A Separate Peace Analysis Essay, Research Paper

Enemy

Dealing with enemies has been a problem ever since the beginning of time. In A Separate Peace by John Knowels, the value of dealing with your feelings and dealing with your enemies is shown by Gene Forester, a student in Devon during World War 2 dealing with few human enemies, but his emotions create a nemesis far greater than any human enemy. “I never killed anybody,” Gene had commented later in his adulthood, “And I never developed an intense level of hatred for the enemy. Because my war ended before I ever put on a uniform;

I was on active duty all my time at Devon; I killed myenemythere.

“Now about the enemies that Gene had put into his own life. Gene had a best friend, his name was Finny, they were roommates and did many activities together. Finny was never the source, but the core of most of Gene’s feelings, both good and bad. First, one of the

biggest problems that Gene had, that is jealousy. Gene was jealous of Finny’s confidency, openness, modesty, superb athletic abilities, his natural leadership skills, his ability to deal with stress easily, his care free attitude, his people skills and, of course, his good looks.

Early in the story Finny demonstrated his openness by when asked for his height, he said 5 foot, 8? inches, while Gene replies 5 foot, 9 inches. Finny pointed out that they were the same height and you shouldn’t be ashamed to tell anybody your real height. Later that day, they skip dinner to go swimming in the river,by Finny’schoice,

and are asked where they were on return. Finny quickly replied that they were swimming in the river, something that is forbidden, right down to the last detail, and they got away with it. Gene said that the rules are very bent during the summer session, but it was actually Finny’s people skills that had kept them out of trouble. Finny was very bold, as Gene wished he was, on one occasion Finny wore a bright pink shirt “symbolizing the first U.S. bombing in Europe. Gene called him a “faerie” but really envied him. Later Finny wore the school tie as a belt and when questioned he claimed that it represented “Devon in the war.” Gene was hopeingly awaiting a scolding for Finny, but again, he got in no trouble. Another

day the two were walking and came across a plaque near the pool claiming that A. Hopkins Parker held the record for swimming across the pool the fastest, Finny took one look at and thought he could beat it, so without any practice at all he plunged into the pool,Gene

timed him and he beat it, just like that. Gene wanted to get an official scorekeeper so Finny could get a plaque but Finny said “no, in my head I know that I did it, that’s all that matters,” thus demonstrating that Finny is very modest and secure. The next day Gene and Finny went to the beach, which wasn’t allowed. This was done at Finny’s request, Gene was going to study for a test, but he felt that he can’t say no to Finny so hey went. At

the beach Gene noticed a lot of people looking at them, he knew they were looking at Finny because of his well built body and his golden tan but Finny said that they were looking at Gene. Before they return, Finny calls Gene his “best pal” and Gene wanted to reply, but he wasn’t sure about it himself and he also has a hard time expressing his true feelings.

That was his first enemy, now the next, anger. Gene’s anger isn’t too bad alone but when jealousy and anger are lurking in the same domain, they prove to be a deadly combination.

Gene was angry about such things as Finny’s ability not to get in trouble, and Gene’s unwillingness to say “no” to Finny, but the real war started when he got the idea that because Finny has low grades, he wanted to lower Gene’s grades as well so he will better than Gene. Gene believed that Finny was trying to wreak his studies with games, an organization they had formed-the Secret Suicide Society, going to the beach and all this “you’re my best friend stuff.” Other than that, there is little anger between Finny and Gene. One day, Finny wanted Gene to come jump off a high limb into the river with him, as they have been doing for several weeks now, and he claimed that Leper, the school nerd, would be jumping today as well. Gene burst out angrily at the idea because he was studying, and thought Finny was trying to wreak his studies, so he said no. Finny took no offense and went along like nothing happened, but Gene couldn’t stand saying no to Finny and went anyway. Now he was enraged on the inside because he knew that Finny was not trying to wreak his studies and really is perfect. When at the tree, he was still sore at Finny and when he was about to jump, Gene shook the limb, Finny Lost balance, fell and shattered his leg. Never to play sports again. Now Gene had a new enemy: Guilt.

Gene knows that he has broken Finny’s leg, it is all his fault, his best friend can never play sports again because of him. All his fault. This is really eating at him and he denies it to everyone except himself. Gene tries to tell Finny that he jostled the limb and made him fall in the infirmary but the doctor came in and interrupted. Later, in the fall, Gene visited Finny at his home and told him that he did actually cause him too fall but Finny doesn’t want to hear any of those words being spoken from Gene’s lips so he doesn’t let him say anything else about the tree incident. Now well into the winter session, Brinker, a friend of Genes, comes into his room and Gene gets nervous thinking that Brinker new that he had caused Finny’s accident, because of that Gene suggested they go to the butt room, a drab room where smoking was allowed only to be confronted by a bunch of “the fellas” jokingly trying to get Gene to say that he caused the accident, Gene panicked, played along but could not bring himself to say that he actually did push Finny out of the tree.

Soon there is a heavy snowfall and nobody was there to shovel the snow off the tracks in a nearby train yard, because the workers were fighting in the war so many of the boys from Devon had volunteered to help shovel the snow. Hours later, after they were done, a train

with many happy, young and energetic newly enlisted soldiers in it, it was then that Brinker declared that he was enlisting, and we soon find out that Gene wanted to enlist to help him get away from his problems and start anew, but due to Finny’s strong disapproval, he stayed at Devon. We now find out that Gene thinks that there is always something deadly lurking in everything he wants, even if he has to place it there himself.

Finny had gone home for a time because of his shattered leg but soon returned to Devon. The day after he returned, he wanted Gene to cut class and help him take a “tour” of Devon; refamiliarizing himself with the place. Although he was not the kind to cut class, Gene agreed.

In a few days we find out that among all the boys at Devon, the first one to enlist in the army is Leper, the nerd. Leper had enlisted in the ski troops because he saw a film and it looked quite exciting. Gene thought that their first contribution to the war would leave in style, proud and bold, but Leper, he just left. The next few weeks are all in preparation for a secret winter carnival, organized by Finny which included a ski jump (about 3 foot high),

music, games with prizes and some very hard cider. Near the end Gene has received a telegram from Leper stating that he “had escaped.” Finny had no Idea what he had escaped from.

Gene went to the place specified on the card: Leper’s home. When there Gene found that Leper had gone crazy. He was “nervous in the service” and had developed quite a psychotic personality. Gene and Leper start out talking friendly but Leper suddenly lashes out at Gene calling him “high and mighty, savage,” and “lord of the manner,” this lead to Leper accusing Gene that he had caused Finny’s accident which made Gene kick Leper out of his chair. Gene had gotten very defensive over this. In a few days later in the evening, Brinker, who has changed quite a bit since earlier in the book, came into Gene and Finny’s room with some of his friends and took the two to the auditorium in the first building. There were several other boys waiting and made the two sit down, Brinker rambled on a bit and then started to question Gene and Finny on where Gene was when Finny was about to jump off the limb, at first Gene and Finny agreed that Gene was on the ground, going up the tree as Finny fell but Finny remembers that they were going to jump together, and Gene was on the limb with him. Due to this unclarity, the boys go to get Leper, who was also there, and he remembers that both Gene and Finny were on the limb and that he say someone bounce up and down, but he would not reveal who fell that day. Finny has finally collected all this information and stormed off in a rage out the door and down the steps to their room but he didn’t make it down the steps safely, he fell

and broke his other leg.

They get the wrestling coach, who knew first aid and eventually the doctor who took him away to the infirmary. They carried Finny out in a chair which reminded Gene of an “tragic, exalted personage.” Gene, who was in a very unstable state of mind went to the infirmary and stood outside Finny’s window while the Doctor and wrestling coach do a little work on Finny, by now Gene is hysterical, he can’t stop laughing, he just can’t. After the Doctor leaves and

it is just Finny in the room, Gene jumps up to the window and tries to talk to Finny but Finny reacts in anger saying “come to break more of my bones,” but Gene has the sense to stay outside and he finally says “Finny, I’m sorry.” Over and over again: “Finny I’m Sorry.” Gene makes his way to the stadium and falls asleep under the bleachers.

The next morning he wakes up and returns to his room to find a note on the door asking him to bring Finny’s clothes and toilet articles to the infirmary, so he packs them and brings them to Finny. When he got there a phrase came to mind: “this is it” very appropriate for the challenge he now faces. Gene enters and places the suitcase on Finny’s bed, Finny sorts through his things quietly and than says to gene that he has tried to enlist in every branch of the army. but because of his leg, no branch will take him. Gene replies to him that he would be no good in the army because he would confuse everybody and doesn’t have the heart to kill. At this point

Finny has a 100% realization that Gene intentionally had caused the accident at the tree and he tells him “you have already shown me, I believe you.” Those are Finny’s last words to Gene symbolizing the forgiveness that has taken place. Gene later returns to the infirmary and the doctor tells him that finny has died, his heart was stopped by a piece of bone marrow, and that he died peacefully. Finny never cried, not then, not at the funeral, because he was an extension of Finny and “you can’t cry at your own funeral.”

Gene did enter the war, but he never saw any action, and was never in any fighting, but he realizes, as Brinker pointed out, that when Finny said that the war is just a joke made up by old men, he was right, it is a game, and their sons are playing in that game and they are dyeing not for their country, but for the sins of others. He realized it but didn’t believe it, Gene feels that wars are made by “something ignorant in the human heart.” Gene was ready for the war now, he was ready to face new problems, new enemies, Finny took problems a little at a time, and that’s how Gene has changed-he is taking that same approach also. Hate, anger, fear jealousy, and the enemies in the human heart are gone from Gene now, Finny has taken them with him to his grave.