

Death and loss in my brother essay



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Death and Loss in My Brother Jamaica Kincaid's novel, *My Brother*, is the stark and shocking story of the death of her youngest brother from AIDS. Alongside this central story, Kincaid also shares in an equally stark tone the story of her family in Antigua. She left that life behind for new opportunities in the United States, but her brother's illness brings her old life back into focus, and makes her think of what she would have been had she not had the strength to leave her native home.

The passage in which Kincaid describes how her writing about the death of her brother kept her alive, and her mode of comparison of this idea with the memories of her own losses growing up in Antigua epitomizes the themes of her memoir, which are death, loss, and how one has to control their own destiny. Kincaid was called home to Antigua due to the perceived eminent death of her youngest brother, Devon (Kincaid, 1997). She fully admitted that she did not know if she loved this brother, but she was still willing to do everything in her power to keep him alive (Kincaid, 1997). She spent her own money on prescriptions of AZT, a powerful drug against HIV and AIDS, and her efforts paid off (Kincaid, 1997). Her brother did not die in the forsaken, run down hospital room he had been placed in, but he continued to die on the inside, both from AIDS and his highly destructive lifestyle (Kincaid, 1997). He continued to drink, use drugs, and have unprotected sex despite his fatal infection. (Kincaid, 1997).

When the AIDS virus finally overtook him, Kincaid struggled with her memories of her old life in Antigua. These memories became entangled with her thoughts on her brother's death, and so she came to the conclusion that if she did not wish to die with her brother, she must write about what

happened to him and what had happened to her, and in so doing revisit all the feelings of loss and death that she had experienced growing up (Kincaid, 1997). Kincaid used imagery and repetition in order to make the reader understand what suffering her brother was going through, and what suffering she had experienced while growing up. She was born to her mother years before her younger brothers were born, and she never had the opportunity to meet her real father (Kincaid, 1997). The man who became her father, and who was the real father of the boys, became like a real father to her (Kincaid, 1997). She had a very rocky relationship with her mother, and quite often did not speak to her for periods of time, including one time during the illness of her youngest brother (Kincaid, 1997). Kincaid experienced loss through the birth of her youngest brother.

His birth was an extreme strain on the family finances, and life was never the same for Kincaid after this baby came into the family (Kincaid, 1997). She was pulled out of school by her mother, and she was never given the chance to take the exams that would have possibly allowed her to pursue a college education in her home land (Kincaid, 1997). She lost a lot of her freedom. At a time when she should have been allowed to act as a young girl, she was instead saddled down with taking care of her little brothers, particularly the youngest, Devon (Kincaid, 1997). Kincaid would lose herself in novels to get away from her rapidly deteriorating state of life, but after one incident when she let Devon's diaper go unchanged while her mother was out and she was lost in a book, her mother took all her books and burned them (Kincaid, 1997). This was a great loss to Kincaid, and it furthered her dislike of her mother and her brother even more (Kincaid, 1997).

She experienced a kind of death when her books were taken away, and it steeled her resolve to better herself and get away from the future that her mother had planned for her, a future that included ten children by ten different men (Kincaid, 1997). Kincaid moved to the United States and made something of herself, but in doing so lost her family in Antigua. Before she came back to attempt to help Devon, the last time she had seen him he had only been three years old (Kincaid, 1997). Much time had passed, and so she did not quite know what to think of her brother's illness. It was almost like she was not even his relative anymore.

Kincaid realized that writing about her own life and all its struggles had allowed her to move on to be the person that she became, a wife, mother, and writer (Kincaid, 1997). When her brother died, she realized that the only way to not be taken up in his death was to write her way out of the situation once more (Kincaid, 1997). This is likely the reason that she used repetition so frequently in her novel.

In order to get the pain and the loss that she did not even know would be in her out, she had to dwell on the fact that his lips turned a violent red, his throat was covered in white thrush, and his genitals looked like they were being eaten away (Kincaid, 1997). She forced herself to record the dreadful images of this young man, who was her brother, even though she did not know if she even loved him, in order to try to make sense of his senseless death. It was through his actions that he became ill, and he was unwilling, and perhaps unable, to give up the things that made him even sicker (Kincaid, 1997). By taking charge of his life and living in a healthier manner, he could have possibly lived a much longer, productive life. Instead, he could

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not stand to lose the things that made him who he was, such as irresponsible sex with men and women, drugs, and drink (Kincaid, 1997). In the end, his being no more than what he wanted to be led to death for himself, and loss for his family.

Kincaid's record of life and death in her homeland is a sad, poignant memoir of a girl who overcame her losses and moved on with her life, and a boy who sunk into the mire around him and never attempted to be any better than a tramp.

Through writing, Kincaid managed to not become stuck in the same mire. She made sure that her destiny was not going to be what her mother had proclaimed it would be, and she had a healthy life and a beautiful family to show for it. The price for this, however, was the loss of her family in Antigua.

Kincaid seems to have come to terms with this loss through the mode of her writing, and even though she was unable to stay out of the pull of her brother's illness and death, she still came out whole on the other side. She made her destiny, and writing keeps her within it. References Kincaid, J. (1997) My brother.

New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.