

# Water for elephants



The Choice to Live Life the Way it Should Be | | October 26, 2012 | 4th | How do you feel about Jacob's decision at the end of the novel? Give reasons/support for your answer from the text. | Water for Elephants by Sara Gruen is about an old man recounting his experiences in the circus. As an old man, Jacob Jankowski makes a decision to leave his nursing home and join the circus that has come to his town. After Jacob's parents' death during Jacob's college exams, Jacob decides to leave college and hop on a train.

He hops on a train that happens to be the Benzini Brothers Most Spectacular Show on Earth. He makes many friends in the circus and marries his love, Marlena. They start a family in the Ringling Brothers circus after the Benzini Brothers circus collapses. In the circus he gains family, friends, and tons of stories. When Jacob is in the Nursing home, his son, Simon, forgets to take Jacob to the circus. Jacob then decides to walk there himself from the nursing home. Jacob anticipates a joyful circus day and his forgetful son is not going to stop Jacob from enjoying that day.

All Jacob wants to do is relive his adventurous past for a day, and when an opportunity to relive that adventure for the rest of his life is offered to him, Jacob takes it. The manager of the circus offers Jacob the opportunity to join the circus. Anyone would give up boring nursing home living for the circus. Jacob makes a good decision at the end of the novel because it is justified by his life now and his past experiences in the circus. The life in the nursing home is terrible in the eyes of Jacob. This life can be easily be replaced by circus life. The people at the nursing home look at Jacob as an obligation. In the circus he is admired.

He knows that the nursing home will be fine without him. Once he realizes this, the choice to join the circus is easy. He is very honest with himself and he shows this when he says, " So what if I'm ninety-three? So what is I'm ancient and cranky and my body's a wreck? If they're willing to accept me and my guilty conscience, why the hell shouldn't I run away with the circus? (331). Simply, if Jacob believes that it is a good decision then it is justified. Jacob knows that life in the nursing home is a boring way to end your life. While he is in the nursing home he is just a patient; while he is in the circus he is a legend.

Charlie, the manager of the circus, idealizes Jacob. Jacob is respected in the new circus. Isn't it a good decision to give up a degrading life for a life of admiration? Some may say that Jacob's decision is not a good decision because he is going without telling his family. In actuality, visiting Jacob has become a continuous burden to his family. It has turned into an obligation. Jacob realizes this and figures his family will forgive him for leaving. When the manager of the circus asks Jacob about Jacob's, family, he responds with: I'll send them postcards. I look at his face and realize that didn't come outright.

I didn't mean it like that. I love them and I know they love me, but I'm no longer really a part of their lives. I'm more like a duty. That's why I had to find my own way over here tonight. They plum forgot about me. (330) Jacob admits that his family will go on fine without him. Jacob's family doesn't need him and Jacob doesn't need them. Jacob's family is really always wherever the circus is. When Jacob joins the circus he forms a new family with people who love and respect him on a daily basis. He understands this and accepts

it and that is why he chooses to rejoin the circus. Jacob's decision is good because the circus is his whole life.

After college, Jacob hops on a circus train and from then on his life is full of thrills. All he really knows how to do is to take care of animals. When the circus comes to town Jacob focuses all his energy on just getting a taste of that experience. Jacob is full of excitement even in anticipation. He says, "...I am now close enough to hear the music thumping from the big top. Oh, the sweet, sweet sound of circus music. I lodge my tongue in the corner of my mouth and hurry. I am almost there now" (323). A person this excited by getting a chance to only view the last part of a show, truly loves and respects that show.

Getting feelings of excitement just in anticipation shows Jacob's love for the circus. Jacob is given an opportunity to relive his past in a way other than memories. He chooses the right way to live the rest of your life. Jacob's excitement for experiencing his old circus life justifies his decision to leave his new nursing home one. In conclusion, Jacob's decision to join the circus is justified in several ways. Jacob's life in the nursing home is subpar when it comes to the level of excitement he is used to. He has become lives a lonely life which is no way to live the rest of someone's life.

He needs to make new friends and family and that's what he can do in the circus. He is treated with admiration in the circus and this is all he wants. He wants to have a happy life and believes that he can't do that in the nursing home. He realizes this and these are the reasons that justify his decision. He can have a happy rest of his life in the circus and that's better than rotting away in a nursing home. If Jacob believes that joining the circus is justified

and a right decision then it is. Gruen, Sara. Water for Elephants. North Carolina: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2006