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A Long Way Gone

Literature Review

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Long Way 1

A Long Way Gone

Book Report

When a child is going into his thirteenth year of life the biggest thing on his mind is probably friends, school, and family. This was not the case, however for Ishmael Beah, a young boy from Sierra Leone. Ishmael was robbed of his childhood, for at the age of thirteen one is still developing and trying to find their own identity. Because of his town being ambushed, he lost his family and was forced to try to survive on his own. Ishmael’s development was shaped based on the fact that he had to grow up fast and fend and take care of himself. He had no mother or father anymore to make him food or care for him or most importantly love him.

In Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model the microsystem plays a key role in Ishmael’s development. First, he is separated from his family and his home is destroyed. That had a huge effect on how he would grow up. In result of his village being destroyed, and not having a fixed family or friends who were always there, Ishmael was always trying to find a safe place to live. He was running to new villages’ everyday trying to establish a place to call home, only for it to be destroyed too and have to run again.

According to the book Lives Across Culture: Cross Culture Human Development, socialization is “…the process by which an individual becomes a

Long Way 2

member of a particular culture and takes on its values, beliefs, and other behaviors in order to function within it” (Gardiner & Kosmitzki, 2008, p. 54). There are five aims of socialization; however, only a few of these play a key role in Ishmael’s life. These aims are roles, sources of meaning, and self-concept. These aims are agented by family, peers, and schools, all things that were robbed from Ishmael and him childhood. He was not able to find his place in the world, or be successful until way later on in life.

A conflict arose at about the age of thirteen early fourteen when Ishmael was finally involved in a group. He was forced into the army. Being in the army gave him a mentality that no one should ever have which was to kill or be killed. He was given drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and “brown brown” which was cocaine mixed with gun powder. Children everywhere were given these drugs so that they could go out and shoot everyone in their path. As an outcome of this, he grew up faster than he should have and not only did he have to deal with the nightmares of killing tons of people, he at the age of fourteen had to deal with the effects of drug withdrawals and rehabilitation.

Ishmael gave a speech when he was cleaned up and at a conference in New York about his journey, in it said “…the war that forces us to run away from our homes, lose our families, and aimlessly roam the forests. As a result, we get involved in the conflict as soldiers, carriers of loads…All this is because

Long Way 3

of starvation, the loss of our families, and the need to feel safe and be part of something when all else has broken down…I also had to get food to survive, and the only way to do that was to be part of the army” (Beah, 2007, p. 199). A few years after that Ishmael again found himself running from the war and ended up back in New York.

Reading the book about Ishmael’s life opened my eyes to what life is like in other parts of the world. He is only ten years older than me and has been through more than I ever could imagine going through. I come from a divorced family where my father was gone for almost all of my childhood, which has affected me greatly in how and who I am today. After reading this book though it makes me feel bad for thinking that I had a rough life growing up. With the absence of both parents, not only are you going to have attachment problems later in life, but also social and relationship problems.

Ishmael went through a lot of stuff as a young child. From losing his family, running for his life, becoming a soldier, and getting addicted to drugs to being rehabilitated, finding family he did not know of, loosing that family too, going to New York to tell people about the serious issues going on, running away from the war again, and making his way back to New York to stay. I would say that he did a good job becoming the strong person he is today, and many people would be proud to look up to him.

Long Way 4

References

Beah, I. (2007). *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier.* New York: Sarah Crichton Books.

Gardiner, H. W., & Kosmitzki C. (2008). *Lives Across Cultures: Cross-Cultural Human Development.* Boston: Pearson.