

IT'S BETTER TO BE HAPPY

The short story "Flowers for Algenon" by Daniel Keyes is about a mentally retarded man named Charlie Gordon. Charlie is thirty-seven years old, single man who has an I.Q. of sixty-eight. He is very stable and independent. He lives on his own, pays his own rent and even with his job he still finds the time to go to adult night school. He is very motivated to learn and be "normal" like his friends. Ms. Kinnian, who is his school teacher even goes as far to say that he is the best in her class. His two best friends, Joe Carp and Frank Reilly, work in a factory with Charlie. They run the machines and Charlie sweeps the floor. Joe and Frank aren't always the nicest to Charlie they do make fun of his handicap but deep down they do have love for him. Charlie loves his job even though it's not much. He is a generally happy person and he definitely makes the best of his situation. Ms. Kinnian decides that Charlie will be a prime candidate for an experiment in the works that will triple his I.Q. Dr. Strauss and Dr. Nemur are the ones who will perform the operation, which is still in clinical trial. Charlie is asked to race a mouse named Algenon who has already had the operation performed on him. The Dr. wants Charlie to race Algenon so that they have a sense of how smart the mouse actually is. The doctors use the race to determine if Charlie is the right candidate for the operation.

They eventually choose Charlie to be their test subject. Charlie keeps a journal that he is supposed to write all of the progress he is making.

There are many reasons I feel the operation should not be done. Some of these reasons are that Charlie is fine just the way he is, and there has not been enough prior clinical research and evidence of the operation being permanent or even being safe. The last reason is as a direct result of the operation Charlie suffers extreme physical and emotional pain. These reasons make my opinion very strong; Charlie should not have the operation.

My first reason on why Charlie Gordon should not have the operation is that he is better off without it. Charlie might have a low I.Q. but he does have a job, friends, and he is for the most part happy. People can understand him and he can function in society. Why does he have to be smart, Charlie already has everything he needs?

" Ms. Kinnian told that I was her best pupil in the adult night school because I tried the hardest and I really wanted to learn" (March 7). Most mentality-retarded people are defiant when it comes to learning, and they get aggravated with not being able to comprehend. Charlie on the other hand, already has the motivation to learn. He wants it so bad that he will do anything to become smart hence the operation, but the cons do outway the pros. Charlie found the adult night school by himself this shows he is self-sufficient, and this is also more evidence

of his motivation. When Dr. Straus and Dr. Nemur asked him how he found the night school he says, " I asked pepul and sumbody told me where I shud go to read and spell good" (march 7). When I interpret this quote I think that Charlie's spelling and words are recognizable and since he has such high motivation they can only get better.

Therefore, he should not have the operation. Nobody ever told him to go to night school he found it and went all by himself. Now isn't that motivation!

Not only was he motivated and self sufficient in night school he also made it to work everyday. " Mr. Donnegan (Charlie's boss) said I was the best janiter he ever had because I like my job and do it good and never miss a day except my operashun" (March 28). This is a great example that Charlie is just fine without the operation. He can make it to work everyday on time and he has never even taken a sick day. That is how devoted he is to his simple job. It makes him feel important even if all he does is sweep the floor. Charlie has a social life that was developed through his job, which is where he met Joe and Frank. At times Joe and Frank might not seem like friends they even make jokes at his expense. "Then Frank Reilly said what did you do Charlie forget your keys and open your door the hard way. That made me laff. Their really my friends and they like me"(March 25). Since Charlie has a low I.Q. he doesn't really understand that they are

making fun of him. This is actually a good thing because Charlie's feelings aren't hurt by what is being said about him. When Charlie needs Joe and Frank they are there. After he has the operation people make fun of him at work Joe and Frank are sentimental to all he has gone through. " Frank Reilly came over and said Charlie if anyone bothers you or trys to take advantage you call me or Joe and we will set em straight"(July 27). Even though Charlie is mentally retarded and has a low I.Q. doesn't mean he should go through with the operation. I believe Charlie shouldn't change one bit his happiness is all that counts.

My Second reason for why Charlie should not have the operation is that there has not been enough prior research that the operation actually will work. Charlie will be the first human to undergo this operation. Only mice have been used so far and they haven't had enough time to find out what the long-term effects will be. Dr. Nemur says, "Remember he will be the first human beeng ever to have his intellijence tripled by surgical meens"(March 8). The doctors really don't care at this point if Charlie lives or dies. The doctors have ulterior motives; they just want to become prestige members in the science world. They manipulate Charlie and don't even do the operation in hospital. "I found out it isn't a hospitol it's a labatory"(March 28). The Dr.'s aren't looking out for Charlie's best interest. They probably don't

even have the verification to perform the operation. Charlie is told that the operation might not be permanent but he is mentally retarded, how can he make the right decision to not go through with the operation. He can't even comprehend the risks. "If it works permanently they will make everybody smart all over the world"(March 10). This quote shows how naïve Charlie really is. Charlie has no idea of all the additional research that needs to take place before this operation could be approved to be distributed worldwide. This again shows that the doctors take advantage of Charlie he should have never made the decision on his own. Somebody should have explained all of the effects and the risks that went along with the operation. After Charlie goes through with the operation Algenon (the mouse who beat him in all of the races) starts digressing down hill and his mental ability to be smart starts to go away. "Motor activity is impaired; there is a general reduction of glandular activity; there is an accelerated loss of coordination"(June 5). Charlie is very sad because of this not only because Algenon is his friend but also he knows that this will soon happen to him. If the doctor's would have waited long enough to see what the long term effects would have been on the mice this could have been prevented. This new development really scares Charlie. Now that he has gone through the operation and realized what he was before the operation the last thing he wants to do is become that

again. This starts to show all of the mental anguish Charlie has to deal with now that he knows that the operation will not be permanent.

Finally the most important reason Charlie should not have the operation is due to it he suffers great amounts of physical and emotional pain. Since he has had the operation he is forced to see how people treated him before. "I didn't know what to do or where to turn. Everyone was looking at me and laughing and I felt naked. I wanted to hide. I ran outside and I threw up."(April 20) This emotionally depresses Charlie, and it even makes him physically sick. If he never had gone through this operation he would have still been his happy-go-lucky self. Now he is filled with pain. This really upsets me because Ms. Kinnian and the doctors knew he was going to go through this pain and they did nothing to stop it. All they cared about was how this operation would benefit science. What about Charlie's feelings? " She (Ms.Kinnian) cried and I cried too but I wouldn't let her in because I didn't want her to laugh at me. I told her I didn't like her any more. I told her I didn't want to be smart any more"(July 25). Ms Kinnian knew that this might happen and so did the doctors, and they didn't even try to protect Charlie from this. Now, after the operation Ms. Kinnian sees all of the pain Charlie is going through. I bet she wishes she would have never took Charlie in to see Dr. Straus and Dr. Nemur. Ms. Kinnian has ruined Charlie's life. "I feel sick inside... inside my

chest it feels empty like getting punched and a heartburn at the same time”(April 20). Charlie starts to go down hill. He feels horrible inside. I have felt this kind of pain before in my life, and it a pain that can't be taken away with any pain killer. Charlie is extremely depressed, and this is a feeling he has probably never experienced in his life.

Everything seems to be falling apart. His once simple life is now much more complicated. Charlie has become alienated from all of the people he loves. He is different now after the operation, and since he has alienated himself he really has know one to talk to about these horrible feelings. “ I am alone at Mrs. Flynn’s boarding house most of the time I seldom speak to anyone” (May 18). Finally Charlie is almost at the end of his rope. He has nothing to hold on to and he even has thoughts of suicide. “ Dr. Straus came to see me again... I told him to go away...I am touchy and irritable. I feel the darkness closing in. It’s hard not to throw off thoughts of suicide” (June 15). This is almost the end for Charlie. Luckily he finds the strength to move forward.

In Conclusion, Charlie Gordon was a great employee, student and friend before this operation. Since there wasn't enough concrete evidence that this operation would work, Charlie ended up loosing his self-dignity. He was shown what he was like before the operation and was ashamed of the person he was. He was smarter then all of the doctors and then losses it all. Charlie was a happy person before this

operation. He was a simple man, and because of his low I.Q. was naive. Charlie was completely taken advantage of and he ends up suffering great emotional pain because of that. In My opinion this operation should have never been performed. Charlie was fine before the operation everyone said he was the best that he could be. There was not enough research done because look what ends up happening to poor Charlie, and there is no reason why Charlie should have ever suffered so much physical and emotional pain. What is more important to be smart or to be happy?