

The evolution of the character lou in david baldaccis novel wish you well essay

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



English Literature

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David Baldacci's novel, *Wish You Well* is, primarily, a novel that is concerned with coming of age. This is principally shown through the character of Lou who, in the beginning of the book is a young girl - Baldacci describes her as being, " Louisa Mae Cardinal, twelve years old, tall and rangy, her hair the color of sun-dappled straw and her eyes blue, was known simply as Lou." (Baldacci 1). The events that unfold in the plot mean that Lou is forced to grow up more quickly than perhaps she might have liked: the death of her father, the paralysis of her mother, leaving New York City and then, after settling with her grandparents in Virginia, the further threat to their existence that could lead to her and her brother becoming orphans. These are not the usual events that a child experiences and it does not enhance the innocent nature of childhood. The novel charts her development throughout this and demonstrates her maturation to the reader whilst also providing a comprehensive case study of an individual who was forced to grow up quicker than her means. To begin with, we are presented with Lou as a young girl - aged twelve. Baldacci's initial presentation of the character immediately presents her future self: " She was a pretty girl who would almost certainly grow into a beautiful woman." (Baldacci 1). In doing this, Baldacci is immediately drawing the reader's attention to the contrast which is about to transpire - the young Lou verses the older Lou.

The first major contrast between Baldacci's presentation of Lou is his choice of language to describe or refer to her. For instance, in chapter one, Lou is routinely referred to as "the girl" implying that she is young, naïve and innocent. This terminology has vanished by the end of the novel. In the first chapter, Baldacci describes Lou in terms of her parents - "Lou had a pleasing variation of Amanda's long forehead and her father's lean nose and compact angle of jaw." (Baldacci 2) and this enhances the imagery of her as a young girl - instead of describing her in detail in her own right, instead she is described in terms of her parents. This is, traditionally, a habit that is used to discuss infants and young children - the expression 'she looks more like her mother,' for instance, is commonly used. The effect of this is to positively encourage the reader to view Lou as childish and as being synonymous with her parents, as opposed to an adult in her own right. However, by the end of the novel, we are presented with a young woman who stands independent of anyone and completely defined by her own character and terms. In the final 'chapter' or epilogue, entitled 'Today' (implying that it is set some time after the beginning of the novel and certainly after the events of the novel), Lou is described as being "a tall woman" and "her hair is silver and hangs to her waist" (Baldacci 400). Clearly, this descriptions depicts an image of Lou as an older woman and although she is still clearly a beautiful woman, the contrast is that she is described without a single reference to her parents - demonstrating the journey that she has made into adulthood and becoming a mature, independent individual.

Upon attending her father's funeral in chapter three, Lou is portrayed as being quite detached from events. Baldacci picks out stereotypical moments of a funeral to demonstrate this: " Lou had not bothered to sing ' Amazing Grace.'" and " Lou did not even pray for the lost soul of her father." (Baldacci 35) It could be argued that Lou is unable to fully process these events in her childish mind but also, it could equally be argued that this is the moment that Lou loses her childish innocence and instead, chooses to focus on looking after her younger brother and instead of finding solace in religious traditions, she confidently asserts that her father's excellent character would be enough to secure his place in heaven. However, her general attitude appears to be reluctant in terms of the religious solace that a funeral offers to so many; the implication of this is that Lou is detached and unemotional. However, by the end of the novel, in a rare moment of solitude and candidacy, Lou says to herself, " You should have come back, Dad" (Baldacci 398) suggesting that as she has grown older, she has found less and less solace in everyday life and instead, finds herself addressing her dead father - implying her belief in heaven and religion. This contrast displays her growth into an adult as when we are children, we are able to find solace in everyday things - a favourite toy, a hobby (in Lou's case, writing) or our family however, as we grow older, we increasingly must find our own comfort and for Lou, this appears to have been religion - so little else in her life can have the same effect.

The other major contrast in Lou's development from child to young adult is her location. In the opening chapters of the novel, Lou is living in New York

City with her parents and younger brother – their life is portrayed as being blissful: she idolises her father and the family seem content and at ease with one another. This is juxtaposed with the hectic, busy life of New York as well as the unpredictable events that are about to unfold and shatter their existence. However, following the accident which kills her father and severely disables her mother, she, along with her brother and their mother, moves to Virginia to live with their grandmother – a farm which provides a serene setting, comparably with New York, and is the backdrop for the events that further harden Lou from child to adult. The extreme contrast between the urban cityscape of her childhood and the calm and rural farm of her adolescence serves to contrast her maturity too – her existence in Virginia is a difficult one and this defines her unprecedented rise in maturity.

This is a novel of contrasts – Lou's innocence verses her maturity which is allegorically portrayed through her attitude towards spirituality (as displayed through her attitude towards her father's death and her mother's illness), as well as more literally through the change in her location. The novel charts her maturity from the innocent young girl without a care in the world and the young woman who has dealt with more emotional upset than most do in a lifetime. Baldacci crafts his novel to demonstrate the effects of a upsetting event on the development of a young mind.

Reference

Baldacci, David. *Wish You Well*. Clayton Vic: Warner Books, 2000. Print.