

Susan Griffin: Our Secret

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In Susan Griffin's "Our secret" there are so many different patterns, themes, and topics to choose from. When writing an essay where you are meant to choose one, which sticks out to me the most? The comparison between Heinrich Himmler and the writer herself Susan Griffin. My main focus will be on the life of Heinrich Himmler and his struggles of life. These people described in the writing as very different yet, they both share similar struggles and upbringings but are on total opposite sides of the war. "Heinrich begins his first diary. He is ten years old. He has just completed elementary school. His father tells him his childhood is over now (page 236)." Already at such a young age for Heinrich Himmler his life has already turned south, he will never know the joy of being a kid. His father is the main reason for his cruel and brutal upbringing throughout his childhood.

Heinrich Himmler was a "frail child, for example, favored by his mother (page 238)". He failed to show masculinity something at an early age his father wanted to see from him. Dr. Schreber while describing an image in his mind of someone in an unhealthy position resembling to that of a coward. He says "I can imagine Heinrich in this posture, silent, curled, fetal, giving comfort to himself (page 239)". Heinrich as a child always being put down, never receiving compliments only unhealthy criticism is very daunting and hard on someone at that young of an age. Dr. Schreber suggests that "the pain and humiliation children endure are meant to benefit them (page 239)".

The title of the essay "Our secret" is shown in this speech from Heinrich Himmler. "He harbors his secrets in fear of and guilt, confessing them to no one until in time the voice of his father chastising him becomes his own (page 240)". His father being the main beneficiary of these secrets he is burdened with can being to take a toll on a person. He is unable to express himself the way that a person is supposed to. Susan Griffin states in his journal there is no signs of rage from Heinrich Himmler he is unable to express that, his father him suppress that feeling. Heinrich Himmler explains what he wants most passionately is his own obedience, and his rage is aimed at his own failures. Over time his secrets fade from memory, he refuses to tell them, finally a day arrives when he believes the image of himself made from his diaries is true.

Susan Griffin describes her childhood as "We were not comfortable with ourselves as a family. There was a great shared suffering and yet we never wept together, except for my mother, who would alternately weep and then rage when she was drinking (page 241)." She received some what a similar treatment to that of Heinrich Himmler's father but instead by her grandmother. The manners Susan Griffin learned were not passed on by casual example but that of anxious memorization and drills. "The napkin when eating to lifted by the corner and swept on to the lap. Hand to be clasped firmly but not too firmly". Her family always felt out of place like they didn't belong, fearing that they were "not real". Her family never spoke of this fear they all shared, not even to themselves.

Heinrich Himmler is now entering a new school in which his father makes a list of all future classmates. He writes the name of each child he writes the child's father's name, what his father does for a living, and his social position. His father is trying to pick the students he befriends not even allowing his son to decide. He has only to carry out his father's plans for him. He is not popular with amongst his classmates, he listens to the secrets told from his peers and repeats these secrets to his father, the school master. He is unable to tell the secrets of himself to anyone even himself but has no issue retelling those of his fellow classmates to his father. "Whatever he learns now he must tell his father. He must not keep anything from him. He must keep his father's good will at all costs. For without his father, he does not exist (page 243)."

Heinrich is not accepted by his classmates. He is frail. As an infant, stricken by influenza, he came close perishing and his body still retains the mark of that illness. He is not strong. He is not good at the games the other boys play. Heinrich is never accepted he has never known the feeling of acceptance. He is constantly reminded of the flaws he possesses and how he is inadequate at most things a child of his age should excel in. It is now 1914 and a war begins Heinrich is seeing the parades and the soldiers marching in uniform. He now sees a way for him to prove himself. Heinrich wants to become a soldier and above all he wants a uniform. He wants to feel like for once in his life he finally belongs to something bigger than himself he wants to feel accepted.

In a photograph describing Gerhard, Heinrich's older brother he is thicker and taller than Heinrich who is standing next to him. In the photograph Heinrich "has become harder, and his

smile, though faint like his mother's smile, has gained a new equality, harsh and stiff like the collar he wears". Could he actually be changing in to a different person after becoming a soldier and getting the uniform he craved. The war however was lost in 1918, and Heinrich had failed to win his commission. Time had passed and Heinrich started reading into popular opinions about the war. Heinrich had also become fascinated with crime, books about Jews, police work, espionage, and torture. He started to do some thinking of his own and not just the thinking he was used to which was mostly conducted by his father.

It is 1933, Heinrich Himmler, has become the President of the Bavarian police. A huge turning point in his life of having power and authority. He is now working with Adolf Hitler and is receiving orders to begin a campaign against subversive elements. Mostly that of Jewish people and communists who are unfortunately placed in to the first concentration camp. Heinrich is now beginning to move up the rankings. Having all this power and in his eyes a purpose it is ironic that Heinrich does not like to watch the suffering of his prisoners. He does not like to witness the consequences that come from his own command. I think maybe he is not used to being full of rage after being suppressed his entire life and controlled by his father.

The year is now 1945 in the month of May and the war in Europe has come to an end. Heinrich is taken prisoner by the allied command. He has removed the military insignia from his clothing and wears a patch over his eye. You can tell he now starts to become that of a coward. He could not witness the cruelty you bestowed upon people but hides from that of his own. The uniform he removes is something that meant a lot to him he felt important when wearing it. He

now attempts to cross the border at Bremervorde with the identity of a dead man. Once he is questioned about the true identity of himself he blurts out the truth of who he really is. Knowing what the outcome of his life will be he had a black capsule between his teeth most likely filled with cyanide. After one jerk of his head the pill is swallowed his life is past and the secrets he possessed are now gone with him.