



Strengthening Bonds in Anne Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist*

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Abstract

In a world where people are spoiled with quick satisfaction and practically get everything what they need immediately, it is simple for them to underestimate the value of relationship. Relationships are the foundation of what one does, and people matter a lot in life. The paper aims to focus on the sibling relationship in the novel, *The Accidental Tourist* about how they bond together and stand for each other in difficult situations and nurture together as one.

Keywords: Relationship – Sibling Bond – companionship – support system.

Each and every one's life is connected with many people. Among them there are people whom few are close friends and just acquaintance and a few will never come across in our lifetime. 'Relationships' are the bonds one forms with the individuals in our lives. Healthy, stable relationships are what all want to be in, rather than insecure, ones. Personal and professional growth is facilitated by connections that are safe and sound.

Among all the relationships, Siblings relationship is special because it usually last a lifetime and are the longest relationships people have in their lives. According to Erica Aten, Pre-doctoral Clinical Psychology intern, Sibling relationship can be segregated into four categories:

Childhood is the time for the first stage. The main needs that siblings meet for one another during this stage are emotional support and companionship. Siblings make the best companies because they have similar experiences and are in need of each other's support when they are growing up and discovering their own worlds.

Next, the adolescent deals with the challenges of individualizing and growing apart from their families. Since siblings serve as a support for teenagers who are getting closer to adulthood and independence, sibling relationships are particularly significant during those formative years.

Adulthood is a period when people go through a lot of new things in life, including dating and having kids, but it's also a time when they lose older family members. Sibling connections take on a companionship role when people get older. Sibling ties become a primary means of meeting the need for emotional support; yet, since adults usually have spouses to turn to for immediate assistance, sibling attachments may not be as strong as they formerly were.

When one's parents pass away, sibling ties become even more important. Siblings typically reunite and support one another, much like they did when they were younger, from about middle age until death. Adults use their sibling connections as a means of making up for losses they have experienced, such as the deaths of their parents, spouses, and friends. Sibling rivalry from earlier times is frequently eased during this period of nostalgia as they talk about old times and share memories. Up until one of the siblings dies, sibling connections remain close-knit and supportive.

Anne Tyler is one writer who emphasizes the value of relationships. Born into a Quaker family, Anne Tyler is a well-known American novelist, short story writer, and literary critic. The main themes and problems in all of her stories are related to family and a person's place in the community. Tyler's works address philosophical issues of freedom and commitment while focusing on family relationships. Her art is notable for its empathy and avoidance of overt moral judgment, a quality for which some commentators have condemned her. Anne Tyler in her novel *The Accidental Tourist* published in 1985 emphasis on the importance of relationship, loss, alienation,

love and reconciliation. It tells the tale of Macon, a travel writer, and Sarah, his wife, who ended their marriage while they were processing the loss of their son Ethan. Macon, paralyzed by hopelessness, becomes increasingly agitated as a result of his seclusion and defiance. Macon finds compatibility with siblings and Muriel a dog trainer where he finds solace with her son, Alexander.

The paper aims to focus on the sibling relationship in the novel, *The Accidental Tourist* where the four siblings in the Leary family, Charles, Porter, Macon, and Rose all of whom are in their late thirties or early forties form the psychological core of this novel. Their childhood was spent with their mother Alicia, who was described as a giddy young war widow. Alicia was not very steady. For the children who need stability, their only defense against the monsters in the closet and someone they can trust to keep them safe, was a flighty, immature creature that changed her demeanor to fit the needs of every new man she met. Her character is clearly explicated in these words:

It was her enthusiasm that disturbed them. Her enthusiasm came in spurts, a violent zigzag of hobbies, friends, boyfriends, causes. She always seemed about to fall over the brink of something. She was always going too far. Sometimes Alicia's enthusiasm turned to her children--an unsettling experience. Then she turned to something else, and something else, and something else. She believed in change as if it were a religion. (64)

The reader is left with a clear image of four contented youngsters curled up close to one another in a shabby apartment, waiting for their mother to get back from her travels. Their paternal grandparents cared for the children when they were still very small and raised them from that point on. These grandparents were "severe, distinguished people in dark clothes. The children approved of them at once" (65). Though Tyler never explicitly states it, it is clear that the deceased father was the trustworthy kind, and that his kids carry a disproportionate amount of his Genes. Though stodgily, the following years of their childhood are spent happily, Alicia bears a great deal of responsibility for the terrible trauma they experienced at the beginning.

The Leary's never feel secure as adults unless they are all together. Rose, the daughter, has never left the grandparents' house, and Porter and Charles, the two elder brothers, have returned to the nest, where Rose takes care of them, after having brief marriages. Macon's disintegrating marriage renders it unanimous, and he also rejoins after breaking his leg.

Tyler begins an introduction to the Leary family early in the morning, as Macon awakens on the couch to the sound of Rose singing in the kitchen. After Macon suffers a leg break in his own house, the readers follow his thoughts as he reflects on his early years and gets the readers ready for life in the Leary home. To focus on Rose' character, sister of Macon who renders her service to the family throughout her life, right from the beginning even after her marriage she takes care of the family members:

There had always been some family member requiring Rose's care. Their grandmother had been bedridden for years before she died, and then their grandfather got so senile, and first Charles and later Porter had failed in their marriages and come back home. So she had enough right here to fill her time. Or she made it enough for surely it couldn't be necessary to polish every piece of silver every week. Shut in the house with her all day, Macon noticed how painstakingly she planned the menus; how often she reorganized the utensil drawer; how she ironed even her brothers' socks, first separating them from the clever plastic grips she used to keep them mated in the washing machine. For Macon's lunch, she cooked a real meal and served it on regular place mats. She set out cut-glasses dishes of pickles and olives that had to be returned to their bottles later on. She dolloped homemade mayonnaise into a tiny bowl. (78)

Macon wondered about Rose if she realized that she lived an odd sort of life unemployed, unmarried, supported by her brothers. Even after her marriage when the brothers needed her, Rose moved in with her brothers. Julian was discussing about Rose with Macon and was worried that she would never come back to him again. Even though her brothers are grown and can take care of themselves she wanted to be with them in their hard times, "Do you think she's not coming back?" ... She's worried about the boys. They're eating glop or something ... I'm afraid she's left me," (363). More than her husband Julian, Rose was concerned about her family members.

Once they are all together again, they have baked potatoes for supper which had been their favorite food, when Alicia left them to exist on their own. Macon recalled years back on winter evenings where, "the four of them seated at the chipped enamel table meticulously filling scooped out potato skins with butter. You let the butter melt in the skins while you mashed and seasoned the floury insides; the skins were saved till last; it was almost a ritual" (88).

The four go back into their early behavioral patterns. When they were younger, they created the card game 'Vaccination,' whose complicated and illogical rules have never been mastered by anyone else. Naturally, it is the main idea, and vaccination acts as a metaphor for the Learys, who are self-contained and hostile to outsiders.

Relationships offer encouragement to get through difficult times. Having a support system during the difficult times can be really beneficial. Macon's siblings were really helpful and took care of him that made him feel the real love and warmth. Macon when he fell down and broke his leg it was Charles who helped in cutting his one leg in the pant, Rose had hemmed them, and she'd also trimmed his hair. Porter had lent him his best stripped tie. They had all been so discreetly helpful that Macon had felt sad, for some reason.

Not just the Learys are bonded together but the bond continues to the younger generation as well, when Susan travelled with Macon to Philadelphia, they were many conversation among them, and one was about Ethan, Macon's son who was missed even by his siblings which was not expressed before. "Nobody talks about him," Macon said. 'None of you mentions his name.' 'We do when you're not around,' Susan said" (210). Even though the siblings did not spend much time with Ethan, the time they spent with him was quality time, filled with love and affection that they could not forget him in all actions they do.

We talk about what he'd think, you know. Like when Danny got his license, or when I had a date for the Halloween Ball. I mean we used to make so much fun of the grown-ups. And Ethan was the funniest one; he could always get us to laugh. Then here we are, growing up ourselves. We wonder what Ethan would think of us, if he could come back and see us. We wonder if he'd laugh at us. Or if he'd feel... left out. Like we had moved on and left him behind. (210)

The siblings also feel guilty that they could not help him to stay alive by any means.

Macon and Rose' bond grew stronger that Rose helped Macon by helping him in his work by sending mail to office, cooking for him and even if he misses dinner the next morning she would question Macon who did not think that would matter much. Not just Rose even Charles cared about Macon, when Macon was in relationship with Muriel Charles advised Macon not to continue the relationship as she was not his type of woman. "She's some kind of symptom, Macon! You're not yourself these days and this Muriel person's a symptom. Everybody says so"

(283). Charles wants Macon to choose a better person as his life partner even though Charles life was ruined he wants Macon's life to be better.

In life, relationships are really crucial. They provide with a sense of belonging, love, trust and support; all of which improve one's emotional and mental health. It is believed that people can overcome any difficulties in life if people are surrounded with solid and healthy relationships. Even dysfunctional relationships teach us valuable lessons through experience and mould a person to a better human being. Relationships are an investment worth making. While people need alone time they also need relationships and other forms of support to lead a happy and healthy life.

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