Celie’s relationship with Shug Avery

Alice Walker’s “The Color Purple” is an extraordinary novel that’s full of surprises. When we discover, as readers that the relationship of Celie and Shug Avery is more than we expected, we were surprise and may have misjudged the situation of their relationship, depending on how carefully we read the lines of every passage of Celie’s life. Most readers would anticipate that the relationship among the two was just a lesbian relationship but if we look back at Celie’s life from the beginning of the novel, Shug represented more than just a lesbian relationship.

When Celie first viewed Shug on a photograph she found left behind by her husband, she thought she was in heaven. She admired this beautiful woman dressed in furs and wore high hills that made her stand tall. When Celie viewed the photograph of her, she then begins to gain a desire to be with her.

Having the opportunity to take care of Shug in her home was the most exciting thing to her. Celie couldn’t wait until her husband brought her there. The first thing Shug says to Celie when she arrive all dressed up with her red matching purse and high heels is, “You sure is ugly” (Walker 46). At this point, Celie’s thoughts of her didn’t change; that statement went through one ear and out the other. Celie still stood on the front porch daydreaming of her beauty.

"First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turn into a man"(49). At this point in the novel, the reader is at a shocking moment, thinking could this really be happening. This is the first lesbian statement quoted by Celie to the reader. Celie has gained love for the Shug and viewed herself as a man that had a sexual desire for a beautiful woman. Celie has never encounter anything like this before.

As we may have noticed, Shug doesn’t realize Celie’s desire for her. All Shug wants at this moment is to regain her strength and get well, all with the help of Celie.

With Shug staying with Celie for so long and receiving all of her care, a change begins to unfold within their relationship. They began to develop a friendship. Shug teaches Celie about importance of life and how to enjoy it. Most of all she teaches Celie how to love.

Alice Walker was once directly asked the meaning of their love relationship she replied: "Love is big. Love can hold anger, love can even hold hatred. I mean, you know, it's all—it's all love. It's about the intention of what you want it to do. It's about what you're trying to give. And often when you're trying to give something, you know, it has a lot of pain in it. But the pain too is a part of the love." (Iverem)

This statement explains that love is the only key to escape our most hurtful past and to learn to live life without hatred. Shug’s love for Celie uplifted her self-esteem. The relationship showed
her that sometimes a person can hurt you so severely; the only thing left possible to do is to forgive and love them.

“Us sleep like sisters, me and Shug”, Celie States (146). They laughed, played, singed and talked about everything. The reader may have not realized the two of them shared common experiences, joy and sadness because they were too tied up by their lesbian relationship

Toward the end of the novel seems like the most appropriate place to begin a discussion on how Celie’s and Shug’s relationship starts to change. When Celie hears the news that Shug has fully recovered and has now decided to move on with her life, she tells Shug Mr. Albert beats her when she’s not around. Thinking back to how dull her life was and having no joy was a memory that came to mind, when she heard the news. She had to think of something immediately to persuade her to stay longer.

When Shug returns from her road trip, she tells Celie she has a surprise for her. The surprise is that she has gotten married to a guy named Grady. The reader at this point is shocked, surprised and wondering what Celie’s response will be.

Celie has begun to feel a sense of pain and hurt that she has fallen in love with someone else. She is jealous of Shug’s new relationship with her husband. She doesn’t like anything about him, not even his teeth. Celie feels she is the only one for Shug and that Mr. Grady is using her for her money.

Shug’s and Celie’s relationship had grown tremendously. She has taught Celie so much in the blink of an eye and Celie doesn’t realize it. She has relied on the relationship so much for comfort, security, sexual desires and friendship; she felt if she went away she would fall apart and not be able to stand up for herself.

Change means growth, and growth can be painful. But we sharpen self-definition by exposing the self in work and struggle together with those whom we define as different from ourselves.... For Black and white, old and young, lesbian and heterosexual women alike, this can mean new paths to our survival. (Lorde)

This response explains that maybe it was best for Shug to leave Celie and break off the relationship with her, so she can learn to survive on her own. This action causes Celie to remember what Shug has taught her. From their relationship and shared experiences, Shug has turned Celie’s life around and gave her a new beginning. She has finally realized and became an independent woman that can stand for herself and her beliefs.
Works Cited

Iverem, Esther. Seeing Black, 20 November 2009. 9 November 2010

—. The Color Purple. 1982.