



SISTERHOOD IN JODI PICOULT'S MY SISTER KEEPER

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ABSTRACT

This thesis paper, sisterhood in Jody Picoult's *My Sister Keeper*. The Novel represents people especially women who shares honest thoughts, and feelings. The research itself is a library research because it solely focused on analyzing the novel with other relevant and supporting articles. This research also uses the mimetic approach proposed by Abrams. Which proposes that art is essentially an imitation of aspect of the universe. The analysis is focused on sisterhood, a central focus in feminism and in this case the feminist literary criticism. It can be explained as the sharing of experiences of oppression, and sharing the thoughts and feeling of honesty. The author writes Anna and Kate to represent people who experiences oppression. Anna losses her freedom as a person so she sues the court for freedom. In conclusion through her novel, the author portrays people who, through the process of forming a sisterhood, found solace from their suffering, gain understanding and achieve happiness.

Keywords: sisterhood, oppression, honesty

I. INTRODUCTION

Jodi Lynn Picoult was born on May 19, 1966, in Long Island, New York. Her father Myron worked as a securities analyst, while her mother Jane Picoult taught in preschool. She grew up in the Long Island hamlet of Nesconset in an upmarket housing development where streets bore names like Prince Charming Lane. She composed her first tale at the age of five, a short story titled *The Lobster Which Misunderstood*. In fourth grade, she decided to become a writer after she received a failing grade on a paper she wrote about her summer vacation (encyclopedia.com).

Picoult received magna cum laude degree from Princeton University, where she studied writing under the direction of memoirist Mary Morris. She and Timothy Warren van Leer, whom she met in college, have been married since 1989. They live in Hanover, New Hampshire, with their three children, Samantha, Kyle Ferreira, Jake Timothy, and a few pets. He works part-time as an antique dealer (www.litlovers.com).

She learned about eugenics which tries to improve the human race by allowing

only those with desirable genetic characteristics to reproduce. Picoult also learned about stem cell research and linked the ideas, wondering if stem cell research could advance the human genome research. She learned that the related issues are complex and emotional (encyclopedia.com).

She received many awards for her writings, including the New England Bookseller Award for Fiction, 2003; best fiction books of the year list, Washington Post, 2004; Margaret Alexander Edwards Award, American Library Association, for *My Sister's Keeper*, 2004; Alex Award, Young Adult Library Services Association, for *My Sister's Keeper*, 2005; Bookbrowse Diamond Award for a novel of the year, for *My Sister's Keeper*, 2005; Vermont Green Mountain Book Award, for *My Sister's Keeper*, 2005; Abraham Lincoln Illinois High School Book Award, Illinois School Library Media Association, for *My Sister's Keeper*, 2006; and "Fearless Fiction" Award, *Cosmopolitan*, 2007 (encyclopedia.com).

She writes numerous novels which are *Songs of the Humpback Whale*(1992), *Harvesting the Heart*(1994), *Picture Perfect*



(1995), Mercy(1996), The Pact(1998), Keeping Faith (1999), Plain Truth (2000), Salem Falls (2001), Perfect Match (2002), Second Glance(2003), My Sister's Keeper (2004), Vanishing Acts (2005), The Tenth Circle (2006), Nineteen Minutes (2007), Change of Heart (2008), Handle With Care(2009), House Rules (2010), Sing You Home (2011), Lone Wolf (2012), The Storyteller (2013), Leaving Time (2014), Small Great Things (2016), and her powerful and provocative new novel, A Spark of Light (2018), about ordinary lives that intersect during a heart-stopping crisis, The Book of Two Ways (2020), about the choices that alter the course of our lives, Wish You Were Here (2021), about the resilience of the human spirit in a moment of crisis, Mad Honey (2022), about what we choose to keep from our past, and what we choose to leave behind, and the YA novels Between The Lines (2012), and Off The Page (2015, library.umass.edu/picoult-jodi).

Picoult is known for taking on compelling social and ethical issues and weaving them into the works of fiction that have won her a devoted readership. From her first novel, Songs of the Humpback Whale (1992), to her recent bestseller The Storyteller (2013), Picoult has grappled with a great range of topics: fractured families, eugenics, school violence, teen suicide, spouse abuse, a child's legal rights, childhood cancer, gay rights, the death penalty, war criminals, vengeance, justice, faith, the value of life. Through her characters and her stories, she engages the complications, considering provocative questions from different angles (library.umass.edu).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Sharing experiences of oppression

Sisterhood in feminism is the shared experiences of oppression and other woman suffered issues. It is comparable to the shared feeling of comradery among sisters within a family context. Sisterhood itself is

one of the main vocal points for feminism (Novio).

In the Feminism context the meaning of sisterhood has been defined and used by feminists for quite a while. For feminism and a feminist, it is more than a word it is a responsibility. It is more important than status, skin color or money. It is a shared self-discovery of the oppressed, it is a joining that is threatened by two other "ideals" in the feminine fulfillment sphere, namely "unselfconscious and inclusion" (tokenism). A Feminine self-sacrifice cannot be forged by the mere saying of words. It is the outcome of continued growth and change. It is a goal to be reached, a process of becoming (Novio, 2020).

Feminism as defined in Novio is an awareness of women's oppression, in the context of deep and emotional connections in a society and within the family. It is a conscious action by men and women to change said societal norms. In other words, to overcome patriarchy. Novio stresses that feminism is a model where help, support, and friendship are each responsible for the feminism movement with the main goal of equality through unity. She further describes that feminist leadership as relational, flexible, intimate and passionate (Novio).

B. Sharing thoughts and feelings of honesty

Understanding and sharing honest, authentic thoughts and feelings are among the best benefits of sisterhood. Sisterhood serves as our safe space to share and heal, especially when it feels like the world is against you. To call another woman a sister is to say, "I trust you," "I have your back," "Your feelings are valid," and "I believe in us." Sisterhood is empowering. A woman must know, love and respect herself before she can know, love and respect another as her sister. Like attracts like, and we can find each other to connect and share our resources (www.huffpost.com).



All of these affected women, hence, the word “sister” has profound meaning. It does not only mean sister between women-siblings but also between those with shared ideas of idealism. The concept of sisterhood and solidarity is separate but connected. It strengthens the thought that personal sisterhood is also political (solidarity). According to her, in sisterhood, one feels with and respects those in the group in an atmosphere that has a collective feeling as the core of the experience (Novio Barbara Eunice).

The sisters tell each other everything; you can talk late into the night to reveal everything in life, from romance to some problems with their friends. Sisters care for one another. This fosters invaluable feelings of love and protection, which, in turn, helps you develop a sense of caring for others. Sisters usually have an extraordinary maternal instinct, and they are the ones who will do anything to bring the family together (secret.sister.com).

Older sisters will show their younger sister how to relate to others, especially when around people who need attention. She will show you how to recognize other people's emotions, and you will eventually become a more empathetic person. When your sister is having a hard time, you will in turn come to her aid and feel her sorrow. Growing up with a sisterhood will teach you very important things. You will learn how to defend yourself. Your older sibling has had an experience that they will share with their younger sibling. They will also teach you to be an independent person. No matter if it's either day or night, no matter what situation one encounters, the sister will always be there (secret.sister.com).

III. THE ANALYSIS

"My Sister's Keeper" is a story about a young girl who wants to free herself from her mother's unreasonable demand to save her sister suffering from acute promyelocytic leukemia, a blood and bone marrow cancer. She had been donating

umbilical cord blood since the first time she was born. She sacrifices herself to save her dying sister. At first, it was successful, but the cancer continued to relapse throughout her sister's life. When she was thirteen, she was asked to donate one of her kidneys to her dying sister.

She wants her sister to do what her sister wants to do. She is not a hypocrite because she also wants to live freely and do the things she desires. But she loves her sister very much and does not want to lose her. She realizes that her sister has given up on her life, and only she can grant her sister's desire. She is ready to do anything for her sister, even to kill her, because she knows that is what her sister wants. Even when she agrees with her sister's request, her sister feels grateful to her. Her sister often changes her desire, but there is one thing that never changes in her heart; she still wants to be Kate's sister. It is a strong sisterhood. She and her sister always rely on each other and keep supporting each other no matter how hard it is. The ending of the novel surprises the readers because Kate is not dead, but Anna is. Anna had a terrible accident and suffered brain death. Eventually, her kidneys are donated to Kate, and the rest of her organs are donated to people who need them. Kate becomes the narrator expressing her sadness and her family's loss because of losing Anna. She also feels guilty for telling Anna to sue her parents because if she had not told Anna to do that, Anna wouldn't have had an accident while visiting from the court to the hospital. But even though it is hard at first to accept Anna's death, they begin to live a normal life without Anna. Anna always makes an impression in their hearts, especially Kate.

The next set of sisters that needs to be recognized is Sara Fitzgerald and her older sister Zanne. Zanne helped Sara in numerous ways during Kate's time of disease. She offered to give Sara and Brian a significant amount of money to help pay for Kate's medical bills. Zanne also spent countless hours supervising Jesse and Anna,



so their parents were able to stay with Kate in the hospital. Adding onto the idea of sisterhood, Julia and her twin sister Isobel share a relationship like no other.

The main characters are Anna Fitzgerald, Sara Fitzgerald, and Kate Fitzgerald. The minor characters are Campbell Alexander, Brian Fitzgerald, Jesse Fitzgerald, Julia Romano, Suzanne, Dr. Chance, Judge Desalvo, Taylor Ambrose, Izzy Romano, and Judge (The dog).

Anna Fitzgerald is the main and round character with the real name Andromeda. She is the youngest Fitzgerald child and the protagonist of the novel. Described as a thirteen-year-old girl with a thin preteen body, dark hair color, unattractive appearance, no resemblance to her parents, and a preference for casual clothes, Anna is also an allogeneic donor for her sister, Kate Fitzgerald. Anna's actions drive the plot as she struggles to reconcile her knowledge that only she can provide the organs Kate needs to survive with her desire to live without an extraordinary burden.

Anna's role in Kate's survival has been a blessing and a curse for her. It has made her Kate's savior, but it has also made Anna unable to be her own person. She is identified as a round character, as her actions allow us to see the different sides of her personality. Anna faces conflicts, including person versus self, person versus person, and person versus society. She struggles in these conflicts throughout the text, and they weigh her down. She has to make many decisions that a regular thirteen-year-old girl should not need to face. The choice that she makes is crucial to her sister: her decision will decide if Kate lives or dies. Throughout the novel, however, she has a long time to think about the decision and finally does come to a decision. Whether it is right or not, she wants to be heard for once.

Sara Fitzgerald is Anna's mother. Described as thin woman with black hair and a serious face. Sara is strong, stubborn,

and intelligent. Her life centers on her efforts to keep Kate alive. She has extremely strong maternal instincts, but her single-minded focus on saving Kate sometimes comes at the expense of her marriage and her relationships with her two other children. She has a deep and abiding love for her entire family, though she does not always know how to express that love. Sara does not always play the motherly role for her other children.

Kate Fitzgerald, 16 years old, is Anna and Jesse's sister who was diagnosed with acute promyelocytic leukemia at the age of two. She had pale towhead hair but is now bald. She is tired of being sick and tired because her mother watches over her like she's inside a giant invisible bubble. Her cancer is at the core of the story, and she has struggled with it nearly her entire life. She has come to terms with the fact that she might die and asked Anna not to donate her kidney.

Campbell Alexander is a man with black hair and tall figure; 180 cm, a square jaw, and cold eyes. He is Anna's lawyer. Initially, he is arrogant and brusque, but he is a caring person. He personally uses a service dog for alerts if a seizure (epilepsy) occurs, allowing him to move to a safe environment. Brian Fitzgerald is Anna's father and a firefighter. Fond of astronomy, he genuinely cares about his children. Yet, he also escapes into his work to avoid the hardships surrounding his family. He can be kinder than Sara, but he needs a lot of time to cope with Anna's death.

Jesse Fitzgerald is Anna's brother and a delinquent. Despite his tough exterior, he is, in reality, a vulnerable and sensitive character. He uses his destructive behavior to mask fundamental feelings of inadequacy. He cannot save Kate, and he has never been able to forgive himself for that. He often felt ignored by his parents because they focus their attention almost exclusively on Kate, and he acts out to gain his parents' attention.



Julia Romano is the court-appointed guardian, whose job is to decide what is best for Anna. She is Campbell's high school girlfriend with an independent personality.

Suzanne is Sara's older sister, a high-powered career woman without children, who provides a foil to Sara. She shows more support to Anna, explaining how disappointed she is in Sara for how she treated both her daughters.

Taylor Ambrose is Kate's crush, diagnosed with myeloid leukemia, and meets her at the hospital while undergoing chemotherapy. Judge DeSalvo is the presiding judge over Anna's case, who is fair, kind, and genuinely cares for Anna's well-being. As the father of a child killed by a drunk driver, he understands how desperately Sara and Brian want to keep Kate alive.

Isobel "Izzy" Romano is Julia's twin sister and roommate who is a jewelry designer. She is fresh from a relationship with another woman named Janet. Izzy is very close to her sister and, as such, despises Campbell for having left Julia.

Judge (the dog) is Campbell's service dog that alerts Campbell if a seizure is imminent, allowing Campbell to move to a safe environment. Dr. Harrison Chance is Kate's oncologist, a warm but serious man who always offers hope that a treatment may work even when the chances are slim.

Sharing experiences of oppression

The author creates two sisters, Kate and Anna, to represent sisterhood and the act of sharing the experiences of compassion. Anna shares her experience of compassion with Kate regarding her feelings of sadness. Despite not wanting to stay in the hospital with her sick sister because she still enjoys playing with her friends, which can be seen in the following passage,

"When Kate needs leukocytes or stem cells or bone marrow to fool her body into thinking it's

healthy, she is the one who provides them. Nearly every time Kate is hospitalized, she ends up there, too" (10).

Anna's suffering because of her sister's sickness can be also seen from the following passage,

"The next time she relapsed, when she was five, they had lymphocytes drawn from her three times over because it never seemed to get enough of them the first time around. When that stopped working, they took bone marrow for transplant. When Kate got infections, she had to donate granulocytes. When she relapsed again, she had to donate peripheral blood stem cells" (18).

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the novel "My Sister's Keeper" written by Jodi Picoult describes sisterhood through the shared experiences of oppression and the open exchange of honest thoughts and feelings. It delves into the impact of oppression felt by people, especially children, where parents prioritize their desires without considering the desires of their children.

The representation of sisterhood through shared experiences of oppression is embodied by Anna. She undergoes oppression by sacrificing herself as a donor to save her sister.

On the other hand, sisterhood depicted through the sharing of thoughts and honest feelings is exemplified by pairs such as Anna and Kate, Sara and Zanne, Izy and Isobel. These sisters consistently rely on and support each other, regardless of the challenges they face. Sometimes, this support involves one sister simply listening to the other's thoughts or problems, as observed multiple times throughout the story. This underscores the notion that



sisterhood is a unique and special relationship.

As the narrative unfolds, it becomes evident that people often look up to their older sisters as role models, protectors, and counselors, regardless of their age. Another sisterly bond portrayed in the story is between the twin sisters Julia and Izzy. Despite being thought to have a sixth sense about each other, and often considered able to read each other's thoughts, they are identical twins with distinct personalities who lead different lives.

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