Progress

How does one handle change, particularly the type of change that is unexpected and considered a major opposition to the status quo. There are a variety of ways people cope with change. However, there are ultimately two types of people. There are the people that fight changing, and there are the ones that accept changing. In Flannery O'Connor’s story “A Good Man is Hard to Find,” there is an undeniable message that change is inevitable, and how one responds to that change is all that matters.

The type of change being discussed is better known as radical change. Radical change is “thoroughgoing or extreme, especially as regards change from accepted or traditional forms.” (“Radical.”). This radical change is the form of change the grandmother is experiencing in this story. “THE GRANDMOTHER didn't want to go to Florida. She wanted to visit some of her connections in east Tennessee and she was seizing at every chance to change Bailey's mind.” (O’Connor para. 1). It is interesting how these are the opening lines of this story. These two sentences are trying to communicate something significant to the reader; the importance is evident, by the capitalizing of the first two words. This story is going to be about the grandmother. The next important message, being sent to the reader, is that the grandmother is trying to get something changed to her liking. This, undoubtedly, is the main idea of this story as it happens time and again throughout.
First off, in this story, the grandmother makes very clear how old-fashioned she is. “Oh look at the cute little pickaninny!” (O’Connor para. 8). This is what the grandmother says when the family is traveling and sees a black child, in passing, standing in the door of a shack. This statement is very racist and derogatory, although the grandmother seems not to care. The next words uttered were "Wouldn't that make a picture, now?" (O’Connor para. 8). It is evident the grandmother knows times have changed. But, obviously, she is stuck in her ways. Therefore, the grandmother is, by definition, considered a radical thinker “…anybody engaged with the very core of her material, who challenges and changes the key beliefs we all have about the way the world is – and should be” (Boyes para. 1). However, she only wants change when it benefits her.

By better understanding the grandmother and her condition, the reader is able to make sense of her pettiness. When the family is about to begin their journey, the grandmother makes sure she is dressed perfectly “In case of an accident, anyone seeing her dead on the highway would know at once that she was a lady” (O’Connor para. 6). This woman is getting dressed up for her own death. Moreover, she is concerned with what people may think of her appearance above all other concerns.

While thinking about the grandmother, it is also essential to ponder the people that are not radical thinkers. These people are the very ones the grandmother wants to change. There are many people like this, who have an open-mind and see how culture is evolving. A clear majority of people today also believe in the privilege to speak freely, and express themselves, thinking nothing of voicing their opinions. But, in this story, as revealed, this was not the case in the grandmother’s premium years. “If I were a little boy," said the grandmother, "I wouldn't talk about my native state that way” (O’Connor para. 7). The grandmother was shaken by the fact that John Wesley did not speak highly of the state of Georgia. She did not care to hear his
opinion, but emphasized her own and her own opinions of propriety and custom. Her inability to change in the slightest or be more open minded becomes increasingly disheartening as the story wears on.

Acknowledging the mindset of both intense and nonchalant thinkers is crucial when trying to aspire change from either side. So, why do people resist change? Well, Rosabeth Kanter writes in the Harvard Business Review there are “Ten Reasons People Resist Change.” All of which are important, but there are three that are exceptionally relevant to the story at hand. The first being, “loss of control: change interferes with autonomy and can make people feel that they’ve lost control over their territory” (Kanter para. 2). Everyone, whether a radical thinker or not, has preconceived notions, and often believe that they have complete control over everything. People fail to realize that when they are sleeping at night the earth still spins. So, it is important to recognize how not in control one is. The next reason for resisting change is “concerns about competence: Can I do it? Change is resisted when it makes people feel stupid” (Kanter para. 7). This is an obvious resistance tactic for the grandmother that shows up in O’Connor’s story. The grandmother is constantly concerned with how others will perceive her. This lack of self-confidence can be detrimental to anyone’s psyche. The last reason for resisting change is based on past resentments:

The ghosts of the past are always lying in wait to haunt us. As long as everything is steady state, they remain out of sight. But the minute you need cooperation for something new or different, the ghosts spring into action. (Kanter para. 10)

This reason relates to the family in this story. They have probably tried, countless times, to get the grandmother to understand that life is different now and that change is necessary. Maybe the
grandmother tried changing once before, and it backfired, so she decided no more bending. This is a possibility, but, either way, the grandmother’s past plays a key role in her current state.

Now that there is knowledge of why people resist change, let’s see the steps people take to experience and cope with change:

I would like readers to understand that for something new to happen in life there is something lost. Welcoming change means accepting the blunders that are made along the way. People who do not allow themselves to make mistakes, will not be able to adapt well with life transitions, and will not be able to enjoy living life to its fullest extent. (MacDonald para. 9)

The most integral part of accepting change is taking the good with the bad. Once someone grasps the reality that mistakes are made in the process of changing, then true change can take place. Change always means something will be lost, so this should not come as a surprise. When one makes the decision to change, choosing one lifestyle over another, then clearly that previous lifestyle should no longer exist; if it does, then nothing changed.

There is one character who has not been mentioned from the story, yet plays a key role in the theme of change: The misfit, who is questioned much at the end of the story by the grandmother. During this interrogation, it becomes increasingly clear that the misfit has a storied past. Quickly, there is the realization that the misfit and the grandmother are both looking for similar answers in life, but they are on opposing teams. The grandmother, outdated and old-fashioned, is stuck in her old ways. Then, there is the misfit, the young, rebellious, abnormal guy that does what he wants. This battle between the two characters in this story is an existing battle that goes on every day in society. This is not a battle between good and evil. This is a war of old
versus new ways, and the willingness to find a compromise between the two. This compromise must happen, because neither the grandmother nor the misfit are in right standing.

The story goes on like, many times, the same way it does in society. There is a pivotal moment in the very end where the grandmother is trying to convince the Misfit to change to her liking. Like in the beginning of the story, the grandmother is unsuccessful, and this is the moment where she is shot in the chest, symbolizing rejection of change by the Misfit. This was not the first time the Misfit has rejected the old though, as he speaks earlier in the story about how good his upbringing was "God never made a finer woman than my mother and my daddy's heart was pure gold" (O'Connor para. 33). The Misfit obviously made a choice long before this one that he did not want to change. The Misfit was not the only one who failed at changing. The grandmother also made the choice numerous times to reject change. This inevitable change happens for both the old and new generations, and rejecting it will not make it go away.

Just as O'Connor suggests in her story, there is much of this same resistance to change in the world we live in today. There are young people everywhere, who consider themselves to have such open minds, but they are completely closed minded to the people like the grandmother in this story. Likewise, there are the opposite type of people, set in their old ways, unwilling to try to understand the young people who live life different from what they are used to, like the Misfit in the story. The ending in this story cannot be the ending for society. There must be a willingness from each side to give in just a little and change. Both old and new generations can contribute to society, but each must change for the better, because neither can stand alone.

In conclusion, the fact that people must adapt or adjust to the unavoidable is rather obvious. The challenge that lies ahead is how to deal with that problem when it arises. People must ask themselves whether they will defect or embrace this is issue. Then people must do their
part in changing where necessary. If every single person recognized, the unpreventable, the
world would be a better place.
Works Cited


