**Analysis Paragraph: Discuss Elroy’s role in the story**

Narrator Tim O’Brien, in the story “On the Rainy River”, describes Elroy as “the hero of [his life]” (p. 46). Elroy, a quiet and solitary 81 year old, gives Tim space to think during a critical moment in his life, and he offers Tim material and logistical support, but his motivation for doing both remain a mystery. When Tim arrives at the Tip Top Lodge he is desperately and unthinkingly driving north, undecided about crossing the border to escape the draft, and the Vietnam war. Elroy becomes a “silent, watchful presence” (p. 46) who seems to understand that Tim needs time and space to contemplate his choice. Instead of pressing him about why he ended up there, Elroy gives Tim a bed, meals, some odd jobs to do, and human companionship, while Tim contemplates “the plain fact of crisis” (p. 49) that he feels has become his life, a “problem [that] had gone beyond discussion” (p. 49). However, six days into Tim’s stay, Elroy offers Tim help with an escape. He gives him $200 (about $1400 today), and the next day, the two men go out fishing on the Rainy River, which borders Canada. On reflection Tim speculates that “he meant to…guide me across the river and to take me to the edge and to stand a kind of vigil as I chose a life for myself” (p. 53). Tim stays in the boat and returns home, knowing he will go to war, but Elroy’s presence and gifts means he carries the decision as his own, not one made from insufficient cash or a route across the border. What is never clear in the story are Elroy’s reasons for helping Tim so much. Tim believes that Elroy recognized him as a “kid in trouble” (p. 46), which was perhaps enough reason to help him. But he also recognized that Elroy is smart and informed, and it wouldn’t be hard to recognize the realities of Tim’s situation. That Elroy is willing to help him so much suggests he may support Tim’s decision to dodge the draft; his quiet acceptance contrasts the shame and ridicule that Tim imagines he’d face were he to run to Canada. Perhaps, if a solitary stranger understands his choice, Tim is underestimating his friends and family back home. Or maybe Elroy knew on some level that acceptance was what Tim needed to face his situation and go home. Tim ends the story by saying “I was a coward. I went to the war” (p. 58). Whether he was courageous, or cowardly, is a matter of perspective and judgement. Elroy gave Tim some time and space to be free of judgement and simply to be with himself as he made the toughest decision of his life.