Color Purple- Celie’s Journey Essay, Research Paper

The Color Purple Celie s Journey

The Color Purple is the story of a poor black woman living in the south between World War 1 and World War 2. This was at a time when, although slavery had ended, many women were still virtually in bondage, and had to put up with many conditions that were reminiscent of the days of slavery. The problem was that they had to endure being treated like an inferior person by their own families sometimes, as well as from the white people that lived there. It was a life that was filled with misery for many black women, and they felt helpless to do anything about their situations.

The book focuses mainly on a woman named Celie, who has lived a hard life already when, at the age of 14 she begins writing letters to God to have someone to confide in, and tell her thoughts and secrets to. In her first letter, she says “I have always been a good girl. Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.” (Page 1) Already at that age she has been taking care of her brothers and sister, and has been working very hard at trying to get something of an education. On top of this, she has been raped by her father repeatedly because, as he says, “You gonna do what your mammy wouldn t.” (Page 1) She has had two babies by him already, and he s taken both of them away right after they were born. She thinks at first he might have killed one of them, but later finds out that he sold them to a couple in town.

Celie doesn t do anything about her situation, because she s used to being treated like that. She s scared, and she fears for her sister Nettie too, when her Pa starts looking at her the same way. Eventually, a man referred to as Mr. \_\_\_\_\_\_ comes along and wants to marry Nettie, but he s too old for her, and ends up marrying Celie. He takes a couple of months to think it over, but goes ahead and marries her because he needs someone to watch over his kids, and besides, she will bring the cow she was raising along. It s not so much that he wants a relationship, he just wants someone to take care of things for him so he doesn t have to do much, and he wants something else when he wants it. Her father even tells Mr. \_\_\_\_ that “She ugly… But she ain t no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain t gonna make you feed it or clothe it.” (Page 9)

As soon as she is married, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ abuses her. She has to work the fields, raise his children (one of which splits her head open with a rock on the day she gets married), and endure beatings whenever he gets mad about something and wants to take it out on her. One time when Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ is asked by his son Harpo why he beats Celie, he tells him “Cause she my wife. Plus, she stubborn. All women good for he don t finish.” Later, she tells God about how “He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie, git the belt. The children be outside the room peeking through the cracks. It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That s how come I know trees fear man.” (Page 23)

And so life goes on for Celie, until she meets a couple of women that change her life around. The first woman she meets is Sophia, who marries Harpo. She isn t afraid to stand up for herself, even to a man. When Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ asks Harpo if he ever hits her, Harpo is embarrassed, and answers that he hasn t. So Mr. \_\_\_\_\_\_ tells him he should, because “Wives is like children. You have to let em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.” (Page 37) While he may have thought he gave his son some good advice, when Harpo tries it, Sophia knocks him right back into place by beating him up instead. When Celie and Sophia talk about Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ , Sophia tells her “You ought to bash Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ s head open Think bout heaven later.” (Page 44), but she knows she would never get away with it. She s just coping with things as they are because that was the way she d always been raised and treated. It s almost normal to her, but at the same time, she admires the way Sophia can fend for herself, and she wishes that she were brave enough to do the same.

Sophia finally leaves Harpo because of the way she is treated, but Celie finds out that she s not so lucky when she shows her attitude to the Mayor and his wife in town one day. When she s asked if she d like to be a maid, she replies “Hell, no.” When the mayor asks her what she said, she repeats it, and he slaps her. With that, Sophia hits him back, and ends up getting beaten up and put in jail. She gets out after Mr. \_\_\_\_ and some others come up with a plan, but has to spend the rest of her sentence as a maid, living under the house where she is working off the rest of her time. The lesson for Celie (and others) is that although Sophia got away with standing up to Harpo and other black people, she found out that she couldn t get away with it around everyone.

The other person that changes Celie s life and finally gives her some self-confidence is Shug Avery, a singer that coincidentally was in love with Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ years before. They wanted to get married, but couldn t because he was forced to marry another woman that was arranged for him. In another kind of twist, Shug is very mean to Celie when she first arrives at their house to get over being sick, and it is because she is somewhat jealous of Celie being married to the man she wanted to marry. Also, one of the reasons that Mr. \_\_\_\_ beat Celie sometimes was because he was married to her, and she wasn t Shug. After some time, the two women get to talking and find that they do like each other, eventually ending up being just more than friends. They form a strong friendship, and Celie finally realizes what it is like to be in love with someone else, not like a sister, but more like a mate, even though Shug is not a man. Over the years they get closer and closer, and one night, even though Shug had gotten married to a man named Grady, they talk about Celie s life. She tells Shug that “Mr. \_\_\_\_ come git me to take care his rotten children. He never ast me nothing bout myself. He clam on top of me and fuck and fuck, even when my head bandaged. Nobody ever love me.” (Page 117) Shug replies ” I love you, Miss Celie. And then she haul off and kiss me on the mouth.” (Page 118)

With Shug on her side, and making her feel that she is worth something besides being a servant for everyone but herself, she finally starts to get some self worth. The breaking point is after years of not having any contact with her sister Nettie (who had run away after her father tried to get her and ended up living with Celie for a short time until Mr. \_\_\_\_ tried the same thing), she finds all of the letters that Nettie had written her since she had gone. Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ had told her that she would never hear from Nettie again, and every time another letter would come for Celie, he would hide it in a strongbox upstairs, and not tell her about it.

One day, Shug tells her to come with her after she d gotten the key for the box, and they find “way down under his tobacco, Nettie s letters. Bunches and bunches of them. Some fat, some thin. Some open, some not.” (Page 129) Many years worth of letters, in which Celie finds out that Nettie became a missionary in Africa, and she has been watching over the children that Celie had years before, Adam and Olivia. She is also thrilled to find out that her children are ok, and that it wasn t her father that had raped her when she was a teenager, but her stepfather, so her children won t be “dunces” as she s been told that children of incest are.

When she knows that Nettie is still alive, her attitude changes a little more. She writes one letter to God saying, “Now I know Nettie alive I begin to strut a little bit. Think, When she come home us leave here. Her and me and our two children.” (Page 154) She finally gets the courage to stand up for herself one day when Shug says that she and Grady are going to leave for Memphis, and then says that Celie is going with them. Mr.\_\_\_\_ starts to protest, saying “Over my dead body” (Page 206), but Celie finally tells him off, calling him a “lowdown dog” and informing him “your dead body just the welcome mat I need You took my sister Nettie away from me and she was the only person love me in the world.” (Page 207)

Celie ends up going with Shug to Memphis, living in her house with her, and starting her own business, finally finding some happiness. She waits for her sister to come back and be reunited with her, and wants to see her children again, too. While she is making a life for herself there, she finds out that she has been left a house with a storefront when her stepfather died. It belonged to her real father, and after her mother died, her stepfather didn t say anything and kept it to himself. Now that he was gone, it came back to her and Nettie. She sets up her business there, sewing and selling clothing, and waiting for her sister to come home with her children.

Celie has finally gotten her confidence and her independence when Sophia tells her about a change in Mr.\_\_\_\_\_ after she left him. She says one day that “I know you won t believe this, Miss Celie, but Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ act like he trying to git religion.” (Page 229) When Celie talks to him next, he is more civilized to her than he has ever been up to that point. They make some conversation and eventually get to talking about things (especially Shug, who d run off with someone else to New Orleans for a “last fling”). After they talk a few times, Celie gets along with him better, and even gets around to using his name, calling him Albert, instead of Mr. \_\_\_\_. She notices the change in him and his attitude towards women, and one conversation helps her learn why. They are talking about Shug, and Albert tells Celie how she stood up to him one time. “She say Albert, you been mistreating somebody I love. So as far as you concern, I m gone.” (Page 277)

Albert and Celie have quite a few conversations where they get to know each other better than they probably ever had, talking about religion, kids, and going over things that happened in their past. He seems to be remorseful about the way he had treated her, and apologizes for beating her just because she wasn t Shug. Celie teaches him to stitch clothing, and he starts to enjoy it. “Took me long enough to notice you such good company” he tells her, and she says “He ain t Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to.” (Page 283)

After years of not seeing her sister and of living a life of misery, Celie s life was finally coming together. She found that she could be happy and content having her own life, without being treated like a doormat by others. For the first time, she was truly happy with her life and the way it is going, except for one thing. Her life became complete when, after years of wondering about her sister, and then years of waiting, Nettie finally comes home, bringing “their” children, and Adam s wife from Africa. As Celie puts it, “I feel a little peculiar around the children. For one thing, they grown. And I see they think me and Nettie and Shug and Albert and Samuel and Harpo and Sophia and Jack and Odessa real old and don t know much what going on. But I don t think us feel old at all. And us so happy. Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt.” (Page 295) With her long lost sister, and her kids reunited with her after so much time, there really wouldn t be any other way to feel besides young again, except for maybe an urge to make up for lost time. Now that she s being treated like she should be, it should be easier to make up the time to her family, because she can be herself, and be happy about it. That s saying a lot after all she s been through, and Celie will surely make the best of her life from that point on.

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