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Roadside America

19 October 2021

The Overcoming Hardships of Lightning McQueen

To begin, the aspect of American car culture and/or automobility that I decided to focus on, is the world-renowned Disney Movie *Cars*. The prestigious film is about Lightning McQueen as he “is on his way to the biggest race of his life when he gets disconnected from his truck hauler” (*Cars*). As he gets lost on Route 66, he stumbles across a small town in Carburetor County called Radiator Springs where he meets some fellow automobiles which assist him on his expedition to make it to the race. My topic of choice to analyze throughout this research essay is the journey that Lightning McQueen takes along the road and how he overcomes adversity while being in route.

To continue, the world-wide known red race car tied the infamous “King” in the Piston Cup Championship located in Los Angeles, California. A week later, the tie breaker is meant to take place at the International Speedway and Lightning McQueen must win the race at any cost in order to help him leave his sponsorship at Rest-Eze and become the sponsored anthropomorphic vehicle of the lucrative team in exchange for the King’s place.

While traveling at night, Mack (McQueen’s driver) becomes a victim to a gang of reckless street racers. This results in the sleeping McQueen to “slip out from the back of the trailer only to wake up in traffic in the run-down town of Radiator Springs” (*Cars*). To make things worse, McQueen ends up damaging the main road of the town in a mishap with the local sheriff. McQueen is arrested and released by the town's judge and doctor, Doc Hudson who at the

request of local lawyer, Sally Carrera, orders him to repave the road as community service.

Trying to rush through the job, McQueen makes a sloppy, bumpy mess of the road only to restart the job all over again. All of these difficulties perpetuate Lightning's character and the pilgrimage he goes through to reach the race on time only helps him become a more experienced sportsman.

Furthermore, Lightning McQueen also made life-long lasting memories such as driving through the meadow with Sally and tractor tipping with Mater. Examples like these are reasons why the journey is the most important factor throughout transportation. The stressful situations that Lightning McQueen was placed in while rushing to his race exemplify that although things won't always go the way you plan in life, you must persevere and overcome failures by learning from your experiences in order to reach success.

Moreover, John Young is a Pixar analyst and he states "[I] went down Route 66, and I learned that the journey in life is a reward. I came back and said, I know exactly what this movie needs to be about. A race car is built from the ground up to do one thing: go as fast as it can. But what if it got stuck in a place where everybody moves much more slowly?" (Young). This scholarly quote exemplifies that the journey aspect of *Cars* the movie is vital to the film and there are a plethora of things people can learn about the adversity Lightning McQueen goes through. For example, as McQueen's life slows down from a famous race car driver to a country living civilian, he goes through adversity while adjusting to his new lifestyle. Many people go through this change too when they move from one place to another or even just go through a mentally challenging event which ultimately makes them think differently about the way they currently live.

Another instance of this occurrence is from Hira Ali when she takes her children to watch this engaging movie for the first time. Hira concurs that “to keep going and not give up despite all odds is one of the biggest lessons of this movie” (Ali). This can be seen when Sally Carrera wisely advises McQueen that he ‘shouldn’t fear failure but instead be afraid of not having the chance’. Lightning’s significant other provides him with this encouraging advice after they start dating and if McQueen never went on this journey, he wouldn’t have developed a relationship with Sally. Ali mentions that it doesn’t matter what someone is going through, as long as they continue to keep going despite misfortune it will bear fruit.

Lastly, while Lightning McQueen is in deep despair, Carrera lifts his spirits when she bestows the knowledge that the celebrity competitor still has a chance to make it to his meet. This glimmer of hope foreshadows that Lightning McQueen overcomes his adversity and it aids him to win his race in the long run. The passage that McQueen takes to victory is crucial to his triumph because without it, he would never have been motivated to conquer his struggles.

Lightning McQueen decides to leave his comfort zone and travel along the road in order to seek happiness while escaping the issue of losing his race, but he finds freedom while being at the wheel along the highway as well. Making the most out of every circumstance that you're in and enjoying the present moment while it lasts is vital to someone's well-being because once the journey is over, there is no going back. In addition, traversing is the best part of every automobility experience because you become more knowledgeable as you progressively propulse throughout life. Jean Shepherd exclaims that “Lightning McQueen, [went] from a self-centered, narcissistic character to a communally oriented individual who lives with social interest” (Shepherd). Like the Lightning McQueen illustration, everyone should proceed to make their race and defeat unfortunate scenarios with prosperity.

Lightning McQueen's attitude towards the cars in the film *Cars* is a great example of how the character would present himself. He's quite openly "arrogant and disregards the cars who he believes to be not as important as himself" (Nicholas). The fabulous race car driver has been known for being a selfishly egotistical machine in the past; however, as his character evolves throughout the movie his personality converts into being more humble and admirable. As Lightning McQueen adventures through the motion picture, his disposition transforms due to the grounding that he has been through in order to make it to his race ahead of schedule.

My personal motivation behind wanting to study this particular aspect of Roadside America is the fact that I want to relate to everyone and help others become better people in the future. So, I think the best way to do that is through a film that is very famous and it is a children's cartoon too so it doesn't just associate with adults. Countless people can connect with this cinema and many humans can learn from Lightning McQueen's trials and tribulations by viewing these valuable lessons included throughout the movie. The author presents insights on "the role of critical car-culture narrative as an art teaching tool" (Garcia). Luis-Genaro explains that the movie *Cars* impacted various aspects of society within automobility.

Finally, the challenges that Lightning McQueen vanquished in order to reach his final destination throughout his journey is the most important wisdom that is present throughout the cartoon. The experiences he faced while being in route correlate to a plentitude of different situations in life and whoever has the opportunity to watch those series of events will walk away with knowledge that will be integrated in them forever.

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Honor Pledge

I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who

has not.

/s/ Michael Grimm