A Worn Path Written By Eudora Essay, Research Paper

A Worn Path written by Eudora Welty is simple story about an elderly woman s journey into town. The main character, Phoenix Jackson is a poor African American woman who suffers from common geriatric conditions such as senility and fragility. Phoenix is very determined to complete her task; she must triumph over various obstacles, including terrain and prejudice. The reason for her journey, which the reader discovers at the conclusion, is to receive medicine for her sick grandson, who has a chronic throat condition caused by drinking lye. Despite her age and handicaps, Phoenix has a very strong personality trait of stubbornness that gives her the ability to overcome nearly impossible odds. When the reader discovers the reasoning for her journey it causes the reader to have further respect for her. Her abilities and willingness are ironic from the stereotypical concepts of most elderly people who are considered dependent and lazy. She adjusts to painstaking situations and becomes an independent person through her determination, which is fueled by the love for her grandson. Through her love and devotion she is blinded from the peril and difficulty of her task. At first glance Phoenix seems incapable of completing her journey, but later the reader discovers that she is in fact quite able.

Near the beginning of the story after Phoenix has traveled some distance she goes to sit down and the reader feels that she cannot proceed but the reader is soon mistaken. Immediately after Phoenix sits she closes her eyes and has a hallucination. The hallucination is that of a boy who offers Phoenix a slice of marble cake. Phoenix temps the offer and when she puts out her hands to accept the cake she gets snapped back into reality and the apparition disappears. This brief scene represents many things that are relevant to the story. The child represents a manifestation of her sick grandson. Her love for her grandson is so great that the dementia that she suffers from does not remove him from her subconscious. The imprint that her grandson has made on her has manifested into a hallucination. When she sits down most likely she has given up so her subconscious manifests itself in the form of her grandson to remind her of the purpose of her journey. Her grandson is offering her help with offering the cake and when she accepts it she is waken up and continues on her journey. Her mental ability to work under such distraught conditions shows the reader that her brain has adapted to her condition and that she is capable to accomplish anything. On a side note the type of cake that is offered to her is a symbol for her stream of consciences. Marble is a combination of many different elements that do not totally mix and you can visually see the all of the elements. This would represent the mixture that she is experiencing with going in and out of conscience. It s not a continuous stream it is broken up and she goes sharply in and out of reality.

In the face of such tremendous obstacles, in light of her failing health and age, Phoenix s character embraces perseverance and love to find the strength to journey into town. With eyes that are “blue with age”, “numberless branching wrinkles”, and with a cane that Phoenix “kept tapping the frozen earth in front of her” with, we know that Phoenix is old, with failing eyesight (437). It is through this undying love for her grandson, that Phoenix receives her strength to dispel her age and disabilities. When Phoenix is confronted with her first obstacle, in the shape of a hill, there is no place for Phoenix to go except up and over. While crawling under and through barbwire to get into town, Phoenix never questions her journey, or even flirts with the idea of turning back. In fact, this is one element of the story that stays constant, and heightens the admiration of Phoenix to the reader. When Phoenix says, “Seem like there is chains about my feet, time I get this far. Something always take a hold of me on this hill-pleads I should stay” (438), she gives the impression that she has traveled this path before. And at the conclusion of story, the reader finds this to be correct, and in fact she has been going on this journey for many years. It is this realization that puts the love that Phoenix feels for her grandson into prospective. Going through this ordeal once would make most elderly people never do it again, but she has the ability to put the pain aside and save her grandson.

At the end of the story Phoenix s says that she will buy a gift for her grandson, a paper windmill. This shows not only her love for her grandson, but reflects the fragility of her and her grandson. The paper windmill is so fragile, like Phoenix, even the smallest breath of air will affect her physical stability. Throughout the story we are shown how frail Phoenix and her grandson are. They are two halves of the same person the grandson needs Phoenix to get medicine and she needs his love in order to physically and mentally survive. Also windmills are very intricate and use the physical, world such as wind to produce useful energy. In Phoenix s case she uses her grandson s love to power her body to complete her mission.

Phoenix is such a strong character, her physical and mental stubbornness are stronger than her senility and fragility. She strays far from the stereotypical elderly woman. Her love for her grandson acts like adrenalin and causes her to accomplish things that could not have been done if not for his sake. Instead of kneeling to the magnitude of the obstacles in front of her she kept on moving. Even with being plagued by an aging body throughout the journey, Phoenix never deters from the path she has taken, and even becomes heroic in completing the journey. She is like the mythological bird that burned itself, and raised a new, young bird. Every time she completes this journey she is reborn and becomes ready for the next time.