Loss of Innocence

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In the historical fiction novel “Eli the Good,” Silas House shows the life of a young boy in the summer of 1976. Eli is a well-rounded character who has a special way with trees and observing. Eli’s observational skills cause him to know too much this particular summer. Despite being a ten-year-old boy, the summer of 1976 clearly steals Eli’s innocence, because everyone in Eli’s life has a conflict that Eli deals with as well.

As summer rolls in, Eli’s aunt Nell moves in to his home. Eli is very close with his aunt Nell. Nell and Eli have a special bond; Eli can tell Nell anything. Eli overhears Nell and his father talking about the options for her cancer. At ten-years-old, Eli knows that cancer can be fatal. The character, Eli, explains, “As much as I didn’t want anything else to agonize about that summer, I tucked it away in my list of other things to worry about…” (House 106). As we can see, Nell’s cancer definitely contributes to Eli’s loss of innocence. Knowing that he could possibly lose a person that is dear to him makes him strap Nell’s cancer to his back.

Next, Eli faces the pain of his loyal best friend Edie. Edie and Eli are inseparable and have a world of their own. Edie and Eli support and comfort each other through all of their struggles in life. Edie faces a life changing experience in “Eli the Good.” Edie’s mother leaves her and her father for an acting career in Atlanta. Edie is ten-years-old and this type of traumatic experience at such a young age causes great despair. House shows Edie’s anger, “Her eyes were hard and dark. ‘It’s the damn truth. I hate her. I hope her plane crashes and she dies’”(157). Edie’s struggle to face her mother’s leaving impacts Eli a lot. Eli sees what it looks like for someone to be deeply pierced. Edie’s conflict impacts Eli’s childhood beyond measures.

Lastly, Stanton is facing a serious problem. Eli’s father, Stanton, has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from serving in the Vietnam War. Although Stanton is not diagnosed, we know he is truly suffering from his war experience. Stanton has a difficult time showing compassion
toward his son, which causes Eli discomfort. Eli sees his father strangling his mother on the night of the fourth of July. Stanton’s outburst was blamed on the war, and it causes Eli’s mother bruises and voice damage. Being just a boy, Eli was scarred from walking in to examine the strangling of his mother. Stanton’s PTSD affects Eli especially when Stanton contemplates suicide. Eli stumbles across his father standing on the bridge railing where a young boy had died years ago. Silas House paints us a picture, “My father was standing on the bridge’s concrete railing, balancing himself there like a tightrope walker as he looked down at the place where the river began to rush and turn white with speed” (259). Eli’s examining his father about to kill himself had to be the biggest reason for his “growing up” that summer.

Eli Book faces the struggles of everyone he loves this summer. At the end of the summer Eli is changed forever. Eli will never have the innocence of a child’s mind again. Eli struggles to comfort Edie in her trials. He fears Nell’s cancer. He also sees the war in his father’s eyes often. Eli grows up a lot in the summer of the bicentennial, because of his family and Edie and their conflicts. Eli and America are both losing their innocence. America is “coming of age” because the Vietnam War, which Stanton served in. Eli’s life is forever changed in 1976 along with America’s hearts tainted.