

Ruth v Hank: the Different Perspectives of Memories

In *The Smell of Other People's Houses* by Alaskan author Bonnie-Sue Hitchcock, each narrator in the chapters has a unique perspective about their memories. To compare, Ruth is the narrator of first chapter and Hank is the narrator of the fourth chapter. They're talking about their journey to overcome their abnormal teenage life, challenged by society and the memories of their parents. As the narrator, Ruth and Hank have a similar family background, but they have a different perspective to perceive their memories and how they use unique smell, in particular, to survive through their life.

Having similar memories of losing parents and normal family, Ruth and Hank have different perspectives of their memories. Ruth has memories of her Mama who left her when she was young. She starts it at the first sentence, "At some point I stopped waiting for Mama to come back. It's hard to hold on to a five-year-old dream, and even harder to remain her people after ten years."(11) Ruth showed her memories of her childhood with her Mama, which wasn't easy to still keep it in her mind. But then, she slowly stopped hoping for her memories, becoming more realistic that her life didn't only depend on her mother. In contrast, Hank's memories of his father become the main guide for his story. Longing for his parents' condition before his father gone, Hank's memory helped him to believe. "If I didn't believe that people we love are still taking care of us after they die, I wouldn't be sitting here now."(54) This passage showed Hank's memories of his father give him hope because he pretend his father was still here. These two

perspectives of memories changed narrator's life: Ruth with her hopeless memories of mother and Hank with his hopeful memories of his father.

A particular smell becomes Ruth and Hank's way to maintain their memory of their parents. Interestingly, Ruth's story includes the smell of her mother that she likes. "If I close my eyes, I can just barely remember my mother's wildflowers in their whiskey bottles... the smell of too much love," (11) as she reminiscing her memories. This particular smell is Ruth's way to keep the good memories of her mother. Meanwhile, Hank, he used the aftershave smell of his dad, to convinced himself that his memories can make his father stay alive in his life. "The boxes smelled like my dad's aftershave, Old Spice," (57) as Hank described his father's old boxes in the garage. When Hank smells the Old Spice, it brings back the feelings of his father's presence, as one of his memory of his father. Both of them use smell to remember a memory and sense a life that they wished: Ruth with her mother's smell and and Hank with his father's smell.

In conclusion, while both of the characters experience similar moments of losing their loved ones and a normal life, the aftermath of their childhood life makes their perspectives different. Even that Ruth and Hank use memory to feel a life that they've been missing, become a guide to their teenage life in different ways. Ruth uses her memory by looking in the present time, while Hank uses his by looking in the past. Perhaps, through the two different perspectives, the author wants us to see how powerful memory can affect someone's life. Little things that they used to experience, like their parents and their particular smell, imprinted deep down in their heart when they miss it. In the end, we can see that Ruth and Hank are just two teenagers who want their old life and try to find the solution with both of their ways of memories.