

UNDER THE WILLOW TREE

HAL AMES



In the center of our town, we have a park. It is a place for people to sit, play, and relax in enjoy the sunshine.

When I was a child, the park was always decorated with banners and during the holidays. All the townspeople would go there to buy hotdogs and cotton candy. Sometimes there would be fireworks in the sky.

The park had many trees, but the biggest and the most beautiful was the willow tree. Its branches hung down to the ground. We would play under the tree because the shade was cooler than in the sun. For many of us we pretended it was a fort where we played games and hid from our parents.

The tree was a symbol of our youth and of our city. Soon we were going to learn that all that was going to change.

Over the past few years, interest in the park and the special holidays had disappeared. People were too busy with other activities to go to the park to enjoy the special events.

One day we found out that our tree was going to be removed by the city to make room for a new building the city wanted to build. The city had wanted to build a new office building for some time, and now they were going to make that happen. They said the park was not being used anymore, and it was time to modernize the city hall.

This made many of us angry. We loved that tree and the park. We had grown up playing under that tree, and our children were doing the same thing. On hot summer days, it was fun to go to the park and play soccer or throw a Frisbee. The tree was in the center of the park, and we did not want it to go away. We wanted to keep our park. What were we to do?

The next week we went to the park, as we usually did on a Saturday. We brought a picnic lunch and some games to play. It was a beautiful day, and many people were there.

The people next to us were talking about the new city hall building. They were talking about how much they were going to miss coming to the park.

I turned to them and asked, “Do you think there is anything we can do about this?”

“We don’t know, what do you suggest?” they replied

We moved closer to where they were sitting and began to talk about ideas on how to save our tree and our park. Other people heard us talking and joined us. Soon we had a crowd of people saying they were against the new building. They wanted to help.

I suggested that we plan a party in the park, just like when we were kids, to prove to the city council that the park was not useless like they thought. Before I knew it, I was asked to be the chairman of the committee to save the park.

The following week, I had several of the people who had been at the park come to my house to talk about the plans for the big party. I was amazed at how much help they all wanted to be.

We set a date for the party and created designs to print signs and invitations. We were all excited.

At the next meeting of the city council, I went to speak with them. At the end of the meeting, they finally let me speak. I told the council we did not want the new building in the park.

They said they did not care. The plans for the building were finished. There was nothing they could do about it.

I invited them to the party so they could see how the people of the town loved the park and how they wanted to keep it just the way it was, the willow tree most of all.

The day of the party came. We had many more people than we had planned, but that was good. The children played, the parents talked, music filled the air, and the smell of food made us all hungry.

It was a wonderful time, but the city council did not change their minds.

The day of construction was coming. The contractor was putting up ropes to show where the building was going to be. Right in the middle of the roped off area was the willow tree, standing tall and proud.

I got an idea. I went home and packed my camping equipment into my car. My family and I drove to the park, unpacked all the gear, and then set up a campsite under the tree. The contractor told us to leave, but we refused. News of what we were doing spread throughout the town.

The police came, but right behind them were other families who planned to stay under the tree as well. While we talked to the police seven other tents were set up and more families were coming. Before long, the space under the tree was filled with tents. We were not going to leave until the city council changed their minds.

The next day the mayor came to talk to us. He tried to explain to us that it was too late to change the plans. Everything was already in place to build the new building.

We told him we were not going to leave. We were going to stay as long as we needed to in order to save the park and our tree. We told them that we would not vote for him and we would make sure the entire city council was voted out of office if they continued their plan.

We stayed under the tree until the next city council meeting. While we were under the tree, we had a great time getting to know other families.

Many of the townspeople attended the next city council meeting. It was loud and those who were opposed to the new building spoke out.

The city council listened to us this time and realized that it was not a good idea to remove the tree. They voted, and the plan was changed. The new city hall was going to be built somewhere else, and our tree was saved.

Now, as it was in the past, on special holidays the park is full of people. The people in our town concluded that if they did not use the park, our beloved willow tree would be cut down, and the symbol of our youth would be gone forever.

VOCABULARY: (*Match the word to its definition*)

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. decorate _____ | a. board, commission |
| 2. banner _____ | b. emblem, logo |
| 3. fireworks _____ | c. no value |
| 4. shade _____ | d. beautify, make colorful |
| 5. symbol _____ | e. exploding rockets |
| 6. Frisbee _____ | f. celebration |
| 7. party _____ | g. update, make newer |
| 8. useless _____ | h. sign, streamer |
| 9. modernize _____ | i. flying disk |
| 10. committee _____ | j. shadow of a tree |

TRUE / FALSE:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. The willow tree was very old. | T / F |
| 2. The city wanted to remove the willow tree. | T / F |
| 3. The park was going to be turned into a parking lot. | T / F |
| 4. My family wanted to save the tree. | T / F |
| 5. We had a parade to save the tree. | T / F |
| 6. The city was going to make the park larger. | T / F |
| 7. The city council changed their minds about removing the tree. | T / F |
| 8. I slept under the tree for three days. | T / F |
| 9. The police made us leave. | T / F |
| 10. We had a big celebration in the park. | T / F |

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

1. Where did we like to play when we were kids? ____
 - a) swimming pool
 - b) under the willow tree
 - c) in the gym
 - d) at home

2. What did the city want to do to the tree? ____
 - a) remove it
 - b) move it to another place
 - c) decorate it
 - d) leave it alone

3. To whom did I go to talk to about saving the tree? ____
 - a) mayor
 - b) police
 - c) city council
 - d) mother

4. What was in the sky at some of the celebrations in the park? ____
 - a) airplanes
 - b) clouds
 - c) rain
 - d) fireworks

COMPREHENSION: *(Write a complete sentence to answer the question.)*

1. Why was the willow tree going to be removed?

2. Who wanted to remove the tree?

3. What was going to be built in place of the tree?

4. Where did we camp to save the tree?

5. What happened to the tree at the end of the story?

6. What did we do to show the city we wanted to keep our willow tree?

7. What did we usually do on Saturdays?

8. How long did we stay under the tree?

9. What position was I given to save the tree after our first meeting?

10. Who came to tell us to not stay under the tree?
