

The things they carried by tim o'brien

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



This quote is impactful because it reveals not only the physical baggage that the soldiers carry but also the mental burden. They have to live on with what the outcomes of the war are even after it's over.

" They carried the soldier's greatest fear, which was the fear of blushing... They died so as not to die of embarrassment." (O'Brien 20)

This quote was impactful for me because it shows that men risked their lives to go to war just to save their reputations. They would rather fight in the war because refusing would mean cowardice and men, according to society can't be that.

" Some carried themselves with a sort of wistful resignation, others with pride or stiff soldierly discipline or good humor or macho zeal. They were afraid of dying but they were even more afraid of showing it" (O'Brien 19)

This quote is impactful because most of these men showed pride during the war to hide their true fears under the mask of humor or enthusiasm. The soldiers could be terrified of being in the war but they still wouldn't show it because it would show lack of bravery.

O'Brien wrote this to show that they carried much more than guns and equipment, they mostly carried burden in their heads. The outcomes of the war were far worse than they appeared because war changes a person not only physically but psychologically as well. The soldiers were risking not only their lives but their reputations and names as well. Being a coward wasn't an option, hiding their fears, showing bravery and pride was far more important than showing how they truly felt. Pride, bravery, discipline, good humor, all

examples of how they hid those negative feelings they had towards the war. All the weight they carried mentally and emotionally was far worse than it appeared to be on the outside.

Contents

“ His jaw was in his throat...there was a slight tear at the lobe of one ear...his forehead was slightly freckled...the skin at his left cheek was peeled back in three ragged strips...there was a butterfly on his chin...” (O'Brien 118)

This quote is impactful for me because it shows how unusual O'Brien's response was when he took a life. Instead of expressing the guilt, he just stared at the body and grasped every amount of detail he could to prevent himself from thinking about his actions.

“ The young man would not have wanted to be a soldier and in his heart would have feared performing badly in battle...He loved mathematics...at school the boys sometimes teased him about how pretty he was...” (O'Brien 121)

This quote is important because it shows how O'Brien deals with the guilt of killing the Vietnamese soldier, by imagining how life was like for him. He does this to hide what he actually feels and maybe also to put himself in his shoes in a certain way. “...there was a butterfly on his chin...The butterfly was making its way along the young man's forehead...Along the trail there were small blue flowers shaped like ” (O'Brien 118 & 120-121)

This quote is important because it shows how O'Brien repeats the physical features of his victim and references a butterfly on the dead body and blue flowers next to the dead body which is ironic. It shows me that even in death, there is life.

O'Brien chose this story to show the effect of death and beauty of life even in death. The effect he wants to invoke on the reader is to put them inside a soldier's head and show them what they're going through. O'Brien wants the readers to feel how he felt in the moment he took a life and understand the horror of facing death. It also shows the reader how O'Brien distanced himself from the death, by creating a life for the soldier. He feels safer by focusing on other things rather than thinking about his actions and feeling guilty. Mentioning the butterfly and flowers near the dead body also shows how there is still hope of life among the war. This story helps develop the next story, " Ambush".

" He was a short, slender young man of about twenty. I was afraid of him... and he passed me on the trail I threw a grenade that exploded at his feet and killed him." (O'Brien 125)

This quote is important because it shows how O'Brien has a clear memory of what happened even though it occurred very fast. O'Brien's repetition of the physical details of the man show how the death was very impactful on him and how he was afraid of him because the effect still haunts him.

“ When she was nine, my daughter Kathleen asked me if I had killed someone...Someday, I hope, she'll ask again. But here I want to pretend she's a grown-up...This is why I keep writing war stories...” (O'Brien 125)

This quote is impactful because it shows how O'Brien wants to protect his daughter from the horrors of the war. He wants to let his daughter know he did what he felt was right when she is old enough so she understands why he keeps writing war stories and why it is necessary.

“ It was not a matter of live or die. There was no peril. Almost certainly the young man would have passed by. And it will always be that way.” (O'Brien 127)

This quote is impactful because O'Brien wants to justify and give a reason as to why he killed a man so people don't think he acted without reason. He believes that if he hadn't thrown grenade at the man he would have just passed by and his death wouldn't have haunted O'Brien.

Tim O'Brien wrote this story to show the readers what effect death can have on soldiers. He also writes to address to his daughter the reasons why he wrote it and to justify his actions. He keeps writing war stories hoping that someday his daughter when she's older, understands the difficult decisions that had to be taken during the war. The purpose of this story is to show the aftermath of death. It depicts the instinct to survive. O'Brien acted out of fear and didn't comprehend his actions until it was too late. This story helps readers understand the impact of rapid decisions that have to be made.

“ He didn't mind blood or pain-he actually enjoyed combat-but there was something about a dentist that gave him the creeps...He fainted before the man even touched him.” (O'Brien 83)

This quote is important because it shows how Curt Lemon isn't bothered by violence and death but is afraid of a someone touching his teeth. This means that he is more comfortable being in the midst of chaos and war than going to a dentist.

“ Anyone else would've laughed it off, but for Curt Lemon it was too much. The embarrassment must've turned a screw in his head.” (O'Brien 84)

This quote is impactful because it shows how shame starts to drive a tough soldier crazy. It shows how he values his reputation and doesn't want people to see him as a coward.

“ The dentist couldn't find any problem, but Lemon kept insisting, so the man finally shrugged and... yanked out a perfectly good tooth.” (O'Brien 84)

This quote is important because it shows how Lemon believes getting a tooth pulled out and coming over his fear of the dentist would keep his reputation intact. It also shows how he is more worried about his reputation than dying in the war and it becomes too much to handle so he decides to act on it.

O'Brien's purpose of writing this story is to show a different side to the soldiers and the society they live in during his time. It portrays how a tough soldier who is always doing dangerous things is afraid of the dentist. In order to keep up his reputation, Lemon goes as far as to getting his teeth pulled

out because it would keep his brave soldier reputation intact among other soldiers. He also does this to prove to himself that he isn't a coward and to overcome the fact that he fainted. This story helps develop other stories in the book such as " On the Rainy River" by talking about reputation and cowardice. Society expects men to be strong and insensitive, therefore, showing any emotion is a sign of weakness to the soldiers.

" I feared the war, yes, but I also feared exile... I feared losing the respect of my parents... I feared ridicule and censure." (O'Brien 42)

This quote is important because O'Brien doesn't want to go to war but he can't decide between his fear of losing his family's respect and his reputation in town. He doesn't want to flee the draft and disgrace his name among everyone because they would think of the act as lack of bravery and love for their country.

" I think he meant to bring me up against the realities, to guide me across the river and to take me to the edge and to stand a kind of vigil as I chose a life for myself... I couldn't act... all I could do was cry..." (O'Brien 53-54)

This quote is impactful because Elroy brings O'Brien to the river and without saying anything he wants to face the reality and decide the path he wants to take in that moment. O'Brien is ashamed of this story because he believes crying is a failure of masculinity and him not being able to make a decision shows lack of brave.

" And what was so sad, I realized, was that Canada had become a pitiful fantasy. Silly and hopeless. It was no longer a possibility." (O'Brien 55)

This quote is important because it is the moment of realization for O'Brien and what he believes is the right thing to do. He won't escape to Canada because it would be seen as cowardice, and he would rather not bring disgrace upon his family and town.?

Tim O'Brien wrote this story to express the inner struggles he dealt with upon receiving the draft. The author wants the reader see how he is compelled into making the decision of going to Canada or staying and fighting for his country and how he decided on it. The old man O'Brien meets when he's on his way to Canada plays a big part in the way he decides on what he wants to do, whether he will stay or escape. Elroy forces him to make a choice at the river of what he thinks is right, and never passes judgment onto him. Elroy's presence forces O'Brien to confront Canada and freedom from the war without him actually speaking. O'Brien's purpose of writing this book is to justify his decisions and also to put the readers in the position he was in on the rainy river.