

This boy's life



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Tobias Wolff Memoir Tobias Wolff opens up his Memoir with the image of him and his mother fleeing to find a better life in the Old West. Tobias wants to start from a "blank page" and decides to go as far as changing his name to Jack. Tobias feels guilty and unworthy and has extraordinary desire to transform himself into the boy he fantasizes about being.

Tobias wants to be the privileged, independent boy that he describes himself as, in his letter to Alice, "I represented myself to her as the owner of a palomino horse named Smiley who shared my encounters with mountain lions, rattlesnakes, and packs of coyotes on my father's ranch, the Lazy B. When I wasn't busy on the ranch I raised German shepherds and played for several athletic teams" (Wolff 13). "Jack" is determined to impress Alice with his made up image of himself as a: free, self-relying adventurer, talented, and decently wealthy boy; all of which Jack isn't, nor possesses.

Jack does not own a horse, and the most adventure he has ever underwent, was the time he tried to find uranium under piles of rocks. More than anything Jack wants to have a loving father and a real family. His biological father, Arthur Wolff, lives separate of the family in Connecticut; Arthur even ended all of his Child Support payments for Jack which were critical for the survival of the family. Jack's family does not have enough money to buy or support a German shepherd so there is no possible way he could have raised one.

Lastly, even though Jack is a semi-athletic kid, he never continues with the sport/activity that he picks up and usually ends up dropping it after some time. Jack does not attempt to realize that this image of him is a fantasy, and can only keep dreaming of transforming himself into the charming young

man he so heavily desires to become. Eventually Jack begins to live in his "untrue" fantasies because it is the only thing that provides him with stability in his otherwise extremely unstable life.

In changing his name, Jack feels that he is one step closer to becoming more like his idealized image of himself, and one step further away from his father, Arthur, who has until now, caused Jack and his mother nothing but troubles. "I didn't come to Utah to be the same boy I'd been before. I had my own dreams of transformation, Western dreams, dreams of freedom and domino, and taciturn self-sufficiency. The first thing I wanted to do was change my name" (Wolff 8). By changing his name, Jack would be further away from his father and closer to the ideal image he has created for himself. Jack's feelings of guilt and unworthiness are motivators for his dreams of becoming that "hero" kid he so heavily desires to become. Jack wants to try and adopt his father's responsibilities and provide for his mother and somehow bail them out of their poverty and unhappiness. Jack is still a small boy however and their situation is far away from his grasp. In order to feel self-sufficiency and happiness Jack ignores reality and begins to fabricate his "heroic" image. Jack's life in Chinook hit an all-time low.

As Jack sets out on his early morning paper route, he feels oppressed by the predawn darkness and is reminded of "other absences" in his life, especially now that he is on his own, "The absence of light became oppressive to me. It took on the weight of other absences I could not admit to or even define but still felt sharply, on my own in this new place. My father and my brother. Friends. Most of all my mother" (Wolff 99). It is interesting to see how Tobias

uses "absence of light" as a symbol to show that he is undergoing days of darkness.

Tobias isn't literally in the dark, but he is isolated from everyone he loves: his brother, father, friends, and especially his father. Jack's loneliness is intensified by Dwight's cruel methods of punishment and ceaseless criticism of his every move. The scornful criticism that Dwight doles out does not hurt Jack as deeply as he intends. In time, Jack becomes somewhat immune to Dwight's cutting remarks and eventually they cease to even hurt, "All of Dwight's complaints against me had the aim of giving me a definition of myself. They succeeded, but not in the way he wished.

I defined myself by opposition to him. In the past I had been ready, even when innocent, to believe any evil thing of myself. Now that I had grounds for guilt I could no longer feel it" (Wolff 134). Jack understands that Dwight wishes to change Jack with "helpful" criticism, but Jack despises Dwight so much that he undercuts and opposes everything Dwight says. Jack cannot bring himself to believe that the criticism is true. In criticizing Jack, Dwight is trying to redefine him, but Jack is too strong to believe Dwight's insults and "helpful suggestions".

Tobias Wolff does a very nice job at closing up his Memoir and making the reader feel as if it was complete. Tobias Wolff speeds up the last chapter and combines it all into a very small section. In this section the reader learns: that his father has gone insane, Dwight gets arrested for almost strangling Tobias's mother, Tobias gets kicked out of Hill, and enlists in the army. Suddenly this momentum ceases and again the memoir begins to come to a graduated pace.

Tobias continues his Memoir by introducing this quote, " When we are green, still half-created, we believe that our dreams are rights, that the world is disposed to act in our best interests, and that falling and dying are for quitters. We live on the innocent and monstrous assurance that we alone of all the people ever born, have a special arrangement whereby we will be allowed to stay green forever" (Wolff 286). The memoir thereafter changes perspective and again continues from where we left off, Tobias just sold Dwight's guns and is heading home feeling happy and self-satisfied.

Tobias leaves the pawnshop with a huge sum of cash believing it would last him for months. Tobias imagines his family reunited again with his brother, mother and father. He also envisions himself with good grades, being the captain of the swimming team, and the school embracing him with arms. Tobias feels happy and self-satisfied because as he says, " In this world nothing was impossible that I could imagine for myself. In this world the only task was to pick and choose" (Tobias 287). Tobias can keep dreaming that everything will be perfect: he will become wealthy, his family would reunite, and his education/talent would be immense.

Tobias understands that he isn't living in the real world and is only dreaming, but he doesn't want to let go of this utopia where everything is perfect and nothing can cause him pain. Tobias continues driving home self-satisfied and happy with Chuck. Going back to the introductory quote, we can see how eventually Tobias realizes that almost all of his dreams did not come true, and he finally began to separate reality from fantasy. He realizes that as a kid he was still " half-created": didn't know what he wanted to become, what he was going to do with his life, and what his purpose was.

Tobias also understands that not all dreams can become reality and life does not always give you flowers; it can be harsh and cause many hardships, unlike whereas in your dreams everything is ideal. Tobias also finds out that life did not predetermine him to become someone famous or well known, but he simply became a plain soldier who serves in the military and eventually goes to Vietnam. Tobias can't stay "green" forever, meaning that he can't keep searching for who he really is, can't keep dreaming of being ideal. He must begin to act in the real world and let go of his fantasies.