

# Benny the war in europe



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This short story takes place in Montreal in a Jewish family. It begins during WW2 and continues 5-10 years. It appears to be a small and mainly poor working class community. Benny's family seems to be wanting more from life, especially his father, who always compares his son to the other sons in the community.

Benny: In the beginning of the story Benny is described as a quiet boy, who is likely to stay out of trouble, should he goes to war. He does go to war and when he returns apparently nothing has changed. Benny is still the quiet boy; short and skinny with a long narrow face, a pulpy mouth and soft black eyes. An important thing to notice is his hands. Later in the story his hands become somewhat a symbol of his mental illness.

Benny is clearly locked up inside and whenever it rains, it triggers his emotional stress, perhaps because the sound of heavy rain hitting a tin roof reminds him of machine guns firing. Later when he starts to hang around at Pop's Cigar & Soda, he often just sits quietly looking at his hands, as if he is reliving the horrors he has seen in the war. Benny starts to lighten up after he marries Bella. He becomes talkative, works hard in his brother's garage and generally becomes all that, what his old class-master in high school recommended he should become: An honest hard working citizen.

Everything turns out fine for Benny, but all though he can now repress his scars, they are still deeply rooted in him. This is also the reason for the very sad ending of the story; that he watches a newsreel concerning war matters, and it all then comes back casting him, once again, into despair.

Bella. Bella is the daughter of Mr. Myerson, the proprietor of Pop's Cigar & Soda. She works behind the counter in her father's shop. Bella is not exactly the town's beauty queen. We learn that she has a clubfoot, mousy hair and that she has a vague beard going. Everybody, including her father, is sure that Bella will end up an old maid, but she turns out to be the first one to notice that Benny has changed. This demonstrates her qualities, despite that she is not all beautiful on the outside. Maybe because Bella is not filled with confidence, she has the quality of being patient and caring for other people, especially Benny, whose weakness she instantly discovers.

Bella & Benny. This is the point where Bella and Benny's relationship begins. Benny has trouble opening up to Bella. He clearly wants to tell her about the war, but he always jams when the images appear to him. Bella clearly wants to help him, unconsciously helping herself, but in her efforts to do so, she takes on a maternal role, in which she would rather have Benny forget everything about the war. So instead of encouraging him to dig deeper into his emotional issues, she regards him as a child, waiting for him to be reasonable whenever he awkwardly tries to share his experiences with her. This "ignorance" to Benny's problems continues in their marriage, and eventually becomes the reason that Bella leaves Benny to himself while having one of his nervous seizures.

The post war-period, of course, were different times, and, taking time, place and culture into consideration, one can not expect a simple community to react otherwise. This is, I believe the point in the story: That shell shock was a reality to a great many families after WW2 - or any war. Only, in WW2 people were not told about mental disorders as a consequence of the war. It <https://assignbuster.com/benny-the-war-in-europe/>

was not a “decent” way to leave the war, after having served three or four years. Therefore this concept called “shell shock” was created to give the families back home a legitimate physical reason for the soldiers’ state of mind. The explanation was, that they had been hit by shrapnel from a grenade very close to them and still suffered a shock from this experience. It is my feeling that this concept was all right, given the social culture at that time, but it is a fact that many soldiers never really recover mentally from the things they see in war.