

The accidental tourist essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Life just is. You have to flow with it. Give yourself to the moment. Let it happen. " -Jerry Brown If an individual allows changes to occur in one's life, then love can be the wonderful result of that acceptance. The theme of reasons why we love and how we love different people is demonstrated throughout the book *The Accidental Tourist*, written by Anne Tyler. There are two main characters that undergo and accept the changes in their lives, and one character that stays static throughout the book, helping one of the characters to change.

Macon Leary is first grounded by loneliness and comfort, then slowly opens himself up to what appears to be a whole new world for him. Then, there is Sarah Leary, who controls some of the changes in her life, and tries to make the best of the rest of them. The character that remains the same throughout the book is Muriel Pritchett—a dog-trainer who takes an interest in Macon and helps him to accept the changes in his life. Above all, the universal theme of this book is love—a surprising new journey for all the characters.

In the beginning of the book, it is explained how Macon and Sarah Leary's son is murdered and how their marriage suffers because of this. Sarah leaves Macon, which is the beginning stage of Macon's renovated life, but one that does not start off happily: " He didn't eat real meals anymore...His hair, which Sarah used to cut for him, jutted over his forehead like a shelf. And something had caused his lower lids to droop. He used to have narrow gray slits of eyes; now they were wide and startled..." (14). Macon is not at all used to living alone.

He wants to control everything and likes nothing to be left to chance—Sarah's departure is not something he can control and he does not deal with it well. Macon begins to think that he cannot live without his wife, but soon realizes a few things that really make him think about the marriage: His brain buzzed with little worries...The worries changed, grew deeper, he wondered what had gone wrong with his marriage. Sarah had been his first and only girlfriend; now he thought he should have practiced on someone else beforehand.

During the twenty years of their marriage there's been moments—there's been months—when he didn't feel they had really formed a unit the way couples were supposed to. No, they stayed two distinct people, and now always even friends. Sometimes they'd seemed more like rivals, elbowing each other, competing over who was the better style of person... (15-16) Macon realizes that he and Sarah never actually became one person; they had always stayed as two separate people living in a stale, routine marriage. Finally, Macon comes to terms with the fact that Sarah is not coming home to him: " Well, of course she wasn't there.

He knew it the instant he stepped inside that house, when he smelled that stale hot air and heard the muffled denseness of a place with every window shut. Really he'd known it all along. He'd been fooling himself. He'd been making up fairy tales" (41). Macon knew that when he got home from his business trip that Sarah would not be there waiting for him like she used to. Although he did not ask for this change in his life, and after living alone for a while, moves back with his sister and brothers—a comfortable change for him.

This all begins to change when Macon meets an unusual woman working at the animal hospital where he takes his dog and becomes acquaintances with her. Muriel allows Macon to open up to her, and Macon shows his willingness to do so: ' I lost my son,' Macon said. ' He was just...he went to a hamburger joint and then...someone came, a holdup man, and shot him. I can't go to dinner with people! I can't talk to their little boys! You have to stop asking me. I don't mean to hurt your feelings but I'm just not up to this, do you hear? She took one of his wrists very gently and she drew him into the house, still not fully opening the door, so that he had a sense of slipping through something, of narrowly evading something. She closed the door behind him. She put her arms around him and hugged him. (189-190) At first, Macon does not give Muriel Pritchett a second thought, but before he knows it, he is dating her and soon living with Muriel and her young son. This shows a tremendous change for Macon, and a step forward in his life. Muriel helps Macon to see the world in a different way.

She is the character that seems to know exactly what she is after in life, and therefore does not change during the course of this book. On the other hand, all Macon does throughout the book is change his life in extreme ways. Macon learns how to love and trust Muriel in a way that he never has with anyone. In an addition to Macon's changing life, there is his wife, Sarah, who makes the decision to leave Macon a year after the death of their son. Sarah feels that Macon does not express his emotions as she would like him to, and that he does not provide her with the comfort she needs and has needed in the past.

This frustrates Sarah greatly and she does not feel as if she can continue in the marriage: I said to you the other day, I said, 'Macon, now that Ethan's dead I sometimes wonder if there's any point to life.' Do you remember what you answered? ... 'You said, 'Honey, to tell the truth, it never seemed to me there was all that much point to begin with.' Those were your exact words... 'You just go on your same old way like before. Your little routines and rituals, depressing habits, day after day. No comfort at all. '... 'I just can't live with you anymore,' Sarah said. 3-4) Sarah is heart-broken with this decision, as is Macon, but she is just not happy with her marriage. During Macon and Sarah's separation, Sarah starts to move on and begins dating a man. Though she has an apartment of her own, which is what she wanted, Sarah realizes how much she truly loves and misses Macon, and makes a slight and almost unnoticeable attempt to get back together with him much later in the book during a conversation between her and Macon: 'It [the rain] looks like strips that just fade away about halfway down from the sky.' 'I wish I were there to watch it with you,' Sarah said... 'Macon?

Do you...What's her name? The person you live with? 'Muriel,' he said. Which he knew before she asked, he suspected. 'Do you plan on staying with Muriel forever?' 'I really couldn't say,' he said. (289-290) Sarah is now the one longing for Macon. Macon thinks that the only thing to do is go back to Sarah, since, after all, he had been longing to get her back for some time. Macon returns to his house with Sarah, leaving Muriel: "He rode on through the city, up Charles Street, into his old neighborhood. He parked and cut the engine and sat looking at the house.

The downstairs windows were dark. The upstairs windows were softly glowing. Evidently, he had come home" (291). Macon is reluctant about coming home to Sarah, but in the back of his mind he still feels like he needs her because they shared so much of their lives together. Soon after, while Macon is on another business trip to Paris, his back goes out and Sarah flies in to take care of him. Things seem to be going well, but then Sarah sees Macon packing his things a few days later, which provides yet another change for Sarah, as well as Macon: Sarah said, 'Macon? ...' 'What are you doing?' 'I'm packing to leave.' 'But what about your back?' she asked. 'And I've got all those appointments! And we were going to take a second honeymoon!' 'Sweetheart,' he said. He lowered himself cautiously till he was sitting on the bed. He picked up her hand. It stayed lifeless while she watched his face. 'You're going back to that woman,' she said. 'Yes, I am,' he said. 'Why, Macon?' 'I just decided, Sarah. I thought about it most of last night. It wasn't easy. It's not the easy way out, believe me. ... he saw now how such couples evolved. They were not, as he'd always supposed, the result of some ludicrous lack of perception, but had come together for reasons that the rest of the world would never guess. (339-340) Macon realizes that he is happier with Muriel, and although he does not want to cause Sarah pain, this time, it is Macon that is making a change that Sarah cannot help—instead of the other way around. Therefore, Sarah must accept these changes in her life, along with all the ups and downs.

Finally, Muriel Pritchett is shown to be the one character that does not go through changes in the duration of the book, already having experienced major alterations in her earlier life. Muriel assures Macon of himself and

makes Macon feel needed for the first time in a long time: “Macon presented himself in front of her, holding out the pizza. ‘Ta-da!’ he whispered. She looked up at him and gave that perky smile of hers—an ornate, Victorian V. ‘Ma,’ she said, ‘I’m going now! Macon’s here!’ It had been a long time since anyone made such an event of his arrival” (196).

Macon shows that he is beginning to allow himself to care for Muriel, and to be happy with her and this change in his life—being needed. Later on, when Macon is at his sister’s house, he begins to actually miss Muriel: Macon laid the photos aside without looking at the rest of them. He knelt to pat Edward...Macon suddenly wished he were at Muriel’s. He wrapped his arms around Edward and imagined he smelled her sharp perfume deep in Edward's fur... above all else he was an orderly man... There was no room in his life for anyone as unpredictable as Muriel. Or as extreme.

Or as...well, unlikable, sometimes... Then he knew what mattered was the pattern of her life; that although he did not love her he loved the surprise of her, and also the surprise of himself when he was with her. (201) As much as Macon never thought he could care for Muriel, he finds himself almost loving her, and loving himself more whenever he is with her. He begins to enjoy his time with Muriel, and now moves with the flow of life, instead of life passing him by while he is still standing still. After Macon leaves Muriel to get back with Sarah, he finds that Muriel will not give up on him.

She follows him to his business trip to Paris: “...why Muriel? Why are you doing this?’ ‘Because I felt like it,’ she said. ‘You felt like spending five days alone in a Paris hotel? That’s what it will be, Muriel.’ ‘You need to have me around,’ she said. ‘Need you!’ ‘You were falling to pieces before you had

me” (318). Muriel is very persistent—just like when she had been pursuing Macon; she refuses to give him up. In the end, Macon cannot refuse Muriel, and leaves Paris without Sarah. This shows Muriel to be a stagnant character in this book—with her unwillingness to give up and her belief in the goodness of people.

In conclusion, Macon and Sarah prove to be the characters that undergo the most rapid changes, and Muriel remains static. Above all, Macon’s desire to control his own life in such a regimented way as packing for trips with a great notion of order is probably due to the fact that he does not trust other people. He feels that he cannot rely on others and instead can only trust himself. However, this all changes with the help of Muriel, who proves to be one of the most beneficial people to come into Macon’s life.

Sarah learns the hard way that you cannot always go back to people and places in your life and try and fix things that are not worth fixing, or not capable of being salvaged. In this case, it was she and Macon’s marriage. Sometimes it is better to let go of the past and move on to the future. The main theme of this book is love, and it is substantiated by Macon’s capability to lose sight of his fear and love someone completely different from himself and all that he has known. All of this happened because of one individual’s acceptance of change and the flow of life.