

# Greasy lake

Literature



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The short story Greasy Lake is written by T. C. Boyle the son of Irish immigrants. Boyle recalls growing up 'as a sort of pampered punk'. We see this pampered punk attitude in the story's main characters. I was completely captivated with the way events unfolded in Greasy Lake as they struck like bolts of lightning one after the other. Three teens' summer vacation told in vivid detail by the narrator and buddy of Digby and Jeff went out of control intensified by every decision they make.

We are told little of the narrator other than he is the driver on this fateful night. With the two previous nights' bringing them little satisfaction, they choose to head to Greasy Lake. The narrator pulls into the lake's dirt lot along with Digby, Jeff, and a bottle of lemon-flavored gin. The title Greasy Lake refers to the once pristine water's now murky state, but the story's characters come across rather greasy as well. The ideal backdrop set by Boyle for this night of savagery has many references to nature such as the "mysterious nighttime grass of Greasy Lake.

The images conjured while reading this story were dramatic and intense; I put down Greasy Lake keenly aware that I wanted more yet oddly satisfied. As I came to the part of the story where the boys attempt to cause a friend to "experience premature withdrawal", I was not amused. The vulgarity was not my style, nor was Boyle trying to please the masses. With that in mind, I overall enjoyed this story collection. I was amazed at the depth of content for such a short story and could imagine myself standing on the shore of Greasy Lake with my toes kneading the mud, unpainted!

While this story was a work of fiction, many of us can relate to driving in our parents' cars and, regardless of make or model, feeling on top of the world.

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We can be oblivious to the consequences of our actions until we get knocked on our asses a few times. By the end of Greasy Lake I felt as though the boys turned down the final opportunity to screw up with the two girls in the mustang's proposal to party together. I was surprisingly pleased that they were finally finding what they had undoubtedly been looking for their entire summer's vacation but were too tired and scared to accept the girls' offer.

Having the insight to how a man thinks in his late teens, even in this fictional piece scared me to death. The truth is this is happening in real life. We hear it on the news, read it in the newspaper, and Boyle very possibly was writing using experiences of his wildest days as a young man learning his moral boundaries. What I received from this work is we all, at some point, need rough experiences to help us learn about consequences. Was that what Boyle expected this work to reveal to the reader?

Who knows what Boyle was thinking when he wrote this story all the way back in 1985? As a reader and critic I would like to be able to learn through my reading as well as the school of hard knocks or as some would call life. The characters would undoubtedly come away from their experience at Greasy Lake with a newfound respect if this were a true story. At least one would think considering Boyle writes that after their desperate escape the boys felt "like war veterans." My husband says (from experience), "You go into the military a kid, and come out of war a man. I am definitely not comparing the characters of Greasy Lake to war veterans rather the contrast of their code of ethics or lack thereof. These boys were morally bankrupt, yet I found myself empathizing with them. Being young and dumb in my teenage years I understood their driving around for hours even days looking for

something that could satisfy them. The fact they were stoned and drunk only made me more sympathetic. We all have done stupid things when we were drinking, and underage to boot.

I would say Boyle has a few good stories to tell of his teenage drinking days. Even Boyle admits to being “ a punk, a cynic and a know-it-all” in his teenage years, and he didn’t even read a book until he was eighteen. I wonder how much of this story was inspired by his past. To give credit where credit is due, Boyle has done quite well for himself. He was first awarded with the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines Fiction Award for the Short Story in 1977. He was also recently inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2009.

In addition, he has received more awards in-between than there is room to name. Boyles said, “ Writing is a habit, an addiction as powerful and overmastering an urge as putting a bottle to your lips or a spike in your arm. ” I find this ugly to say, but I am thankful for Boyle’s addiction. Tom Coraghessan Boyle lives in Santa Barbara, California with his wife and three children. In his spare time he relaxes by playing the saxophone. When asked of plans to retire, he said, “ Sure we’ll all retire, all of us once they drain our blood and pump the embalming fluid in. ”