he was quiet, so quiet, and never comfortable sitting still anywhere but always up and moving around" (186). The war in Vietnam has ruined their relationship. Before the war, Lyman remembers "times we'd sat still for whole afternoons, never moving a muscle, just shifting our weight along the ground, talking to whoever sat with us, watching things" (186).

In the beginning of the story, before Henry is sent to the war in Vietnam, we see that Lyman and Henry had a strong family relationship because before the war they would both spend their time together travelling in the red convertible. Lyman describes the good times they had: "We went places in the car, me and Henry. We took off driving all one whole summer" (183). When Henry gets back from the war, the family relationship is ruined because everything has changed for no good; Henry is not the same. "The Red Convertible" is a story that shows how war changed Henry's personality.

One of the most dramatic personality changes that we can notice in the story is how Henry is described as a fun person to hang out with especially for his young brother Lyman.

When Henry gets back from the war in Vietnam, Lyman notices something strange in him. Henry no longer smiles like he did before the war. One of the things that the story tells us is that Henry "always had a joke, then, too, and now you couldn't get him to laugh, or when he did it was more the sound of a man choking, a sound that stopped up the throats of other people around him" (186). The war in Vietnam had changed his personality, something Lyman did not understand.

The story tells us that Lyman "had been feeling in the dumps about Henry" (189). Lyman remarks how Henry "was such a loner that [he] didn't know how to take it" (186). Lyman has no idea what has happened to his brother Henry in the war in Vietnam because he cannot understand these changes. The war in Vietnam has caused Henry to have PTSD. Henry shows these symptoms when he has come back from the war in Vietnam: "he was quiet, so quiet, and never comfortable sitting still" (186). Lyman also states how "Henry was jumpy and mean" (186). When Henry and Lyman are watching TV in the room, then Lyman "heard his teeth click at something. [Lyman] looked over, and he'd bitten through his lip. Blood was going down his chin" (186-187). This shows that something deeply wrong is happening to Henry. As the story shows us all these examples about Henry's behavior, we can see that the war in Vietnam has been responsible for Henry having PTSD. It was not only the war, but also the fact that "the enemy caught him" (185).

When the enemy captured Henry Junior, a reader can assume that something terrible happened to him. That experience has been painful for him. In a way it ruined everything he once had. His family relationship, the personality his young brother admired, and finally the war in Vietnam caused him to have PTSD. There is no doubt that the war in Vietnam caused Henry to have life problems. This is a tragedy American veterans has to face after every war, including modern veterans from the last two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. They all come to a similar situation where almost every veteran has to deal with these three major life problems after every war. Is this what we want for our veterans that have fought for America?

Works Cited

Erdrich, Louise. " The Red Convertible." Love Medicine. New York: HarperPerennial, 1993: 181-193. Print.