

James dickey's deliverance essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

During World War II Dickey enlisted in the United States Army Air Corps. Dickey served as a navigator with the 418th Night Fighters in the South Pacific where he logged close to 500 combat hours while flying over 100 missions. Dickey was awarded several awards, including the Air Medal, The Asiatic Pacific Ribbon, The Philippine Liberation Ribbon and seven battle stars.

Dickey's nights consisted of near death experiences, while he days consisted of nothing to do. Dickey soon began to fill these long monotonous days with books developing his interest literature, particularly poetry. Thomson Gale, 2005)The War both fascinated and horrified Dickey, it changed his whole outlook on life, he now viewed his life as a survivor. He once commented in a letter to his parents that all he did was lie around and reflects on how lucky he was to be alive.

During the 1960's Dickey experienced one of America's most remarkable streaks of literary accomplishments in American literature. Most of this success was owed to his first collection of poetry, *Into the Stone and Other Poems*. In this book of poems, there were only five poems based on Dickey's past war experiences. Most of the poems stressed nature as the force from which life and death can be gained.

(Calhoun, 1987) The first novel that Dickey published was called *Deliverance*. The novel was publicly attacked for its use of violence and ignoring important social issues. Despite all this, *Deliverance* became a best selling novel in 1970. For all of his collections of poems, Dickey came closest to capturing his personal mythopoeic vision in his novel *Deliverance*.

The novel reflects Dickey's characteristic cult of experience, concentrating on man's ambivalence towards civilization and the company of women.

(Kellman, September 1994) Deliverance consists of four financially successful white-collar men, men who live in the suburbs. Ed, graphic designer or art director for an advertising agency, insurance salesman Bobby Trippe, and soft drink executive Drew Ballinger. The fourth, Lewis Medlock, is an outdoorsman who yearns to transcend his own claustrophobic existence as a landlord and who is the driving force behind the canoe trip.

The first section of the book describes a day at the office for Ed. This shows us of the normal unexcited events that happen in Ed's life. You can begin to see the pattern that Ed does over and over again, day after day. There is nothing new, nothing exciting about any of these events.

Ed does nothing to set himself apart from any other person. He is simply the same as every other office worker in any other office. Ed is a drone in a bee colony or a worker in an ant farm. As the men are packing for the trip, Dickey uses symbolism to describe Ed's experience with his son Dean, "it was odd, it was as though they both knew what the knife would do and didn't know at all, and as he waved it — with the greatest love "... I was caught in the same curious dance as he, knowing what the knife would do and not believing for a minute". This opens up speculation as to what the knife will be used for. It also gives the reader the feeling that something might happen involving the knife.

When Lewis stopped to pick up Ed, the car was filled with several camping items. Ed begins to think of himself, "If we had an accident and had to be

identified by what we carried and wore, we might have been engineers or trappers or surveyors or the advance commandos of some invading force. I knew that I had to live up to the equipment or the trip would be as sad, a joke as everything else". This tells us that Ed has to live up to a stereotype of outdoorsman, a camper or the manly image set forth by society. Also the phrase, "Invading Force" causes us to believe that Ed knew he was not one with nature and would be considered an outsider by the mountain men. Ed is going on this weekend excursion to hone his survivalist skills.

Lewis a macho man of the 70's and thinks he can set an example for others. He is the others catalyst. He is dynamic and physically impressive, believes a conditioned body is essential for survival when the machines fail and man take to the hills and start again. Lewis wants to take this journey to prove his manhood. He craves to escape his "humdrum" existence. Lewis sees his escape through canoeing the Cahulawassee River in the north Georgia wilderness, before it is flooded over by the upcoming construction of a dam and lake.

Barnett) The river, now a fierce winding, wild river, it will soon become a huge calm lake. For the weekend these four men will be wild and fierce, but all realize that after the weekend they too, like the river, will become calm and unadventurous. They are past the prime of their life, middle aged men seeking a voyage to prove to them they have not passed their prime. Throughout the novel, tests of self awareness, growth and preservation through violent encounters with wilderness reflect William Faulkner's "The Bear" and Herman Melville's "Moby Dick".

Calhoun, 1987) This is the river, the setting, and the time in which man and nature will be in conflict. During this conflict man must forget all civilization and return to the basic human nature and instincts. Man must use knives and bows and test his manhood against nature itself. "Rights of passage," as the old Indians called it. This is a ritual that every young man looks forward to.

This is when the young brave becomes a warrior. This is when the brave must test himself against the wilderness, the other warriors, and himself. These four were already men, but this was a test of inner bravery, finding the courage to stand up to the unknown. This type of inner conflict is something that everyone deals with.

In the back of our minds we all question do we have what it takes to survive? This is something where an individual must rely on his own resourcefulness during some type of adventure. We all wonder if when it comes down to it can we protect our friends, our family...ourselves? When it comes down to a crucial moment do I have what it takes to be a man? Dickey divides the novel into five parts for emphasis. The first simply titled "Before," the three middle sections which carry the dates of the three days of the trip, September 14, 15, and 16 and the end titled "Last". Each segment has a progression, both as the continuum of the book, and as its own unit, with the ending being especially significant. "Before" ends with Ed viewing the young golden eyed model as some sort of nymph. To him she represents the possibility of him reliving his days of youth and energy, thus the "Before" section.

September 14," The different nature of the society into which the city dwellers have now passed is emphasized with the appearance of the hillbillies at the gas station in Oree. The men are now trespassers in the mountains. They are now in the wilderness and outside of their comfort zones. By the end of " September 14," Ed finds his imagination fulfilled in his interlude with the mysterious owl that claws through his tent. This is when Ed and his friends reveal the communication with nature, as Drew said, " I've always wanted to do this.

. Only I didn't know it". " September 15," The mood starts to change at the beginning as Ed puts his fog-colored long underwear on, symbolizing his beginning merger with nature. Ed awakens, early and goes hunting with his bow and arrow. Sighting a deer, with hands trebling, he shoots but misses, later explaining to Lewis that he broke psychologically at the last moment.

He lacks what it takes to take a living life. His survivalist urges have not developed and the city life still hold him. Tying Ed to a tree and cutting him with his own knife, one of the mountain men sodomizes Bobby. A moment of truth falls over Ed as he thinks, " I could not feel Bobby anywhere near, and the other canoe was not in sight.

I shrank to my own true size, a physical moment known only to me and with strain my solar plexus failed". Bobby has lost his innocence in that moment of rape. This traumatic event has changed Bobby. He becomes quiet, scared, and unable to act; he no longer brags about himself, but becomes a very insecure man, Bobby has been defeated by man. Snider, 2000) While Bobby is being raped, Ed could only bow his head and think of what to do, but he

was helpless as he thought, " A scream hit me, and I would have thought it was mine except for the lack of breath.

It was the sound of pain and outrage, and was followed by one of simple and more carrying". This is a moment that will cause any man to " Stop and think". There is no way to place a value on the loss of innocence. Ed's quest is no longer a romantic tryst with nature as he is caught in a rock crevice, it is a search for revenge and self-preservation as Bobby has been raped, and Drew is killed.

He will achieve this revenge through the execution of another murder. To protect him and the remaining members of the groups, Ed takes to the strenuous task of climbing the gorge with bow and arrows in hand. Ed must shoot the man on the cliff or be shot. Ed's hand shakes as it did when he sighted the deer, but at the moment of truth, his aim is true. From that moment on Ed is a different man. Ed had to make a choice and as with the deer this choice only depended on Ed and his inner strength.

Ed must return to his Atlanta home for a lifetime of remembering while he pursues the art of advertising. Ed has been delivered into the understanding of something disturbing about being human, about what humans carry inside them. Death is not a subject we think about or wish to deal with. Ed had to kill or be killed, face-to-face. Ed has now become what Lewis has wanted to be but lacks the skill to become; a hardened survivor, free of the city in every way, to the degree that he feels nothing in common with Bobby or even Lewis. Now with a broken leg, Lewis becomes dependent on the other

men for assistance Lewis, the strongest of all the men, has been defeated but by a different force.

Lewis has been defeated by nature. Being the leader of the group, Lewis struggles with the humbling situation of asking for help. His position with the team has changed. Lewis realizes that he can no longer lead but, by virtue of the river, he must follow.

For Lewis this act of following was defeat. "September 16" brings Ed back to himself. When he goes upstairs to go to bed, there is no more fusion with any sort of being or consciousness, everything is reality now. Finally in "After", Returning to the city life, Ed feels a continued connection with the river and the outdoor life. Ed later buys a cabin on a lake with his wife with Lewis becoming their neighbor.

Bobby business is in a failing status and moves to Hawaii. Ed has little to do with Bobby and comments that, -" he would always look like dead weight and like screaming, and that was no good to me. " Dickey makes it clear that Ed and Lewis have encountered and completed a full circle and now appreciate reality. These four men are only a catalyst for a much stronger even more meaningful message. This message can be interpreted in several aspects. One being that we as humans have the ability to recognize and can survive the trials of suffering.

However, the means of survival can at times leave lasting marks on a person and can leave ever bearing impressions in a person's memory. We must accept that the world is not always full of positive and happy people, and that we need to have the ability to learn to accept the difference between

good and bad. This difference will not always be negative but instead at times it will have a positive effect. Society could not function without this difference in stratification. Society needs to have different levels of people to assume different roles. Inside these different levels there can be pain and suffering.

This novel dealt with a very touchy subject from whom we all could learn a life lesson to make error, is not to be seen as a mistake, but a life-learning lesson. Some lessons hurt, some make us feel good, but all lessons allow us to grow, in person and in spirit. These four men, three which survived the "Rights of Passage," endured the river trip from home to the wilderness back to home, just as the river in the story started calm, went to raging rapids, then back to calm at the dam. Each man has offered his innocence and received strength from the river.

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