

Sibling Rivalry

Can you imagine being raised by an older sibling? In The Outsiders this is the reality that Ponyboy Curtis faces after his parents die in an automobile accident. Ponyboy, a rather dreamy and detached kid, has a hard time getting along with Darry, but when he leaves his home he begins to better understand his brother. Darry basically runs the family and bosses Ponyboy endlessly. This angers Pony to the point of continuous resistance and daily fights. When Darry's emotions are released through anger at Ponyboy for being out so late, Darry hits Ponyboy across the face. In confusion and anger Ponyboy flees his house and heads towards the vacant lot where Johnny was sleeping. Later, in an old church away from family and the comfort of home Ponyboy begins to miss his brothers, whom he had always taken for granted.

The story starts by portraying Ponyboy as a young, detached, dreamer. He uses his mind but not his head. "...sometimes I just don't use my head. It drives my brother Darry nuts...I make good grades and I have a high IQ...but I don't use my head,"(4) Not only does this prove how others see him but how what others say can get embedded in your mind. Even when thinking to himself Ponyboy believes he doesn't use his head. Yet if no one had ever made this observation to him would he think of himself that way? Most likely not. He was detached in a way that made him unlike any of the greasers. He enjoyed sunsets, movies books. This also shows his dreaminess. He prefers submerging himself in fiction over facing what the real world may bring. Of course this is understandable, he probably thinks the real world can only bring pain since it brought his parents death. Sodapop, though he tries, doesn't fully understand Pony, neither does Johnny. The only person that vaguely understands the way Ponyboy's brain works is Cherry. " 'You read a lot, don't you, Ponyboy?' Cherry asked. I was startled 'Yeah, why?'...'I could just tell. I'll bet you watch sunsets too'...'I used to watch them, too, before I got so busy.' "(40) Cherry was the first to understand Pony's thoughts until later in the book.

When Ponyboy was in the old church with Johnny he began to change. He started to realize the importance of his family. He had always taken Darry and Soda for granted. When he has to live without his brothers, he starts to appreciate them and see what they have to go through. This starts to broaden his understanding of Soda and Darry. His full understanding of Darry takes place in the hospital. When his two brothers show up to wait with him and Ponyboy shows joy at seeing Soda but not Darry, Darry actually begins to cry. At this point understanding begins to fill Pony and he seems to forgive all. "...Darry did care about me, maybe as much as he cared about Soda, and because he cared he tried too much to make something of me... 'Pony where have you been all this time?' He meant 'Pony you've scared me to death. Please be careful, because I couldn't stand it if anything happened to you.' " (98) Darry, who seemed untouchable, drained of any emotion, except maybe, annoyance and anger at Pony, was crying here in a hospital even though Pony was barely hurt, crying when he hadn't even cried at his parents' funeral. And Ponyboy understood. Pony understood about the pressure and constant reminders of homework. It was all for Pony, because of Darry's hopes for Ponyboy. Never getting to go to college was Darry's downfall.

He didn't want Ponyboy to have that regret. That voice in the back of your head when you see old school buddies saying, "They're better than me; but only because of their education." He didn't want that regret for Pony. He cried because losing another family member would destroy him. He wouldn't be able to take it. He couldn't have gone on thinking maybe he could have done something about it. He couldn't face that grief again.

When the novel began to approach its last chapter, Ponyboy had changed in many ways. Having gone through two of his friends' deaths, he gains a better understanding of life and the personalities of those who surround him. For a short period of time Ponyboy becomes harder. Here he is talking to Two-Bit "I busted the end of my pop bottle and held on to the neck and tossed away my cigarette...They looked kind of surprised and backed up...'You'd have really cut them up huh?' 'I guess so,'... 'Don't get tough you're not like the rest of us and don't try to be'... 'What in the world are you doing?' ...'Picking up the glass.'" (173) At this point Pony's trying to be tough, in a sort of unconscious mind state, and this unnerves the others, yet they still see the old Ponyboy in there and they know that this state won't last long. Ponyboy is also more present. He now knows that he has to embrace reality, but he doesn't always have to let it affect him. He is still dreamy in his love of books and movies, yet this isn't a bad thing. He no longer lives in that world, but he is still a part of it. Of course he still watches sunsets and probably always will. They speak to him in their quiet oranges and pinks. The silence of the town during the sunset is a time to contemplate how to live and cope. It's the silence he needs most from the sunset.

Ponyboy went through many experiences that he had to understand and cope with. His best friend killed a teenage boy, his brother Darry actually cried and Dally and Johnny died. Having to live with his brothers was hard; he had to cope with Darry trying to make him a better person and student. Ponyboy knows that family is worth it, and Pony's relationship without Darry changes immensely throughout the book partially as he comes to that knowledge. Darry, though not changing as much as Pony, sees how hard he's been on Ponyboy. He begins to see how much his own stress and hardship effects his brothers. Ponyboy learns of those hardships and of other hardships that someday he may have to face. These experiences changed how Ponyboy understands, copes with, and embraces reality. Having to live without security in an old church; learning that reality, though hard, is always there and it is sometimes mandatory to live with it or work around it. This changes his views and his ability to understand others.