

# Sonny's blues conclusion essay



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Reading James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues," one can see the unspoken brotherly bond between the narrator and his younger brother Sonny is illustrated through the narrator's point of view. The two brothers have not spoken in years until the narrator receives a letter from Sonny after his daughter dies. He takes this moment as an important sign from Sonny and feels the need to respond. While both Sonny and the narrator live in separate worlds, all Sonny needs is a brother to care for him while the narrator finds himself in the past eventually learning his role as an older brother.

When the narrator and Sonny finally get a chance to speak to each other after many years, they begin to slowly open up to each other the grim reality that they face. I said: ' But there's no way not to suffer-is there Sonny? ' ' I believe not,' he said and smiled, ' but that's never stopped anyone from trying. ' He looked at me. ' Has it? ' I realized, with this mocking look, that there stood between us, forever, beyond the power of time of forgiveness, the fact that I had held silence- so long! — when he had needed human speech to help him. (52).

The narrator realizes that it was his responsibility to be there for his younger brother for all the years that Sonny needed him, even if it was just to talk or listen. He doesn't know if Sonny will be able to forgive him, or if too much time has passed to be any forgiveness. Although the narrator is there for his brother now, he could have been an influence to him for his entire life, just as any brother should be. The two characters come to the realization that they do share a brotherly bond, and that the narrator cares deeply for his brother even after all the time apart.

The narrator ultimately tries to make up for all the time apart that he has spent away from Sonny during his time of need, Wu 2 and through deep bonding throughout the story he tries to bring together the gap between them, in addition to easing his guilt about abandoning his younger brother so many years before. Sonny has had a problem with drugs for some time, which leads him having to serve a jail sentence. The narrator says, " I don't give a damn what other people do, I don't even care how they suffer. I just care how you suffer.'

And he looked at me, ' Please believe me,' I said, ' I don't want to see you-die-trying not to suffer" (61). He knows his brother has a problem with drug addiction, but he does not want to see him give up without a fight. He cares about his brother, which is what Sonny has needed all this time; an older brother to tell him that he should not give up. While knowing of the issue, the narrator tries to stay oblivious, which is part of the reason he turned his back on his younger brother for so many years.

" I couldn't believe it: but what I mean by that is that I couldn't find any room for it anywhere inside of me. I had kept it outside me for a long time. I hadn't wanted to know. I had had suspicions, but I didn't name them, I kept putting them away" (831). The way that he dealt with his younger brother's problems was by turning his back on them. He knew that Sonny was dealing with heavy problems, but chose to look past them and live his own life. He also knows that leaving his brother during the time he needed him the most was wrong of him to do.

The narrator goes on to say, " I didn't want to believe that I'd ever see my brother going down, coming to nothing, all that light in his face gone out, in the condition I'd already seen so many others"(57). The narrator has seen many kids around him in Harlem that went down the wrong road, but tried to convince himself that that would never happen to his brother. He was never there to steer him in the right direction, which could have possibly lead Sonny past drugs and jail, and onto a promising future. Knowing that Sonny lives in a place where many kids make bad decisions with drugs and crime, yet still turning his back on Sonny, he was never there to protect Sonny like an older brother should.

Sonny tells the narrator that he has always had a dream of becoming a musician. As a natural instinct, the narrator objects by saying that he should finish school first. This important part in the story shows dialog from a protective older brother, a brother that Sonny has never had the chance to have in his life before and desperately needs more than ever. ' Sonny. ' I said, ' I know how you feel. But if you don't finish school now, you're going to be sorry later that you didn't. ' I grabbed him by the shoulders.

' And you only got another year. It isn't so bad, and I'll come back and I swear I'll help you do whatever you want to do. Just try to put up with it till I come back, Will you please do that? For me? (53). The narrator is finally coming to his senses; he knows that his younger brother needs him to be a role model and guide to set his life in the right path. The moment the narrator finally remembers that Sonny is a person who should be an important part of his life, and not just a past memory, was the moment he

saw a story in the newspaper about Sonny being arrested for peddling and using heroin.

“ Then perhaps I just started at it, at the newsprint spelling out his name, spelling out the story. ” He goes on to say, “ And at the same time I couldn't doubt it. I was scared, scared for Sonny. He became real to me again”(63).

This turning point in the narrator's life is a crucial aspect of the story because it is the moment when he remembers his past, and the fact that his younger brother is dealing with serious problems. The reality of the imperfections of the world, especially the dangers of his hometown of Harlem come back to haunt him.

He has put his past behind him for so many years that the reality of his brother being arrested for drugs to him is similar to “ great block of ice got settled in my belly and kept melting there slowly all day long” (55). He began wondering what Wu 4 Sonny looked like, and if he still had his bright face. Although he does not respond to his brother right away, this moment strikes the beginning of the narrator's memory of his younger brother.

Harlem plays a major role in the narrator's life and his relationship with Sonny because it is where they were both born and raised.

It is not the best neighborhood for children to grow up in, which is associated with the reasons for Sonny's poor decisions. “ All this was carrying me some place I didn't want to go. I certainly didn't want to know how it felt. It filled everything, the people, the houses, the music, the dark, the quicksilver barmaid, with menace; and this menace was their reality” (58). The narrator realizes that Harlem is a main reason for why Sonny is going through such

struggles. He does not want to go back and face his past life. He brings Sonny into his house, which reminds him of the house in which they grew up in.

“ The same things happen they'll have the same things to remember. The moment Sonny and I started into the house I had the feeling that I was simply bringing him back into the danger he had almost died trying to escape” (55). The narrator is acting like the protective older brother that he should have been all along. After the narrator's daughter dies he receives a condolence letter from Sonny, which leads him to keep in touch with him as often as possible and eventually see him. “ When I saw him many things I thought I had forgotten came flooding back to me. ” He goes on to say, “ He looked very unlike my baby brother.

Yet, when he smiled, when we shook hands, the baby brother I'd never known looked out from the depths of his private life, like an animal waiting to be coaxed into the light”(55). The narrator describes Sonny as somebody he has never known. All the years apart has turned the two brothers into complete strangers. This moment between the Wu 5 two men is possibly the most important to the central theme of the story, which is the importance of a bond between brothers. Throughout the story, the narrator learns how important it is to Sonny for him to care and listen to him.

Sonny is vulnerable and in a state where he is getting into trouble with drugs and alcohol perhaps because he feels as though no one cares enough to help him. The narrator lives his life as a teacher while Sonny spends his days using drugs hoping someday to pursue his dreams of music. Living their lives

together, the narrator and Sonny ultimately releases how important their bond's with each other are, and as the story progresses and the events fold out, both characters end up in a place they are meant to be; acting as family and leaning on each other for support, which is the true importance of an older brother.