

= The Old Man and the Key =

" The Old Man and the Key " is the thirteenth episode of The Simpsons ' thirteenth season . It first aired in the United States on the Fox network on March 10 , 2002 . In the episode , Grampa Simpson falls in love with Zelda , an old woman who has just moved in to the senior home in which Grampa lives . However , Grampa is not the only one in the home who is infatuated with Zelda .

The episode was written by Jon Vitti and directed by Lance Kramer . The storyline was pitched by Vitti , who based it on an article about social status in senior homes . The episode features Olympia Dukakis as Zelda , and Bill Saluga as his television character Ray J. Johnson . The song " Ode to Branson " , which was written by Vitti and composed by Alf Clausen , was submitted for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Music And Lyrics in 2002 , which it ultimately lost to a score from The Blue Planet .

= = Plot = =

The episode begins with Homer anticipating the new XFL season before Marge tells him that the league has folded , which she hears from the league 's MVP , who now works at her hair salon . The Simpson family then gets a phone call from Grampa Simpson 's retirement home saying that he is dead . When the family arrives he informs them the home got it wrong and Grampa is still alive . A beautiful new woman named Zelda moves into his retirement home . Grampa is determined to win her love over Zack , the youthful owner of a minivan . After renewing his driver 's license (which Patty quickly gave to him in return that he would not wink at her again) , Grampa convinces Homer to let him borrow the car to romance her . Although he impresses the new old gal , Homer and Marge think she is a hoochie and only likes Grampa because he can drive . After he crashes Homer 's car in a death race with the Souvenir Jackitos , a rival seniors gang , Homer gets particularly livid with Grampa and takes his keys away , forbidding him to drive ever again . Zelda informs Grampa that she got them tickets to Branson , Missouri but when he tells her he does not have a car Zelda leaves with Zack and his minivan .

Grampa steals Marge 's car and " kidnaps " Bart , taking him on the road to Branson , Missouri to win back Zelda . When realizing that Grandpa and Bart are heading to Branson , Homer , Marge , Lisa , and Maggie , take a bus there . However they end up not in Branson , Missouri , but Bronson , Missouri (where everyone in town looks and talks like Charles Bronson) . Ray Jay Johnson , Mr. T , Charo , Yakov Smirnoff , Charlie Callas , Bonnie Franklin and Adrian Zmed are the stars of the show in Branson they go to see . (Tennessee Ernie Ford is backstage , but crumbles to dust when Grampa proves he is dead by showing the deceased singer his obituary .) Grampa calls out to his lady from on @-@ stage , but then denounces her in front of everyone , who then call her (in a chant) a hoochie , sending her fleeing off the stage in tears . Grampa then reconciles with Homer .

= = Production = =

" The Old Man and the Key " was written by Jon Vitti and directed by Lance Kramer . It was first broadcast on the Fox network in the United States on March 10 , 2002 . The idea for the episode was pitched by Vitti , who was inspired by an article about senior homes . The article described senior homes as being a lot like high schools , in that there are popular and unpopular people , and that those who , for example , own a car are " like kings " . Vitti suggested that the episode should be that " Grampa 's life [is] basically like that of a teenager " , with Homer acting as if he was Grampa 's father . The Souvenir Jackitos , who challenge Grampa to a death race in the episode , were conceived from an observation by the writers . The writers argued that the only ones buying expensive trademarked jackets are old people who want to appear younger .

A scene in the episode shows Grampa and Bart driving to Branson with Marge 's car , listening to the radio . Because the scene consists entirely of auditive gags , the Simpsons staff had difficulty figuring out what to show visually during the scene . In the DVD audio commentary for the episode , Jean explained that these scenes ? get a really big laugh at the table , ? but are subsequently hard

for the animators . The scene makes use of a repeated background , an animation technique made famous by Hanna @-@ Barbera in order to cut budget .

The song " Ode to Branson , " which is performed by several " washed @-@ up " celebrities , was composed by Alf Clausen and written by Vitti . Even though Vitti received sole credit for writing the song , parts of the lyrics were written by Simpsons writer Carolyn Omine , which were then revised by fellow writer Matt Selman . Selman was especially satisfied with the rhyme sung by Mr. T ; he stated that whenever he feels down , he thinks of that rhyme and that it " boosts [him] up inside . " The episode features American actress Olympia Dukakis as Grampa 's love interest Zelda . American comedian Bill Saluga also makes an appearance , as his television character Ray J. Johnson . The owner of the minivan is portrayed by series regular Hank Azaria , who imitated the voice of Clark Gable for the character .

= = Cultural references = =

The title of the episode itself is a reference of Ernest Hemingway 's book " The old man and the sea " . A scene in the episode shows Grandpa wearing a zoot suit , a suit popular in the 1940s . When Grandpa and Zelda take off on one of their dates , three old men with long beards imitate ZZ Top as a short part of " Sharp Dressed Man " is played . Grandpa 's interaction with the " Souvenir Jackitos " in Apu 's store mirrors a scene in the 1961 musical film West Side Story , with Grandpa and his friends taking the role of the Jets in the film , the " Souvenir Jackitos " as the Sharks , and Apu as Doc . The " Death race " on the other hand , is a reference to the 1955 drama film Rebel Without a Cause . The abandoned aqueduct , in which the death race takes place , is based on the Los Angeles River . Yakov Smirnoff 's appearance at a theatre in Branson , Missouri in the episode may be a reference to the fact that he owns and performs at a theatre in the city in reality . During the ending credits , the Simpsons wave goodbye while The Beverly Hillbillies theme song is playing . In fact , before the Gracie Films jingle , Lisa says in a southern accent , " This has been a Gracie Films presentation ! " , which parodies the line " This has been a Filmways presentation ! " The beginning of the episode shows Homer excitedly preparing for the new XFL season , only to be disappointed when Marge informs him that the league folded after one year .

The name " Zelda " is a reference to Zelda Fitzgerald the wife of F. Scott Fitzgerald . Like Grampa , F Scott 's courtship of Zelda was difficult . The Fitzgeralds are closely tied to the Roaring 20s , so this is also a joke about Grampa 's age .

= = Release = =

In its original American broadcast on March 10 , 2002 , " The Old Man and the Key " received a 7 @. @ 9 rating , according to Nielsen Media Research , translating to approximately 7 @. @ 9 million viewers . The episode ranked 19 in the top 25 most watched television programs the week it aired . Later in 2002 , " Ode to Branson " was nominated for the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Music And Lyrics , which it ultimately lost to a score from BBC 's nature documentary The Blue Planet . In 2007 , the song was included on the soundtrack album The Simpsons : Testify .

Following the thirteenth season 's release on DVD and Blu @-@ ray , " The Old Man and the Key " received mixed to negative reviews from critics . Writing for Project : Blu , Nate Boss stated that Grampa " just isn 't all that funny when cornered , and that 's what we get here , " and that " the jokes are a bit too few and far between " . Giving the episode a negative review , Ryan Keefer of DVD Talk wrote that it was " borderline painful " and one of the season 's " duds " . Casey Broadwater of Blu @-@ ray.com wrote that the episode " moves at a geriatric pace " , and R. L. Shaffer of IGN stated that it " represent [s] some of the worst of The Simpsons . " On the other hand , giving the episode a positive review , Ron Martin of 411Mania enjoyed the " poke towards Branson , Missouri , a mecca for old people everywhere , " and Jennifer Malkowski of DVD Verdict gave the episode a B rating . Colin Jacobsson of DVD Movie Guide wrote that , even though Grampa is " essentially a one @-@ joke personality , " " those gags tend to be pretty fun . " He concluded his review by writing that the episode was " a likable program . "

Despite the mixed responses , the episode features one of the " most used little clips " of the series . The scene shows Grampa getting his driver 's license . Instead of taking a photo for the license on the spot , Grampa suggests that Patty , who works in the facility , use a photo of him from a newspaper headline that reads " Old man yells at cloud . " Patty agrees , and Grampa , holding his newly acquired license , goes up to a window and yells " Who 's laughing now ? " at a cloud . A still from the scene has been used several times on The Daily Show . Both Malkowski of DVD Verdict and Jacobsson of DVD Movie Guide considered it to be the best part of the episode . After Clint Eastwood 's speech at the 2012 Republican National Convention , which featured Eastwood talking to an empty chair representing President Barack Obama , a modified version of the image with the caption , " Old man yells at chair " , was used in an internet meme .