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Our secret susan griffin pdf

Segmental mosaic structure of the great Griffin Stone Choir & its famous fragment. I've often looked back at my past with a new insight only to find that some old, hard-to-recall feeling fits into a larger pattern of meaning.—Our Secret, The Choir of Stones By Susan Griffin, war is more androgynous than most of us imagine; it has less to do with bombs, battles and deaths than with denial in a social structure that creates fragments of real events where you must never see the effects of what it does. . . . Ms. Griffin sets standards that few authors can meet. - Richard Restak, The New York Times Book Review Susan Griffin's long essay Our Secret, a chapter in his book The Choir of stones: The Private Life of War, is about the hidden shame and pain people carry and their consequences. It is an astonishing essay, a meditation on soul-destroying money to adapt to false self-beings that have been brutalized by others, mentally or physically or both, or by themselves in committing acts of violence and emotional cruelty. As an essay, it shows the power of the writer's voice- the scenes are few and free in forty-eight pages, but it's mesmerizing. Our Secret joined my pantheon of all-time great essays, along with Jonathan Leth Brody, Eudora Welty in The Little Store and James Baldwin Notes of a Native Son. Despite its innovative braided structure, Griffin's essay is similar to Baldwin's in that it's a rather classic reflective essay, though Baldwin's spine uses a more traditional framed structure (opening and closing basically the same scene). Somehow, Griffin achieves narrative drive through her divided approach, perhaps because of her interesting juxtapositions, intense focus, and the quiet power of her language as her family's story unfolds alongside the stories of war criminals and victims. Our Secret is a hybrid of memoir, history and journalism and is built from these discreet themes: the Holocaust; women affected by World War II, directly or indirectly in their treatment by husbands and fathers; Heinrich Himmler's austere, repressive boy, who grew up to command Nazi rockets and became the chief architect of the Jewish genocide; the testimony of man wounded by war; and Griffin's desperately unhappy family life and raw, suppressed girlhood. Between these passages are a brief italicizing of just a few sentences on cellular biology, for example, how a missile around a cell nucleus allows only certain substances, as well as the development of guided missiles in Germany, and later by many of the same scientists, in the United States, where nuclear warheads have been added and an ICBM has been created. Griffin often returns to the story of Himmler's life, returning to his a record of the times and trivial events that his father Gebhard, a teacher, required him to sustain. Griffin reflects on his own life in relation to Himmler's life: I was born in 1943, in the midst of this war. And now I feel that my life is still connected with the lives of those who lived and died at that time. Even with Heinrich Himmler. All the details of his existence, his birth, his childhood, his adult years, his death, continue to reson here on earth. . . . Over the past few years I've been looking, albeit for what exactly I can't say. Something still hidden that lies in the direction of Heinrich Himmler's life. I was in Berlin and Munich in this search, and I walked on the gravel in Dachau. Now, as I sit here, I read once again excerpts from Heinrich's childhood diary that exist in English. I started thinking of these words as ciphers. Repeat them to yourself, hoping to find a door to this man's mind, even as his character forms so that I can figure out how it is he becomes himself. It's not easy. The earliest entries in the diary reveal so little. Like the words of a student who has commanded him to write what the teacher requires of him, they are wooden and rigid. The seal of the father's character is so heavy in this language that I do not even catch the breath of the self here. It's easy to see how true it will be. You just have to imagine Gebhard standing behind Heinrich and tapping his foot. Griffin comments on the usual mask Himmler's parents usually wore in photos, like anyone — father kindly, even. But this contrasts with the advice of German experts in raising children at the time that parents should crush the will of the child, dominate and suppress it. Braces and straps were used to correct posture while standing and sitting and to prevent masturbation. The child, Dr. Schreber advised, should be persuaded by the inability to block something in his heart. Of course, there can be no single answer to such a monumental puzzle, nor can there be a single event in history. Rather, there is a field, like a field of gravity, which is created by the movements of many bodies. Every life is influenced and this in turn becomes an influence. Whatever is causing it is also the effect. Childhood experience is just one element in determining the field. As the man who made history, Heinrich Himmler shaped many of his childhoods, including, in the most subtle way, my own. And the earlier history, the history of governments, wars, social customs, the idea of gender, the history of religion leading to the idea of original sin, shaped Heinrich Himmler's childhood just like any philosophy of raising children. You can take, for example, any formative state of his private life, the fact that he was a weak child, for example, favored by a mother who could not meet the male and show that his its true meaning comes from a larger social system that has given excessive importance to masculinity. However, entering history through childhood experience changes perspective not from history, but to an earlier time, just before history finally shaped us. Is there a child who existed before the conventional story we tell about ourselves, which, although invisible to us, still shapes events, even through this absence? [Susan Griffin.] In this I remember the cast-offs thoughts: what was it like before relationships and opinions sharpened, my own and others's, and took irreversible and unchanging form? Griffin, on the trail of Himmler's soul, who went missing as a child, buried under rage turned inward just as much as outside, speaks to a rabbi in Berlin who seems to have lost faith. However, here in this grim essay there is a shard of hope: Despite his answers, and just as the Holocaust made a terrible argument for the death of the spirit, talking in this little study with this man, I could feel from him the light of something that survived. Himmler's diaries remind Griffin of life in her grandmother's house, where she was sent at the age of six when her parents divorced. He says with chilling simplicity: As a family, we didn't feel comfortable. There was great shared suffering, and yet we never cried together, except for my mother, who alternately cried and cried while she was drunk. Together, under the care of my grandmother, we kept to appearances. Her effort was relentless. In particular, her grandmother worked on the transformation of Gryf. Grammar. Manners. Remember. Drill. The Griffin family was horrified, like Himmler, that its humble origins would be discovered and she managed to forget the Jewish roots of one of the parties. Just as young Heinrich learned to befriend boys whose fathers held prestigious positions; He was taught to be punctual in a way that became more and more austere. Griffin wonders how boys are shaped into men: Most men can remember a time in their lives when they weren't so different from girls, and also remember when that time was over. In ancient Greece, a young boy lived with his mother, practicing female life in her house until the day he was taken from her to a men's camp. From that day on, a life that was soft and graceful became rigorous and difficult because the older boy was prepared for the life of a soldier. While researching his book in Paris, Griffin meets a woman, Helene, who survived one of Himmler's death camps. She was dragged by another Jew and tracked down by a network of information — a system reminiscent of Himmler's childhood diaries — collected on cards and sent to the Gestapo for reproduction and submission of documents, the work of countless men and women. You can track every death order signed by Himmler, Griffin writes, yet these would never have happened on such a massive scale without this vast information system. What do they think those who have been accepted for this job? She jumps forward: The men and women who produce the mechanisms that trigger nuclear bombs do not tell themselves that they produce weapons. They just say they're metal counterfeiters. Many learn this ability in childhood to become strangers to themselves, he emphasizes. And outwardly the Nazi mechanism of death was masked in legality: These crimes, these murders of millions, were carried out in no charge, as if no one in particular. Others are more likely to cause others the suffering they have endured. Leo, a Russian refugee brutally in a German prison during World War II, went to America. In high school, he and his friends decoy and beat up gay men for sports. He was later called up to the Korean War and assigned to interrogate Russian prisoners. He was given two men for questioning. With the first man he made all sorts of threats. But he didn't do anything. The man was definitely silent. And Leo learned nothing from him. He left the room with all his secrets. You can never, Leo told me later, let every man get the better of you. With the other man he was determined not to disappoint. He wanted to tell him what he knew. He again made the same threats and again met with silence. Then, suddenly, with his thumb and finger, he turned off the man's eye. And when the man screamed and bled, he told him that he would die in one way or another. He was about to be shot. But he now had the choice to see his tormentors, or not, die in agony or not. And then the man told him his secrets. Sharing his sins, Leo doesn't break down until he tells Griffin how he killed an innocent black man with the butt of a gun after the war. Looking into the man's broken face, Leo sees that he is just like me. Griffin breaks down when she finds the core of her own rage, her memory of the eight-year injustice of punishment by her grandmother. Desiring to make a woman feel the same pain, her imagination takes over: I force her to feel what I feel. I force her to know me. And when I strike her, blow by blow, a thrill of crying is released in me, and I become completely myself, crying in me becomes furious, rage turns into tears, all the time beating my heart, all the time uttering an icy, bitter, passionate cry, a cry of vengeance and love. This powerful, inspiring essay is kept in mind. Our Secret took the courage to write, and boldly asks the reader to consider unpleasant topics and slow down. He slowly teaches how to read it and begin to appreciate its many layers, its juxtaposition, its depth. I'm grateful to my blogging friend Paulette Bates Alden for let me get a copy of Our Secret during rehearsal me with one of my essays. Googling Griffin's name and essay title reveal a cottage industry among writing teachers and students. I sampled several student reactions to Our Secret and was impressed by their insights; while there are many essay services that provide freeing students from interpretation, I like to think the ones I read were original. After reading the Stones Choir from writing primarily here about his Our Secret excerpt, I looked at some book reviews and struck that reviewers tend to call it a collage. I would say this, and the fragment is braided, made of different but reappearing elements. It's a dark book, but deep, and Griffin's hard work makes it compulsively readable. [I found the full text of the essay that the teacher submitted (you can often find them, googling the author's name and essay title and pdf.) pdf.]

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