**Private Peaceful by Michael Morpurgo Disability Aspects**

Harper Collins Paper back Edition

**Story overview**

The novel tells the tale of the Peaceful family through a series of flashbacks on Tommo’s last night before a firing squad(we think). Tommo has 2 big brothers:- Big Joe and Charlie. They live in rural Devon in a tied cottage on the Estate of the Colone. There father is a forester who worked for the Colonel, but he was killed by a falling tree when Tommo was still under 6. Their mother is the lynch pin of the family keeping everyone going particularly Big Joe who has learning difficulties. When the Dad dies they get threatened with eviction unless Mum goes to work as a Lady’s Maid at the Big House for the Colonels wheelchair using disabled wife. This means that ‘Granma Wolf’ an aunt has to move into the cottage to cook, clean and look after the three boys.

Molly lives with her two strict parents, but befriends the family and is nearly always at the Peaceful house or going on adventures with the boy.. As they grow up both Charlie and Tommo fall in love with Molly, but her parents ban her from seeing them. Charlie finds a way and makes her pregnant and they get married. Charlie is always getting in trouble with the Colonel for poaching or not obeying his orders when he works for him as a stable lad. Eventually the Colonel forces Charlie to enlist in the army and go to France to fight. If he does not go he threatens to evict the family. Tommo decides he will go to although he is not yet 16. The horrors and pointlessness of the trench warfare and the discipline of the Army are well described and compared to Mr Munnings the disciplinarian village school teacher.

**Disability at the time.** Big Joe has some sort of learning difficulty. In the 1900’s society was very keen on locking away anyone who behaved or tough differently to most people. There had just been a Royal Commission on Mental Deficiency which defined people with learning difficulty as **idiots**, **imbeciles or feeble minded or moral defectives.** These were based on new measures which had just been developed by the statistician Binet for the French Army and used an Intelligence Test which has now been shown to be culturally biased and only measured one aspect of people’s thinking. In 1913 this became law and each Council had to employ someone to go out and round up people like Big Joe and put them in a long stay hospital for life.

The ideas of the towards people like Big Joe had changed quite rapidly. Before 1850 they would have just been part of the local community, helping out at bit for food or begging if they had no family. They would not have been locked away in an asylum unless they were a real danger to people. But from 1850 that began to change and increasingly people with learning difficulties were locked away in large asylums so they could not mix with people, have relationships and children,

The introduction of compulsory education n 1870 also meant for the first time that all children were expected to go to school and learn to read, write and do sums. This was driven by the economic need to compete with countries like Germany by having more efficient workers and the need to person an Empire that covered a third of the globe. There was no provision made for pupils who had learning difficulties until 1919.

The thinking of Charles Darwin about evolution and natural selection was increasingly being applied in a simplistic way to human society by a new movement called Eugenics.

Galton, Darwin’s cousin, and others applied ideas such as ‘survival of the fittest’ to society. They were most concerned that the ordinary , most of whom they identified, as immoral, drunken and having too many children, while they the good and worthy stock had fewer children and were being out bread.

The truth was they were frightened of the growth of the working class and its power as England had become the ‘workshop of the world’, with the industrial revolution progressing and more folk leaving the land and coming to towns to work.

As the towns grew the conditions were bad, many died of typhus and cholera because there was not clean water and no sewage system. In addition houses were in short supply and badly built and were overcrowded and damp leading to tuberculosis . Wages were very low and so most working people lived in near poverty.

In this situation it was easy to construct the idea that anyone with a learning difficulty was a treat to the ‘race’ and should be locked away.

Rural areas were still not really part of this system and things went on much as they had for hundreds of years with the squire in the manor house employing the people of the village on his estate, hunting and fishing. But the changing world was fast encroaching.

Everyone going to school

Cars and Planes

Railways

Wars etc

**Whilst 908,371 British Empire combatants were killed during First World War (1914-1918), a vast army of 2,090,212 men experienced disabling injuries. See DISABILITY** AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR IN BRITAIN for background.

<http://www.worldofinclusion.com/res/qca/First_WW_and_disability.doc>

**Questions**

1. When does the Colonel threaten to get Big Joe put into an asylum and why?
2. How is Big Joe described by Tommo?
3. How does Big Joe communicate his wishes to others
4. How does Big Joe’s Mum help him
5. What reasons are given in the book for Big Joe not going to school?
6. How would the village school have to change for Big Joe to be included
7. Describe how Granma Wolf treats Big Joe, Molly, Charlie and Tommo?
8. When Big Joe goes missing after the Colonel shoots Bertha(the dog) whty do you think everyone changes their behaviour to the Peacefuls?
9. The War was a great cause of disability describe some of the ways people acquired impairments during the 1WW.
10. What do you think was likely to happen to Charlie and Tommo if they had lived?
11. What would they have done when they returned if they were disabled.
12. How do you think the soldiers felt who had been impaired in the War on retuning to rehabilitation hospitals, handouts and begging when they had been promised ‘a land fit for heroes’
13. Write a poem about how you might feel as a returning soldier
14. Imagine Tommo wanting to write a letter to Big Joe on his last night. How would he write in a way that Big Joe might understand thayt he loves him and why he is not coming back.
15. Do you think people just assumed Big Joe could not understand things and so did not try and explain things to him in a way he could understand? If so write how you would explain why Bertha was shot or the Wolf woman got rid of all his animals( you could use pictograms and diagrams ads well as letters.

Omnly his Mum can rally understand him and sooth when he gets upset.