Passage 2 SUMMARY: “Rituals of Memory”

Blaeser’s story is told from the first-person point of view and concerns a memory she recalls from her childhood growing up in rural Minnesota. She lives within a culturally diverse community, populated by the descendants of both European and Native American origins. Though these cultures have been at war in the past, there also exist times where they were not “in opposition” to one another. Specifically, the author draws on her memory of one Memorial Day in particular where these separate cultures came together under the mutual respect of honoring their ancestors.

As a member of the American Legion, the author’s father takes her along when he marches with his fellow veteran soldiers to the gravesites of those men lost in battle many years ago when his ancestors’ troops fought against the Native Americans for land. While the purpose is to pay respect to their own people, the last gravesite the Legionnaires visit, however, is not of their own (European) ancestral background, but the site of their enemies in battle, the Indian warriors.

As this is a flashback to the author’s childhood, she notes that she did not realize at the time that the Legionnaires were actually honoring their Indian enemies; she did not realize what a gesture of great respect it was. She just enjoyed the moment, linked arm-in-arm with the people around her, not understanding the age-old tension and turmoil their cultures had. (It represents the innocence of childhood, that children do not always see in color, so to speak.)

Everyone stood for a brief moment in time where they did not care about the heat, or the bugs, or the political issues that still surround the two cultures even today; they just enjoyed the brief connection shared as they both honored their ancestors at a grave site tucked away in the woods.

As they arrived back at the beach to celebrate the holiday, both groups returned to their separate lives, but the author’s point is that even very separate cultures can find common ground when it comes to honoring and protecting the memory of our ancestors.