
Re-connection With Ethnic Identity In Unearth

Alicia Elliott's short story „Unearth“ tells the story of a woman re-connecting with her early childhood. A very dominant theme in the short story is the theme of Ethnic Identity. The protagonist, Beth, is a native woman, who was raised by Anglicans ever since she was eight years old. When her brother's remains are found on the grounds of her old residential school 55 years after his disappearance, she thinks back to the time before she was adopted. Using Beth's character as an example the story explores the ethnic identity of the few native people left in North America, especially the ones that did not grow up in their tribes. Using acts of genocide against Indigenous people as a major theme the short story shows that no matter what happens to people and how many horrible policies are established, people will never fully lose the connection with their ethnic identity, this can be seen through Beth's brother Henry being used as a symbol for her early childhood, her taking the big step of telling her daughter about her late brother and the reservation being the setting near the end of the story.

Beth's brother Henry is used as a symbol for her childhood and being reminded of him causes her to re-connect with her roots. Both children were basically sold by their mother in exchange for salvation and only she survived this. Finding his remains makes her think back to her early childhood, about the time when Henry was still there, about her mother's behavior and regret after he disappeared and about her being sent away and eventually being adopted. She cannot remember much about Henry, mainly because she was so young when he was taken away, but thinking about him reminded her of the fond time she had, when she and her mother would prepare traditional corn mush: At the end of the story she even prepares the corn mush she remembered for herself. Through the discovery of Henry's remains and the memories caused by this Beth re-connects with her early childhood, showing that she never fully lost her ethnic identity.

The phone call Beth shares with her daughter after talking to the police officer can also be seen as a big step towards re-connection with her ethnic identity. Although she is a little hesitant at first, Beth calls her daughter, Lindsay, after leaving the burial ground: This hesitance is very understandable, what happened to Henry is something big and she has not told her daughter about his existence yet. When Lindsay picks up the phone, Beth asks her if she was a good mother and tells her that her mother kept comparing her to her brother. Lindsay immediately assumes that she is talking about her adoptive parents, but Beth corrects her and tells her about Henry: She had never told her daughter about this, but now at 63 years of age, felt the need to do so. This is another big step towards re-connecting with her background. Through this phone call and the sudden need to tell Lindsay about Henry it can again be seen that Beth still has a connection to her ethnic identity.

The setting of the reservation is also a big indicator for the fact that Beth is finding her roots again. She goes back there near the end of the story to buy some white corn and realizes that it is very different from the reservation she remembers from her childhood: Even though the place has changed a lot, the setting causes another childhood memory of her native heritage. While driving through the reservoir she remembers times with her mother running errands very specific to her background. This setting also causes her to immediately be recognized as Mohawk. She has spent years making sure people would not find out about her heritage, but as

soon as she goes back to the place where she spent the first couple years of her life, another Mohawk woman recognizes Beth as one of their own: She finally realizes that she is still one of them, despite being raised somewhere else and not having been back in the reservation since her childhood days. The reservation being used as a setting, Beth going back there to begin with and then having this feeling of belonging, also shows that she is re-connecting with her childhood and her ethnic identity has always been a part of her.

In conclusion it can be said through the remains of her brother being found, Beth is reminded of him and therefore her childhood, tells her daughter about his existence and goes back to her old reservation. All of this causes her to re-connect with her early childhood and her ethnic identity, which was buried in the back of her mind for years, but never fully lost. This shows that even native people that were raised in different surroundings because of horrible policies and their people being victims of genocide, can always go back to their roots and re-connect with their ethnic identity.