

**OBSTACLES THAT STRIVE TO TEAR THE JOADS APART**

**PAUL ELLING**

**AP ENGLISH**

**OCTOBER 2, 1995**

People face tough situations everywhere in life. The strong people use these obstacles as stepping stones to bettering their lives. The weak people never recover from certain obstacles. In The Grapes of Wrath, several hurdles threaten to tear the Joad family apart, including the Oklahoma drought, authority pushing them around, and their journey to California.

The first barrier the Joads have to get past is the drought in their home state of Oklahoma. It doesn't rain very much. Without rain, the crops of the Joads dry out. Only the hot sun and the depressing dust are there to pour over the Joads' crops. The Joads can't harvest anything when the crops are dying. There is a dismal feeling among the Joads, because they don't know what to do when there are no crops to make a living off of. What good is there in the Joads staying on the farm when there is nothing arable? The drought snatches away the income of the Joad family. The drought seems to be a big monster, and the owners of the land must protect their monster from the drought monster. The owners of the land don't want to finance worthless land. They must get rid of the tenant-farming Joads in order to make any money. The Joads hope to stay and reap some benefits, and maybe they can cash in next year. The proprietors disagree. "The bank--the monster has to have profits all the time." (42) The owners are just doing what they must to keep themselves afloat, trying to pull their money away from the drought monster, but the Joads want to live on their farm. So, the Joad family relinquishes

their home. The drought will not allow them to stay and live on someone else's land, especially when the land is no good. "The land... gradually died..." (47) This impediment, the drought, strives to rip the Joads away from their home.

The most insurmountable obstacle the Joads come upon is authority asserting itself over the Joads. The family must be adamant to the pressure of the family falling apart. First, the ones in charge thrust the Joads off their land. The Joads are of no necessity to the landowners. They put the Joads out of their own house first of all. Tom Joad can't believe the family is gone from his only known home when he returns from being in prison. "I wonder Pa went so easy. I wonder Grampa didn't kill nobody." (61) After running the Joads out of their home, the family must go to live with Uncle John. The strong owners want Uncle John gone also, so the Joads must leave again. They know the owners would knock the house down, even if the family is in it. The family decides to find a place to call home in California. Once the Joads are there, they find a terrible situation that works to tear them apart again. The first "home" the Joads find is a Hooverville. This place is dirty, crummy, and cheap, but they have no place else to go. The family isn't there long, when a supposed contractor comes and offers jobs. It sounds suspicious to the Joads and the other migrant workers. Tom Joad speaks up in defense of a migrant worker, and the deputy proposes to arrest Tom, tearing a piece of the family away. In

the end, the deputy tries to take one migrant worker in, the worker escapes, Tom Joad trips the deputy, and Jim Casy kicks the deputy. Casy takes the blame for Tom, so Tom can stay with family. Casy knows that Tom is an integral part of his family and losing him would really hurt them. Two camps later, after the government camp, the family comes to another disrespectful place. Tom meets up with Jim Casy. The authorities come for Casy, and in the struggle, they murder him. Tom hits the man that hit Casy, then the other one hits Tom. Tom is now a criminal, and the cops are after him. They want to peel Tom away from the family. The Joads hide their son and move to another place, an abandoned box car. Ma tries desperately to keep Tom with the loved ones, but he has to leave to keep the family away from his trouble. If Tom stays, he will possibly break the family apart, because the rulers of the camps would punish the Joads for hiding Tom. Finally, the wages that authority forces on the Joads creates a strenuous situation. The Joads must earn more money than most families to be able to feed everyone. The handbill the Joads have tells them there are good wages in California. "I got a han'bill says they need men," Pa says.

(243) What the Joads do not realize, and only begin to realize from the talk of the ragged man is that the employers in California will get as many men as possible out to California. They will start the wages at so much, and the migrant workers will accept those wages. Then, the employer figures that they

can pay less to the migrant workers. Some workers won't accept the lower wages, but the hungry ones will. If they have children, the workers must learn to feed their family on less. The power people will keep lowering the wages, until they are almost nothing, because the very hungry ones will accept the low wages. The Joads have to keep moving around to find the decent pay in order to feed the entire family. If they don't find the money they need to survive on, this obstacle will tear them apart.

The third thing that blocks the Joads from staying together is the journey to California. They have no other option but to try their luck in the land of opportunity. Traveling is a tough job, and the Joads have never done much of it before. "They say it's two thousan' miles. That's a hell of a long ways. We oughta go," Pa says. (136) The Joads "think" they know how tough the odyssey to California will be, but they have no idea how much pressure it puts on the family. Traveling makes the family tired. They want to be rid of the trials of traveling. The Joads become irritable with each other, and Ma shows it the most. She's afraid the family won't make it to California all together. "...I'm a-goin' cat-wild with this here piece of bar-arn if my own folks busts up," Ma warns. (219) Ma tells that the family is all they have left. Being together so much and the difficulty of migrating severs some members away from the family. The first family member to leave is tough old Grampa. He dies on the way

to California. Grampa isn't willingly going to be taken from his home. The family puts Grampa to sleep with soothing syrup, and they get him on the truck to take him. Grampa already starts to die when they force him to leave his land. Grampa leaves the family and takes a little piece of the family with him when he goes. The Joads have to overcome the sadness of Grampa's death. Grampa's burial will cost money, but the Joads can't afford any funeral. This obstacle would hold them back from California, so they bury him themselves. Noah, the oldest son, parts with the family when they make it to California. "I'm a-gonna go now, Tom--down the river. I'll catch fish an' stuff, but I can't leave her," Noah tells Tom. (268) Noah wants to stay by the river and let the family go on without him. Others threaten to leave the family, further dampening the spirit of the family. Uncle John, Rose of Sharon, Connie, and Al all desire to let go of the family. The ones that actually separate from the Joads are Connie, Tom, and Jim Casy. Granma, like Grampa, abandons the family by death. The Joads become comparatively smaller than before. They must come together to overcome the obstacle of losing family members. The journey to California takes its turn in tearing the family apart in a big way.

The Grapes of Wrath presents barriers that try to keep the Joad family apart, including the Oklahoma drought, authority pushing them around, and the journey to California. There are many times when a family must overcome obstacles. For the Joads,

their time comes in The Grapes of Wrath. For although they lose much, their bond, in the end, is stronger than ever.