How Far Would You Go To Learn The Truth?

Throughout the book *Eli The Good*, Silas House tells the story of Eli Book’s childhood during the summer when he was 10. Eli’s father was never fully there for him because his mind was always somewhere else. The Vietnam War was part of his past which never fully left him. During his time in the war he wrote letters to his wife Loretta, Eli’s mom. Eli had always been curious to read those letters because he wanted to know the secrets his daddy held about the war. The letters play a significant role throughout the novel because they change Eli’s life and view of his father. Eli’s secretive reading of his father's war letters act as a bridge to his emotionally unavailable father.

The Vietnam War had always interested Eli because he wanted to know why his father was the way he was. Since his father would not tell him about the war, Eli decided to take matters into his own hands. One summer day while everyone was away, he snuck into his parent’s room with his best friend Edie and started to read the letters his daddy wrote in Vietnam. One of the first letters he read, saddened him. His father wrote “I killed a man today” (House 89). After reading the letter, Eli knew what some of his father’s nightmares were about. He realized why his daddy may have been sad quite often. Eli could picture him imagining the man, which made him upset. He knew there were people dying in the war, but he never thought his father would have killed a man.

The letters intrigued Eli and he wanted to know more. Eli had to wait a while before he was able to finish the letters, but in the meantime he went to work with his father one day. The day was good until a thunderstorm passed through the town. Eli saw his sister and aunt dance in the rain, so he decided he’d do it to. There was a lot of lightning and his father was afraid and
angry. The man that worked with his father told him that he was scared of lightning because it killed his friend in the war. When Eli was able to read the letters again, he read the letter about his friend being struck by lightning and realized what all the fuss was about. His father lost his best friend from lightning and not from the war. He never wanted to see lightning strike anyone he loved again.

One of the last few letters Eli read gave him insight as to why his father holds so much pain in his life. His father has Vietnam feet, shrapnel in his back, and had accepted death. Everything Eli’s father went through changed who he was. He looked at life differently. He knew what real pain was and what it took to be a soldier. When he learned that his feet had changed, the medic told him “those were Vietnam feet and I was a real soldier now” (House 236). He felt the pain of being hit with shrapnel from a bullet and because he saw his life flash before his eyes, he accepted death. Was changes a person and Eli learned that through the letters.

Although Eli was only ten years old and everything he read was a lot to take in, he managed to see past it so he could learn the truth about his father and the war. After reading the letters, his view of his father changed somewhat. He realized why he acted the way he did and why he reacted in certain ways. His mother would always blame the war and Eli learned that she was right. The letters made him realize why his father came home the way he did. The war changes a person because of everything they are put through, mentally and physically.