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The importance of tough love in “Man Babies”

Tough love - it has always been a difficult topic. Some people say it is good, while other people say it is bad. Until I read Richard van Camp's short story “Man Babies”, I was convinced that tough love is bad, unnecessarily cruel and not helpful. I started reading “Man Babies” because of the central plot line of the book that the younger generation was lazy and spoiled, which appealed to me a lot. This is why I decided to explore the topic further and give my own opinion. First, I would like to give a small biography about Richard Van Camp and explain how he gained so much fame for his work. After this, I will analyze the story “Man Babies” and explain what part of modern society each character represents in the story. Lastly, I will answer my research questions “How does Richard Van Camp's short story ‘Man Babies’ represent the younger generations in today's society? And how might tough love change this?”.

First, let me introduce you to Richard Van Camp, a Tlicho writer born on the 8th of September 1971 in Fort Smith, Canada. He is well-known for his short stories and novels about the Tlicho tribe and their struggles in what is now known as Canada. He also explores themes of abuse and toxic relationships in his works, most famous for this is the book “The Lesser Blessed”. The book follows the story of a young boy and his struggles of teenage life and opening up about his rapist father. Although he is famous for writing about these themes, he is not confined to them: “Moccasin Square Gardens”, for example, a collection of short stories, shows the variety of topics Richard van Camp is able to write about, ranging from sci-fi horror stories about flesh eating monsters to funny stories about wedding brides, to puerility and men. However, the main story I would like to focus on in this text is the one about puerility and men, “Man Babies”, (van Camp, p.85-105).

The short story “Man Babies” tells the story of a man called Steve and his girlfriend Karen. Karen has a 28-year-old son called Baby, who still lives in her basement. Baby is unemployed and lives off of Karen as seen in the quote “Dude, if your mom's still calling you Baby at twenty-eight and you're still living at home - if you're too busy playing Nintendo to work and earn, ”, (van Camp, p.86), which shows Baby's dependence on his mother as he has not moved out yet and spends all his time playing video games. Steve does not approve of this and tries to get Karen to kick her son out of the house, or at least convince him to move out on his own. In this case, Steve represents the older generation which thinks of the newer generation as lazy and spoiled. Lastly, Karen represents the enabler, enabling Baby to be lazy and do nothing by removing all obstacles from Baby's life. This leads to Baby never having to face a challenge in

his life and staying with his mother because it is the easier option. Steve finally kicks Baby out, without Karen knowing. He sent him to his Grandpa, who is even harsher on Baby than Steve was. This drastic change in Baby's life forces him to face the first big problem in his life. This is because Baby was removed from his comfortable home with his mother and forced to do something to get him out of the situation with his grandfather, whom he despises for making him work outside. As a result of these events in the story, Van Camp is able to thoroughly develop his main ideas that the new generation is lazy, and that tough love is necessary.

Lastly, Richard Van Camp reflects on the younger generation of today's world as lazy and spoiled in his short story, this is seen in Baby's behavior. He also explained that it is not entirely the younger generations' fault for being lazy, because the older generation is responsible for how they raised them. For example, Karen is the older generation which has the job of raising the younger generation, Baby. She raises him by removing any difficulties from his, life as mentioned previously. This leads to this stigma from the older generation, Steve, that they are lazy because they do not have to face any difficulties. For example, "But I can't be proud of a son who'll mooch and be in the way of my dream" (van Camp, p.88). This quote from Steve shows how fed up he is with the laziness of Baby, as he states that he could not[?] be proud of him if he were to remain living with him and Karen. When Steve finally snaps, he kicks Baby out, forcing him to get his life together, as he could not return home yet because of Steve. After a couple of months, Baby returned home a changed man. He finally had an apartment, a job, and a car. He then asks to talk to Steve; it first looks like they are going to fight but then they have a heartwarming moment, hug and make up. It ends with Baby thanking Steve for kicking him out, because otherwise he never would have moved out and got his life together. Richard van Camp shows that tough love sometimes is the right answer, similarly how pelicans kick their babies out of the nest to make them learn how to fly.

In conclusion, I think that Richard van Camp showcased why tough love is necessary and helpful. I also think that parents should not be so doubtful of the their children's ability and let them make mistakes. This is what growing up is all about in my opinion, as it is impossible to learn without failure and commitment. Finally, if I would have to answer my research question in one sentence "How does Richard van Camp's short story 'Man Babies' represent the younger generations in today's society? And how might tough love change this?" I would say: the short story "Man Babies" represents the younger generation and its problems nowadays in a simple family setting and tells us that tough love is the most important and effective tool today's parents have to raise their children.

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