

Saving sourdi essay sample

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“ Once, when my older sister, Sourdi, and I were working alone in our family’s restaurant, just the two of us and the elderly cook, some men got drunk and I stabbed one of them. I was eleven” (Chai, 2001). The opening statement to, “ Saving Sourdi” written by May-lee Chai, set the tone for the narrative. Nea, the narrator, clearly expresses her strong feelings of love and protectiveness for her older sister, Sourdi. She also gives the impression that she is young, immature, and confused about the world around her. There is also a bit of foreshadowing in the beginning of the story. It starts off in a predicament where Nea’s good intentions go completely wrong when she acts on impulse. While Nea and Sourdi were working at their family’s restaurant, several male customers become drunk and obnoxious. When one of the men begins making rude gestures and remarks to Sourdi, Nea takes it upon her to “ save” her older sister.

Nea decided in that moment that she needed to do something drastic in order to complete her rescue mission, so she took a pairing knife and stabbed the man in his arm with the intentions of killing him. All Nea cared about was her sister’s safety, she didn’t think of the consequences nor did she expect to be wrong for her heroic behavior. “‘I was trying to protect you,’ I said through my tears. ‘ I was trying to save you’” (Chai, 2001). Nea didn’t understand why she was being punished for trying to protect her sister, she believed that she did right. This shows how loyal Nea is to her older sister and how she can be possessive at times. “ I was glad I’d stabbed that man. I was crying only because life was so unfair” (Chai, 2001). This whole situation pretty much explains how the rest of the story is going to play out by describing Nea’s feelings and perspective of life.

I believe that if we got to know Sourdi's point of view, we would have a better understanding of her thoughts and feelings of the whole situation. Since the story is told through only Nea's point of view, we automatically assume that Sourdi is always in danger and is need of rescuing. It could be because Nea feels that it is her responsibility to protect her older sister from what she perceives as harm. This is apparent when Nea believed that Sourdi was in danger in the restaurant, at the cornfield, and even in her relationship with Mr. Chhay. In all three situations, Nea assumed that her sister was in distress and needed to be saved. However, in all three situations she was wrong and acted on impulse. If we got to know Sourdi's perspective, we would know if she actually needed to be saved or she was content with her place in life. Sourdi seemed to be more accepting and understanding of her role in life, even if she wasn't happy with it.

Nea, on the other hand, disagreed with the life that Sourdi was living and didn't understand why her sister didn't feel the same way. It was these misunderstandings are what caused the two sisters to slowly drift apart. " We used to say that we'd run away, Sourdi and me. When we were older. After she graduated. She'd be my legal guardian" (Chai, 2001). Nea trusted her life with her older sister and believed that they would always be together. It seems as if though reality only hit Sourdi, and Nea still had a lot of maturing to do. " I never thought of him as a fork in the road, dividing my life with Sourdi from Sourdi's life with men" (Chai, 2001). While Sourdi was ready to move forward in life, Nea had a hard time letting her go.

Nea's feelings toward her older sister derived from when they were younger. Nea and Sourdi experienced and endured a lot for their age. " That summer <https://assignbuster.com/saving-sourdi-essay-sample/>

we'd just moved to South Dakota. After all the crummy jobs Ma had had to take in Texas, where we'd first come to the U. S., where our sponsor's lived, we were so proud to be working in our own restaurant" (Chai, 2001). They struggled with the hardships of being an immigrant family moving to a strange and foreign land. When Nea describes places that her and her sister would travel, she says where they were originally from. " Cambodia even, to light incense for the bones of our father" (Chai, 2001). Being from Cambodia during those times, the two sisters might have experienced living in refugee camps during the war.

" Once upon a time, in another world, a place almost unimaginable to me sitting in the pickup truck with Madonna singing ' Lucky Star' on the radio, Sourdi had walked across a minefield, carrying me on her back. She was nine and I was four. Because she'd told me, I could see it all clearly, better than if I actually remembered: the startled faces of people who'd tripped a mine, their limbs in new arrangements, the bones peaking through the earth. Sourdi had said it was the safest to step on the bodies; that way you knew a mine was no longer there" (Chai, 2001). Because of these tragic experiences, the girls are always in survival mode. Sourdi protected her younger sister when she was unable to protect herself, and Nea remained loyal to her older sister and would do anything to keep her from harms way. Their sisterly bond was stronger than ever.

The hardships and struggles these two girls faced at a young age, shaped them into the strong women that they would become. This is also the reason why Sourdi is so accepting to her place in life now in America, because she knows how worse things were back home in Cambodia. Something Nea was

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too young and naïve to understand. When characters in the stories said things that were racially offensive, it made me angry because they have no idea what these girls went through. An example of this is when the drunken male at the restaurant referred to Sourdi as his “China doll,” while his friends egged him on. Another example is when Duke stereotyped them as an “Oriental family.” I value equality and believe that people should never be judged based on race, gender, sexuality, or financial status.

Arranged marriages are very common in most Asian cultures. In most cultures that practiced arranged marriages, families would marry off their daughters to men of wealthy families. It was clear that Sourdi was in love with Duke, however, it was never her choice who’d she marry. This is where Mr. Chhay’s character comes into play. Nea’s mother and uncle arranged for Sourdi to marry Mr. Chhay. “Ma liked Sourdi’s husband. He had a steady job, a house. She didn’t mind he was so old and Sourdi just eighteen when they married. In her eyes, eighteen was a good age to start a family” (Chai, 2001).

This statement made by their mother, pretty much explains her feelings towards Sourdi’s marriage and what she values most in life, which would be wealth. I think that their mother feels this way because of how she was raised and the cultural traditions she practiced as a child. The mother had also married at a young age so she felt that it was only right that Sourdi marry Mr. Chhay. Based on the description that Nea provided, I would assume that Duke is somewhat of a rebel because of the way he dresses and the music he listens to. However, I do believe that Duke is kindhearted because of how much he truly cares about Sourdi.

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References:

Chai, M. L. (2001). " Saving Sourdi." In M. Meyer (Ed.), *Literature to Go* (81-96). New York: Bedford St. Martin's.