Green Gene Essay, Research Paper

A Separate Peace by John Knowles recounts the friendship between two friends, Gene and Finny, during the year before they turn 18 and join World War II. It begins fifteen years in the future with Gene returning to his Alma Mata and remembering the drama and growth of his last year at Devon. Gene was rather naive and shy, concerned more with his academics. Gene was also very doubting and insecure about his own abilities. Phineas, or Finny was confident, the athlete and ringleader. Liked by all, he always had a crazy plan brewing in his mind. Daring and brave, his entire objective was to enjoy life. Finny persuades Gene to be bolder and more spontaneous, yet when Finny was not around Gene lost that sense of poise and self-assurance. Consequently, this created opposition within Gene?s mind. Gene both admired and envied Finny. Gene detested Finny?s constant and sanguine attitude toward life because it epitomized a serenity that he could never achieve because of his own insecurity.

Phineas had this mindset that permitted him to see life from a different point of view.

?The Devon faculty had never experienced a student who combined a calm ignorance of the rules and a winning urge to be good, who seemed to love the school truly and deeply, and never more then when he was breaking the regulations, a model student who was most comfortable in the truant?s corner (Knowles, 16)?.

He had a charisma and a persona that mesmerized the student body as well as the staff. No one ever knew what he was going to do next or the reason he would give and that was exactly the way Finny liked it. The incident when he wore the pink shirt and explained his motive demonstrates not only that Finny was unpredictable but also shows his influence among the school community. He viewed the shirt as his emblem, his way of celebrating the fact that the Allies had just bombed Central Europe. Gene summarizes Finny?s amount of sway best when he states, ?No one else could have done so with out some risk of having it torn from his back (Knowles, 18)?.

Even when faced with stark realities, Phineas concocted some fantastic story to feed his disbelief in unsettling events. The most blatantly dismal thread occurring in the book was the War, in which Finny believes that it is a sham made up by some old, fat men to keep the young from enjoying themselves.

?Well what happened was that they didn?t like that (the drinking and behavior of the ?Roaring Twenties?), the preachers and the old ladies and all the stuffed shirts. So then they tried Prohibition and everybody just got drunker, so then they really got desperate and arranged the Depression. That kept the people who were young in the thirties in their places, but that trick couldn?t work forever and so for us, in the Forties, they cooked up this war fake (Knowles, 106)?.

Another disheartening event that Finny brushes off was when Gene jounced the limb on purpose and then tried to confess to him that he had jerked the limb, Finny disregarded the confession and explained it as a fleeting moment of insanity.

Gene was very apprehensive about his own abilities and thus, buried himself within his books and his academics. He was cautious about games and sports, such as the incident with Blitzball. Finny created this game and in the founding moment threw Gene the ball. For the rest of the game Gene tried to give the ball away and become less of the center of the game. ?Still mine? Nobody else has had the ball but me, for God sakes! (Knowles, 31)?. During the beginning of the school year when Finny was still in Boston, Gene still avoided the spotlight and gravitated towards the shadows when he signed up to be crew manager instead of attempting to play a sport. Gene, when not in the company of Finny, was very withdrawn and reserved.

It was this difference in his actions and personality that proved fatal. It was the relationship with Finny that provided the problem. He was both appreciative and envious of Phineas. He respected Finny and wanted to be like him. During Finny?s sojourn in Boston, Gene wore his clothes around school and tried to become Finny. He even believed that it was his purpose to be a part of Finny. ??and I lost a part of myself to him then, and a soaring sense of freedom revealed that this must have been my purpose from the first: to become a part of Phineas (Knowles, 77)?.

Gene even rationalized his feeling of envy by creating another competition within his own mind. He genuinely believed that Phineas was trying to sabotage his chance at becoming valedictorian by dragging him to the beach on the night of a big Chemistry exam and by forcing him to attend the midnight meetings of the Super Suicide Society. Even when Finny sarcastically responds with ?I?d kill myself out of jealous envy (44)? to Gene?s question of whether or not he would mind if he came out head of the class, Gene took it as Finny being serious.

?Finny had deliberately set out to wreck my studies. That explained Blitzball and the Super Suicide Society meeting every night. ?But them I found a single sustaining thought. You are even in enmity. You are both coldly driving ahead for yourselves alone. You did hate him for breaking the school swimming record, but so what? He hated you for getting an A in every subject last term. The realization broke as clearly and as bleakly as dawn at the beach (45)?.

But then Gene?s delusion comes to an abrupt halt when Gene and Finny are arguing over why Gene had to go to the Society meeting that night. ?Studying! You know with books. Work. Exam.?Okay, we?ll go and I?ll ruin my grade (49)?. ?You want to study??I didn?t know you needed to study. I didn?t think you ever did. I thought it just came to you.? Then Gene realized that Finny was innocent. He wasn?t trying to interfere and ruin his grades. ?It seemed that he (Finny) made some kind of parallel between my studies and his sports. He probably thought that anything you were good at came without effort (49-50)?. Gene recognizes the fact that the competition he had created in his mind was a lie and that Finny was a true friend. Gene was very paranoid; it was this paranoia over his inadequate talent that led to his distrust of Finny. He saw himself as disloyal and deceiving. Finny was very sincere and honest. As a result of this revelation of Finny?s virtue, Gene realized that he is lacking in another way the Finny is not. This further angered Gene, who is irritated with his shortcomings and ashamed of his past actions and thoughts, and led to him to take the opportunity to destroy Finny and jounce the limb.

Finny left and Gene began to think that he can develop into a carbon copy of him, but then Finny returned and Gene realized that he could never be like him or a part of him. Phineas subsequently became this symbol, this unattainable representation of peace and tranquility. Gene remembered all the events in the past year that contributed to Phineas? character and personality. He rememberd how easily Finny led everybody and created Blitzball. ?Or just Blitzball, yes Blitzball. Well, let?s get started (Knowles, 28)?. And that was it, the game had been created and the tradition born.

Gene recalled the swimming incident. When Phineas broke the 100-yard free style swim record set by A. Hopkins Parker. He wasn?t even a swimmer and broke it on his first try and then did not want Gene to tell anybody. ?No. I just wanted to see if I could do it. Now I know. (Knowles 35)?. Then Gene stated, ?There was something inebriating in the suppleness of this feet?glamour, school boy glamour?It made Finny seem too unusual for-not friendship, but too unusual for rivalry (Knowles, 38)?.

?Finny had a strong belief that you, being collective, always won at sports. ?When you played a game you won, in the same as when you sat down to a meal you ate it. It naturally and inevitably followed. Finny never permitted himself to realize that when you won they lost that would have destroyed the perfect beauty which was sport. (Knowles, 29)?.

Finny represented primitive innocence. The simple want to be happy and enjoy his life. Gene was jealous of this wonderful harmony that embraced Phineas and his life. This sentiment was established when they sneak away to the beach and before they fall asleep Finny confesses that Gene was his best pal and Gene realizes why he cannot reciprocate the gesture. ?Perhaps I was stopped by that level of feeling, deeper than thought, which contains the truth. (Knowles, 40)?. He couldn?t confess his friendship because he wasn?t his friend. Gene remembering all of these trials and actions realized that he was not Finny?s friend but his opponent. He saw all along that he had been his enemy, his rival, because Gene could never have nor achieve what came natural to Phineas.

Phineas was this idol to Gene. Gene was his best friend and still it was not enough. Finny was nonchalant, unflappable. He was a natural creator and leader. He encouraged those around him and inspired ridiculous and outlandish behavior among his friends. He organized the Winter Carnival, invented games like Blitzball and the Super Suicide Society. He got away with anything and everything simply because of the amazing kind of person he was. Gene felt beneath him. He was nervous and suspicious. He could never lead a group of young men to build snowmen or jump from a tree time and time again. He looked up to Phineas. ?It was quite a compliment to me to have such a person choose me for his best friend (21)?. But at the same time he wanted to be him or become a part of him. He hated that Finny had broken the school swimming record without being a swimmer because, one; Gene himself could never do that and two; if he did he would not have kept it a secret. He was humiliated by this conflict he felt and his shame transferred into hatred. He blamed Finny for making him feel inadequate and substandard. He knew he could never attain the composed manner and dignified position that came so effortlessly to Phineas, the demeanor that was Phineas.

Works CitiedKnowles, John. A Separate Peace. Bantam Books: New York, New York. 1966.