

I am the grass

War, Cold War



Jud Harris English 101 Instructor Mrs. Willis Essay 3 29 March 2011 Life Changes in a Soldier in Daly Walker's " I Am the Grass" War creates many different versions of a person after being a soldier. A person can become stronger and more focused on the important things in his or her life. Most people come back changed more for the worse though. War can make a person paranoid, cold and withdrawn. The Vietnam War is the most well known for this fact. The war also can make a person learn about life. Thus in Daly Walker's " I Am the Grass, " the narrator deals with the struggles of life from coming home after the war in Vietnam, finding something to do with his time and life, and returning to Vietnam. In Walker's " I Am the Grass, " the narrator learns that returning is not what he had in mind. The narrator is not greeted by anyone. He does not have his own welcome party like the other people. The narrator knew that " soldiers in uniform were taunted in the streets by flower children" (Walker 315). Therefore, not wanting to be taunted or draw attention to the fact that he is a soldier, he slips into the bathroom and changes out of his dress khakis into jeans and a flannel shirt. The narrator feels like " an exile in my own country" and also feels " deceived and confused and most of all angry" (Walker 316). The narrator is unsure what to do about his feelings and instead just starts forming his life day by day. Struggling to find something to do with his free time, the narrator starts forming a new life in Walker's " I Am the Grass. " The narrator, unsure of what to do, drifts from one job after another not finding solace in any of them. He " studied drawing at an art academy, cut grass with the grounds crew at Soldier Field, parked cars at the Four Seasons" and nothing seems to make him happy (Walker 316). He did not find happiness

until he started taking care of patients at a hospital. This happiness inspires the narrator to apply to medical school. He gets accepted. He is a plastic surgeon and likes the money but becomes "bored with these patients and their vanity, their urgent need for surgical enhancement" (Walker 316). He is also a reconstructive plastic surgeon and loves helping children with cleft palates and lips. He participates in Operation Smile and goes to Haiti, Kenya and Guatemala. He even does his own personal Operation Smile which brings him back to Vietnam and the memory of the war he fought. The returning to Vietnam in Walker's "I Am the Grass" causes the narrator conflict within himself. The old war territory brings back memories and old feelings toward the Vietnamese that the narrator tries to keep suppressed and forgotten. In the car on the way to the hospital, the narrator wrestles with the urge to call the driver, Tran, names such as "gook or a slope, a dink motherfucker" because that is what he is used to doing upon seeing men like him (Walker 317). The narrator even pictures Tran's head on a pole. These are thoughts and feelings ingrained in the narrator's mind from fighting in the war. Riding around Vietnam brings back the memories of the war and the narrator cannot help but relive them and struggle to keep them in the past and his mind in the present. He knows that he is there to help children. His meeting Dr. Lih Viet Dinh causes more inner conflict with the narrator. Dinh has no thumbs and the narrator feels the need to help fix him but at the same time does not want to because the narrator still believes Dinh is part of the enemy. After fixing and helping all the children that needed his help, the narrator is asked by Dinh if he could give Dinh thumbs. The narrator decides to help but does not have much hope for the success of the procedure. The

procedure is a long and difficult one. The day before he leaves, the narrator goes to see Dinh and assess the final product. He realizes the thumb did not set as he is peeling back the last layer of the gauze and can "smell the faint odor of necrosis" (Walker 326). The narrator realizes he is a changed man when he feels bad for Dinh. On his way home, the clasp doesn't work on the narrator's seatbelt and it makes him realize that he likes the risky side of life and it makes him feel like part of Vietnam. Returning to Vietnam, forming a new life, and coming home from war teach the narrator in Walker's "I Am the Grass" valuable lessons about himself and about life. The narrator finds a job he loves helping other people. The job gives him some closure about the things he did during the war. Fighting in The Vietnam war is often said to have changed men for the worse. However, in this story, the war makes the narrator a better man who likes helping other people.