A Separate Peace: Revealing The Evil In Finny

The novel, A Separate Peace by John Knowles, is rife with scenes that have a significant impact on the reader. Throughout, there are situations presented that can have a significant impact on the characters or individuals life. Finny's falling out of the tree drastically alters his life in serious ways including sports, school and the military.

Finny is a boy full of life and charisma which gives him the advantage of getting away with breaking rules and being able to talk himself out of most situations. Genes states: "I was beginning to see that Phineas could get away with anything. I couldn't help envying him that a little, which was perfectly normal. There was no harm in envying even your best friend a little" (Knowles 20). He was born a athlete but is not that smart. Gene is one of Finny's best friends at the Devon School, they do everything together. Gene and Finny alway tried new things to have fun since at the Devon school there are not many things to do besides study and prepare for the war. They frequently jump off the tree as a representation of jumping into the workforce. And then, the unthinkable happens which later destroyed Finny's life. When they arrive at the tree, Finny comes up with a plan to do a double jump. Both boys climb up the tree and stand on the limb above the river together. Unintentionally, Gene jostles the branch and Finny loses his balance and falls heavily into the river. It took a minute for both boys to realize what just happened. Finny has shattered his leg.

When Finny fell out of the tree, it had a ripple effect - it not only cost him his leg, it eventually cost him his life. The first major impact was sports, as it plays a very big role in his life and he was always grateful to be a student athlete. For example, Finny and Gene are alone in the pool and Finny notices a (what kind of record?) record from 1940, so he decides to break it. Finny beats the record by .7 seconds but there was no one there to witness it. Gene encourages him to try again the next day to make it official. Finny refuses and asks Gene not to tell anyone, because he may not want that attention right now. Throughout the novel, there are many parts that have a huge impact on Finny with sports. Gene describes Finny's attitude by saying:

You always win at sports. This 'you' was collective. Everyone always won at sports. When you played a game you won, in the same way as when you sat down to a meal you ate it. It inevitably and naturally followed. Finny never permitted himself to realize that when you won they lost. They would have destroyed the perfect beauty which was sport. Nothing bad ever happened in sports; they were the absolute good. (Knowles 74)

When Finny broke his leg it brought an end to sports for him which causes him to become withdrawn and depressed.

Often a person deals with a situation that later alters their life and they are not able to make a change. After the incident, the novel entails more information about what else in Finny's life is impacted, school played this role. At the Devon School, each boy was conditioned in way to help them prepare for war. Sports came to Finny fairly easier than academics did. Everyone at the Devon School, including Gene, saw that Finny was not as academically challenged as they were. Gene was always on top of his work and was studying night and day, unlike Finny who was constantly practicing in his sports. Even though Finny did not try in school did not mean he

was not intelligent. Finny knew what he wanted and how to get it in sports and other activities. After the tragedy, Finny did not lose interest in school, he lost it in life. He later became depressed. When Finny was in the hospital, Gene came to visit him. Gene explained to Finny what really happened in that moment, but Finny did not believe any of it. After that moment, the two friends would not have talked for a while. Gene went back to the Devon school, but without Finny everything was changed. This included that Gene joined an extracular activity, assistant manager instead of playing sports because his compassion for Finny not being able to play sports impacted Gene substantially. In the long run, that caused him to lose friends because he would not interact with others. Overall, school was not just impacted, but the life that brings school together, was substantially lost.

As a result of Finny's careless act, it not only impacted sports, it impacted Finny's future in the War. At the Devon School, all the boys are forced to enlist in the War once they graduate. During this time period, World War II took place. So each of the boys were taught at The Devon School how to act in War. This reality makes the division among adolescence and the grown-up world clear. Youth is the highschool of sports and dreams while the adult world is one of war. The tree is illustrated in the book as a part of the senior class obstacle course in their preparation for war. For Finny, the war and the tree represent a training ground for the war. When Finny's fall occurred, he lost the privilege of being in the war. When Gene realized that Finny would not be able to enlist, he stopped himself from enlisting as well. Another war came up for Gene. It was Finny and Gene's relationship with each other. After the incident, the boys friendship feel and they were not the same. Due to his awful accident, he was no longer able to enlist since he would not be strong enough by then. Gene described how hurt he was from their friendship

He needed me. I was the least trustworthy person he had ever met. I knew that; he knew or should know that too. I had even told him. I had told him. But there was no mistaking the shield of remoteness in his face and voice. He wanted me around. The war then passed away from me, and dreams of enlistment and escape and a clean start lost their meaning for me. (Gene, 45)

Throughout the book, we are able to see how Knowles represents evil in Finny. This played a big role for Finny because when he shattered his leg it ruined the chance for a great future for him that included in his sports, academics and the military. The first incident that portrayed how evil played with Finny was when he fell off the branch. Due to that incident, he later fell down the stairs towards the end of the novel. At the end of the book, Finny has to somehow accept and endure it. Without any of these incidents occurring, Finny's life would be nothing like what it was. He would be playing sports and breaking more records with the gift he was given, or preparing for the War, and becoming one strong man. Gene and Finny's friendship would be closer than ever, they would not have to blame each other because they both know that they have huge differences that make them relatively closer. Knowles states, "everyone has a moment that belongs to them". (Knowles) The Devon school was clearly not meant for Finny. In the end, we conclude with the death of Finny. Overall, we are able to see that the lesson in the novel teaches us to that no matter what, everything occurs for a purpose.