The Falcon and the Snowman

I grew up in a politically volatile family. My mother, active on the left, and my father, a moderate, both influenced my political upbringing. But even more important in the evolution of my beliefs was a book.

Throughout my life, I was instilled with the belief that I had a moral responsibility to be aware of what was going on around me, and to defend and support what I believed in.

My ideology has frequently changed over time, shifting from left to right, radical to conservative. After the age of 12 or so, my fathers' beliefs seemed to rub off on me, and I adopted a more conservative political viewpoint than that of my mother. I no longer attended my mother's radical meetings, and began to think about world affairs and consider important issues on my own. I was patriotic, and in many ways, blindly so.

I read a book when I was 14 that changed the way I looked at things. The book, "Falcon and the Snowman" described the true story of two young men who'd recently graduated from college, and were finding their own niche in society. One of the young men, Dalton Lee, turned to quick money schemes, and became involved in the cocaine trade. His friendship with Christopher Boyce, the second character, continued as it had since they were boys, with Boyce turning his attention to his fathers' former place of employment, TRW.

Boyce, a relatively naive young man, was placed in charge of monitoring top secret intelligence data that was being collected around the world by American intelligence operatives. Boyce was above suspicion according to his employers, since his father was an ex-FBI man who had done some for for TRW before. They didn't know Boyce had different ideas from his fathers' about how our government should be run.

Before going to TRW, Boyce regarded himself as fairly moderate politically, with a decent sense of what was right, and what was wrong. After coming across transcripts of messages from the CIA about initiatives to overthrow the Socialist/Democratic governments of Chile and Guatamala, and the infiltration of various newspapers and student groups in Australia, Boyce became disillusioned with the U.S. government's role in world affairs, and sought a way to vent his protest. Unfortunately for Boyce, he was unable to talk to anyone about his feelings, due to the fact that all of the information was highly classified, but he ended up confiding in his friend Dalton Lee.

Lee, continuing in his madcap pursuit of money, came up with the idea of selling the information to the Russians. That way, Boyce would be able to strike a blow at "reactionary imperialism", and he and Boyce would make a bundle doing it. Boyce agreed to do it.

Using crude methods of smuggling the top secret information from TRW, Boyce was able to photograph the material at home, and bring it back to the office at TRW, without anyone knowing. The two young men then set upon discovering ways of contacting the Russians.
Dalton Lee went to the Russian Embassy in Mexico, and told them he had Top Secret information about U.S. intelligence sources. They jumped at it, and the two became a sort of Laurel and Hardy of spies.

Using a system that seemed to come from a bad spy thriller, Boyce and Lee sold the material to the Russians over a period of 2 years. Eventually they were caught. They are both now serving 35-50 year sentences in prison, and after a successful escape by Boyce that led authorities on a manhunt for over 2 years, he was returned to prison.

The obvious influence the book would have had on me was one of disillusionment after reading of the various CIA operations, just as Boyce was. But for me, this was not the case. I had already read many books about that sort of thing, and had dealt with the various feelings that I had about what almost seemed to be a betrayal of the very ideals that our country is supposed to be set up on. Instead, what struck me was the severe reaction Boyce had to the discovery of these actions, and the consideration of what must have been going through his mind to enable him to sell the secrets of our country to the Russians.

The book did not change the way I thought about the government, but rather, it changed the way I considered what effect the government had on its people, and how the citizens of this country react to the dealings of our government. For a man like Boyce, just out of college, to commit treason is a shocking reminder that each of us are brought up in different ways, with different attitudes towards the people that govern us. I was not struck by the seemingly "bad" things the CIA was doing, but Boyce was. He had grown up sheltered from the shady side of our government, and upon the discovery that all was not rosy inside the Oval Office, he lost touch with all sense of reality. I now better understand what the ramifications of ignorance are, and I now see how important it is to have the entire truth told to the citizens of our country.

We now have 2 generations of disillusioned people. The first being the children of the Viet Nam War, who grew up hating what we had done to the Vietnamese people, along with our own, and rebelled in open, defiant ways. The second group, albeit smaller, are the ones growing up with such events as the remnants of the Watergate affair, and the Iran/Contra Scandal. It is a new breed of citizens who have come to realize that what our government stands for, and the policies it pursues are two separate things.

It is time to step back and examine what the principles of this country are, and discover new ways of educating the members of our society. The average American citizen must have a clearer understanding of what our nation is about, and be able to make rational, coherent decisions about who should represent them, and who should run this country. "The Falcon and the Snowman" made me realize what exactly our country was missing, and how we might be able to go about changing the way the every-day person looks at the way our nation is run. I believe that we can educate the majority of our people as to what it means to live in a democracy and in order for the U.S. to be able to continue its claim that it is the leader of the free world, we must.