

Fern Chooses Freedom: The Positivity in Getting Unstuck

I pride myself on my ability to anticipate the twists and turns of movies, but I must admit that watching *Nomadland* placed me out of my comfort zone, at no point did I feel confident enough to make predictions about the story. My lack of exposure to films like *Nomadland* created an immersive experience as I underwent the process of “getting unstuck” from the imposed norms of society and mainstream media while watching Fern get unstuck from the capitalist-driven standards commanding how people should live. This experience emphasized that the process of straying from traditional formations is filled with anxiety and uncertainty, but it exposes us to new perspectives and ideas that inevitably cause individuals to expand their lifestyles beyond the cemented boundaries placed by society. Getting unstuck allows individuals to live an authentic life of their choosing, which is an inherently positive outcome.

In the film, we join Fern as she is indoctrinated into the nomad lifestyle after losing her job, home, and husband. Throughout her journey, Fern is exposed to individuals from diverse backgrounds and varying opinions of societal norms. Her close friend, Linda May, was failed by society’s work-driven mindset and chose to work towards achieving self-sufficiency on her land after discovering the measly sum in her retirement fund even though she had worked her entire life. Swankie, another person of note, refused to play into the expected hospital-ridden life that comes with a terminal disease and, instead, chose to spend her remaining time living to the fullest among the birds and rocks in nature. Both individuals carved their own paths because enforced societal expectations were not compatible with the lives they wanted. Through Fern’s

interactions with Linda May and Swankie, her resolve and appreciation for the freedom that the life of a nomad provides grow, as well as her knowledge of the strength it takes to accomplish this.

After these pillars of support say their temporary goodbyes to her and set off to accomplish their goals, Fern is met with her conventional sister and Dave, who has given up the nomad life for his family. These individuals provide Fern with the perspective of those who live according to societal standards and emphasize the aspects of life (a steady job, home, and a family) that are difficult to achieve when one lives outside the realm of societal norms. The many people that offer Fern a place to stay highlight how society trains us to think that those not following the economic and family standards are in need of guidance and reform. Although Fern attempts home life for some time in Dave's house, she eventually takes off again in her van. The scenes of her saying goodbye to Dave's home and driving off are Fern's final goodbyes to the highly valued sedentary lifestyle as she chooses to keep being a nomad, only following her own rules and living up to her expectations even after facing judgment and confusion from those around her.

Nomadland shows us the difficulties that stem from straying from society. Fern works odd jobs, says goodbye to friends, faces criticism from family members, and cannot always cover her needs. Although she faces these hardships, she continues to choose to be a nomad. She refuses to play into society after being disappointed by the erasure of her hometown due to capitalism and after being exposed to others who have also been let down by imposed norms. Fern's willingness to persevere and commit to a life independent of social constructs is her method of taking control of her happiness. Overall, her journey is inspiring and freeing and filled with possibility and positivity.

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