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The Pricelessness of Rediscovering Family Bonds

How would one feel if their teenage daughter is reluctant to spend time with her family, while she enjoys hanging out with strangers who try to lure her away? Would the parents let her do what she pleases, attributing her behavior to puberty? If so, who should be held accountable: the daughter who prefers to spend time with her peers rather than with her family, or the parents who fail to actively encourage her to spend time with the family? This problem of the relationship between a teenage girl and her family can be seen in the short story “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” by Joyce Carol Oates, which depicts the protagonist, Connie’s hardships and realization of her family’s value. Such social phenomenon of family alienation may seem natural since everyone has a moment when they want to escape their parents. However, those who neglect the relationship may encounter a moment when they need their family, and only then do they recognize the value of family.

Although it is common for teenage adolescents to grow apart from their families, “Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been” suggests that the responsibility for family estrangement usually lies with the parents, emphasizing the value of family relationships that can be appreciated when recognizing the problem of increasing disregard for family values and weakening family bonds due to parental indifference towards their children.

To start with the characters, the relationship and conflict among the characters portrays the common relationship between a teenage child and their parents, accentuating the priceless value of family relationships. Connie is a teenage girl who is

only interested in her looks and hanging out with older boys which helps her feel like a grown-up. She tries to break free from her family's constraints and explore her identity, but soon meets an obstacle represented by Arnold, a man near his thirties who knows every single detail about Connie. Irony becomes apparent when Connie, who desires to appear and act like a grown-up, finds herself perceiving Arnold as an object of terror rather than of admiration, as she is confronted with an extreme embodiment of adulthood. Such irony demonstrates that Connie's pursuit of maturity may ultimately be meaningless. Furthermore, as their conflict magnifies, Connie's need for her parents' help highlights the importance of family. Another noticeable relationship is the one between Connie and her family members. Connie slights her older sister June for being too plain and chunky, referring to her as "poor old June," indicating that she is disregarding June and feels superior to her. Moreover, Connie and her parents have a pretense of exasperation, which creates a tense relationship between them. Her mother is portrayed as a strict figure who tries to keep Connie in line, but Connie seems to have an implicit conflict with her mother as she does not feel like being part of the family, as in the scene where Connie prefers to stay home rather than going to barbeque with her family. Her father does not speak much after coming back from work, implying that Connie is not getting enough attention from her parents. Such complicated relationship between family members stresses the lack of communication followed by psychological distance growing apart.

Along with the characters, the lack of affection in Connie's family is depicted throughout the plot which consists of a major conflict between the protagonist, Connie, and antagonist, Arnold. The conflicts arise in the setting of a suburban American neighborhood in the mid-1900s, centered around Connie. The inciting incident is when Connie first met Arnold at a restaurant, leading to the rising action where Connie notices an unfamiliar car approaching her house while listening to the radio after Connie's family left

for the barbeque. In the car was Arnold Friend, a man who refers to himself as Connie's lover, and his friend Ellie. Arnold coaxes Connie to go for a ride, but Connie repeatedly refuses which leads to Arnold's annoyance. The conflict develops to a crisis when Connie realizes that Arnold and his friend are not kids, and that Arnold knew every detail about Connie. As the confrontation reaches its climax, Arnold threatens Connie not to touch the telephone and to come out the door. At this point, Connie experiences an internal conflict whether she should call her parents or obey Arnold, which implies the desperate help of family that Connie needed. She runs into the room and picks up the phone, but fails to call her parents due to the roaring sound in her ear. The imagery of Connie crying out for her mother is portrayed as Arnold stabbing her lungs repeatedly, indicating her fear and urgency. The plot moves to the falling action as Connie enters a condition where she feels empty and hollow due to the failure of reaching out to her family. Finally, as a resolution, she walks out the door as Arnold had wished. Arnold tells Connie that she is better than her family because none of them would have done the same for her. The superiority of Connie over her family mentioned by Arnold was what Connie had in mind before she went through adversity, but now her attitude towards her family had changed as she was the one sacrificing for the safety of her family. The plot first depicts Connie's estrangement from her family, but throughout the expansion of the story, it opens up the glimpse of hope in realizing the priceless value of family. The narrator proceeds the story using a limited omniscient third person point of view with the focus on Connie's thoughts and feelings.

More important, the theme of the story is also emphasized through the usage of sound as a symbol to represent Connie's characteristics and emotional states, furthermore creating a tense atmosphere. The first sound is Connie's ambivalent voice which is cynical and drawling at home, but high pitched and nervous outside. The contrasting description of her voice represents the opposite attitude she has towards her family and

friends. Additionally, sounds of music are constantly mentioned throughout the story where some relaxes the atmosphere as the music at the ride with Eddie, a boy Connie met at the restaurant, while others act as a device to develop suspense and nervousness. The scene in which Arnold appears listening to the same Bobby King song that Connie was listening to on the radio not only naturally changes the scene, but also serves as a symbolic implication of the upcoming main conflict. Ellie, Arnold's friend, continues to raise the volume on the radio, which symbolizes the escalating clash between the characters and creates a tense, tightly paced atmosphere. Lastly, Connie's perception of Arnold's voice changes in response to the rising tension. Initially, as mentioned in the story, Arnold speaks in "a simple lilting voice as if he were reciting the words to a song." However, as Connie feels fear after realizing that Arnold and Ellie are not kids, Arnold's voice turns into the voice of the man on the radio. His voice changes again to the echo of a song when Arnold threatens her that he will come inside once she touches the phone. Furthermore, in the scene where Arnold orders her to put the telephone back where it was, the voice sounds like a "stage voice." The change of Arnold's voice represents the emotional states of Connie.

Another complication is the circular structure that helps understand Connie's estrangement, and the tone that creates a dark atmosphere which accentuates the tragedy of the story. The story starts with "Her name was Connie," as if the narrator had already been talking about Connie right before the story started. The final scene of the story, Connie walking out the door towards Arnold, seamlessly connects with the beginning of the story as if it were a circular structure. The nonlinear structure including flashbacks and daydreaming creates a sense of disorientation and confusion which mirrors Connie's own confusion and fear of being isolated by her family. The change in narrator's tone and imagery also serves as a significant device as the story develops. The opening scene sets a neutral tone, with the description of Connie's house as "familiar and unremarkable," which suggests

that danger can lurk in the most familiar places. Connie is described as being two sided in every way, implying her change in perception of family value. Moreover, the tone changes to an ominous and foreboding tone during a dialogue between Connie and Arnold, further transforming into a stringent, nervous tone as the conflict reaches its climax. The tone creates a sense of dread and unease throughout the story, prompting readers to expect tragedy to happen soon.

In conclusion, while it is natural for adolescents in puberty to go against their family, parents still have an ongoing responsibility to maintain interest and concern. As can be seen in the closing scene where Connie sacrifices for her family, a teenage girl is not an irredeemable devil or someone who will perpetually distance herself from her family. "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been" emphasizes the hardships one may endure without the support of their family, ultimately suggesting the importance of prioritizing family bonds. Sacrifice may be a means to strengthen these bonds, and paying enough attention to children is another crucial aspect. Although Connie initially appeared as a typical teenage girl disregarding her family, she was the one who sacrificed for their sake, demonstrating her realization of the true significance of being part of a family and acting as a responsible member. With adequate parental attention, the challenges faced by an adolescent girl can be managed, and had there been sufficient concern from her parents, Connie's involvement in danger could have been prevented.

(Word Count : 1619)