

If one is to compare and contrast the short stories A & P, by John Updike, and A Soldier's Home, by Ernest Hemingway, they must look beyond the obvious. One knows by reading that there is a distinct difference in time as well as place. Oklahoma is, after all, quite a ways away from the beach as most know. To compare or contrast the aforementioned short stories in a deeper context, a large amount of the focus must be centered on the main characters: Sammy and Krebs.

Sammy is disillusioned with the life he is living; day in and day out, the same monotonous occurrences populate his existence at the "A & P". But this all changes one day as three bikini-clad vixens walk into his life. After being badgered by Sammy's boss, Lengel, for not wearing the "proper" public attire, the girls leave. Sammy, being imbued with a certain sense of heroism, defiantly quits his job; in some ways hoping this show of rebelliousness will bring him to "Queenie's" attention. Unfortunately for Sammy, the girls are gone by the time he leaves the store. It's interesting to note that one can go to extreme measures, perhaps even life affecting ones, in order to put some kind of spark or change into their life. Sammy attempts to do so, but his acts take a turn for the worse as he finds himself with no girls, and now, with no job. Lengel sends a parting word to Sammy: "You'll feel this for the rest of your life." Perhaps Sammy will, but maybe this action will be the catalyst for Sammy to take his life in a direction he chooses, instead of one dictated by others.

Krebs, on the other hand, returns to a world that is very different than the one he left. Finding himself cut off from the rest of the world, Krebs longs for women friends, but at the same time avoids them. He yearns for comfort and security, while at the same time rejecting them. An example of the latter is seen when Krebs tells his mother he doesn't love her, then turns around and reverses his sentiment. He is scarred by war, more psychologically than physically, as he found a new home on the front lines, one that he sometimes wished he had never left.

Sammy and Krebs are much alike when you break down their respective psyches. They both feel marooned from society. Sammy from one that he plays an almost robot-like role in, and Krebs, who feels disconnected from a society that he feels lost in. Maybe the reason why he feels lost like he does, is because he had been gone for so long that he felt out of place when he returned, even though his family welcomed him with open arms. Sammy feels lost as well, but not in the weary-war-veteran-returns way. More in the dreamy-small-town-kid-who-seeks-adventure-way. Reading the stories one after the other can give the impression that both want out, Sammy from his small town blues, and Krebs from his home back to what he believes is his real home, the war front. Sammy somewhat differs from Krebs in this regard, though.

Sammy is determined to do something about his problem. As already noted, he quits his job on a whim for the purpose of getting a date. Even though that may sound silly, he still is on the path of change, for better or worse. Krebs, on the other hand, feels trapped in his hometown, as if the war were in another dimension. Unlike Sammy, he does nothing to improve his situation, and instead seems to sulk about life, devoid of energy and constantly fatigued. Maybe, his problem is that he wants to return to the camaraderie and freedom of the war, but not the frightening or grisly aspects of it. So in consequence, he must go through life like the proverbial zombie, not knowing where he will be going in the near future. Yet, Krebs does find solace. It appears in the form of his younger sister.

Sammy and Krebs both seek to get out, with the door being opened by their respective female companions. Even though Sammy and Queenie don't exchange dialogue in the story, Sammy still sees Queenie as a "way out". Krebs looks at his sister, Helen as his "way out". He is ready to go and watch her play indoor baseball instead of discussing the problems he had with his mother, and finally decides to get a job and start over in Kansas City. In a way, they both use females to help them attempt to "get out" of their current static lives.

Sammy and Krebs both share many similarities, but in some way they are very different. They both attempt to implement changes in their lives, whether they succeed or not is left for the reader to decide, as both stories end when their characters reach crucial crossroads in their lives. But one thing that can be agreed upon is that both are young, not boys, but not yet men, and attempt to parlay this confusion in similar, but sometimes differing, ways.