



Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

A play adapted by Karen Patterson, "Growing Together" Service-Learning Network from the children's book by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan

“ On the way home, Uncle Willie shows me the counter. ‘We fed one hundred and twenty-one people today,’ he tells me. That’s a lot of citizens. ”

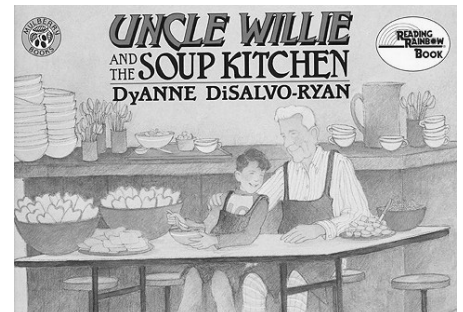
-- from *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen*

A reader's review of "Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen" . . .

"Can a soup kitchen be warm and inviting? It can when Uncle Willie works there. When his nephew has a day off from school, Uncle Willie invites him to spend the day helping him at the soup kitchen. Although hesitant at first, the young boy discovers, that in Uncle Willie's eyes, that the food collected from his neighborhood is not just food, but preparation for a feast. To Uncle Willie, the soup kitchen visitors aren't strangers. They are his guests."

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Narrator 1: Each day in cities all across the country, volunteers and paid workers prepare meals to feed millions of hungry men, women, and children who come to eat at local soup kitchens. Religious organizations, neighborhood stores, food banks, money donations, and government subsidies support these efforts to provide hot meals to the poor.



Narrator 2: In Ohio, one in six adults and one in five children is food insecure or hungry. It isn't necessary for patrons of soup kitchens to be unemployed or homeless. Sometimes working people do not make enough money to provide basic needs and comforts for themselves or their families. Many elderly people and others living on small fixed incomes depend on soup kitchens for their main meal.

Narrator 3: *Bread for the World, Results, Second Harvest*, the *National Network of Food Banks*, and the *Food Hunger Hotline* are a few of the hundreds of local and national organizations that exist to meet the growing needs of the hungry in our neighborhoods today. Locally, *Mid-Ohio Foodbank* supplies hundreds of food pantries in Ohio, including *Heart to Heart Food Pantry* in Grandview.

Narrator 1: This is the story of "Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen" by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan.

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

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Scene One: Uncle Willie picks Johnny up from school and walks him home.

Uncle Willie: "Hi, Johnny. How was school?"

Johnny: "Race you to the corner!"

(Johnny runs past Uncle Willie, then turns to make sure he is coming. Uncle Willie pretends to wobble on his legs. Johnny bends over to hold his stomach because he is laughing, which allows Uncle Willie to catch up.)

Johnny: "Uncle Willie, it's nice of you to walk me home after school, since my mom is at work. But what do you do while I'm at school all day?"

Uncle Willie: "I work at the soup kitchen. We fed a lot of people today. Spaghetti and meatballs. Good thing the bakery truck stopped by to give us extra bread."

Johnny: "Why do you work there, anyway?"

Uncle Willie: "It's important. Sometimes people need help."

(Enter "the can man" pushing a shopping cart full of empty cans he finds in the neighborhood.)

Johnny: (whispering to Uncle Willie) "Let's go."

Uncle Willie: (to "the can man") "How's business, Frank?"

Frank: "One more block and I'm done for the day."

(Uncle Willie picks up an empty can and tosses it into the cart.)

Frank: "Two points for the basket!"

(Frank exits the stage, pushing his cart.)



Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

Johnny: "Since when do you know that can man?"

Uncle Willie: "Since Frank came to eat at the soup kitchen."

Johnny: "But why doesn't Frank eat in his own house? Doesn't he have a place to live?"

Uncle Willie: "I never asked Frank where he lived. In the soup kitchen, you only have to be hungry."

Johnny: "Well, what does he do with those cans?"

Uncle Willie: "He cashes them in for money at the supermarket. Maybe that little bit of extra money helps him to make ends meet."

(Uncle Willie and Johnny arrive at Johnny's house.)

Johnny: "Bye, Uncle Willie. See you tomorrow."

Uncle Willie: "See you tomorrow, kiddo."

(Johnny goes into his house, and Uncle Willie walks away.)

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Scene Two: Johnny's mom walks him to school the next day.

(Johnny and his mom walk past a woman sleeping on a park bench.)

Johnny: "She looks lonely. I feel kind of sad to see her alone."

Mom: "There are a lot of lonely people these days. That's why I'm proud of Uncle Willie. He's doing something to help."

Johnny: "But I wonder what it's like to work inside a soup kitchen. I mean, Uncle Willie goes there almost every single day and I've never even gone with him once."

(Johnny and his mom arrive at school.)

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

Mom: (Handing Johnny his lunch and giving him a hug) "Why don't you ask Uncle Willie to take you next Monday? Remember, you have a day off from school!"

(Johnny goes into the school, and his mom exits the stage.)

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Scene Three: Johnny goes to the soup kitchen with Uncle Willie.

(Uncle Willie and Johnny meet outside Johnny's house.)

Uncle Willie: "All set?"

Mom: (Sticking her head out the door, joking) "You two keep out of trouble!"



(Uncle Willie and Johnny walk to Mr. Anthony's Meat Market.)

Uncle Willie: "Let's stop and see if Mr. Anthony has anything for us today." (walking into the store, hollering) "Hello, already!"

Mr. Anthony: "Hello, yourself! Have I got something special for you! (handing brown bags to Uncle Willie and Johnny) Chicken for the soup."

Uncle Willie: "Food for a feast. Thanks, and have a great day!"

(Uncle Willie and Johnny leave the store and walk to the next building.)

Uncle Willie: "Here we are. (Sandra opens the door.) Good morning, Sandra."

Sandra: "A very good morning. You brought us a helper today."

(Sandra and Johnny shake hands. All three enter the soup kitchen, which has large pots steaming on the stove and a large open space with tables. There is a high chair set up in the corner. There are people working in the kitchen.)

Johnny: "Look! Lunchroom tables, just like at my school. But what's the high chair doing there?"

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

Uncle Willie: “Little children come here, too. (Turning to the people working.) Now let me introduce you all around. This is Mike.” (Uncle Willie hands Mike the bags.)

Mike: “Chickens. That’s great! Thanks for picking them up.”

Uncle Willie: “And this is George. If it wasn’t for George, we’d all be in hot water. (George is standing at a sink washing a big silver bowl.) Now let’s get to work.”

(Uncle Willie and Johnny tie aprons on over their clothes. Then he chops vegetables and tosses them into the soup pot. Johnny watches as all of the people in the kitchen work together to prepare the meal.)

Sandra: (to Johnny) “Will you help me sort the fruits and vegetables? The market gave us so much fruit that we can make a salad today.”

(Johnny separates the fruit, washes it, and Sandra cuts the fruit and puts it in a large bowl.)

George: (to Johnny) “Everything comes extra big around here. We buy food in bulk quantities because we can buy more for less money that way. Do you think you can handle carrying these around to all the tables?”

(George shows Johnny large baskets of bread and large dishes of butter, which Johnny takes around to each table.)

Mike: “Break time! Help yourself to a bowl of soup.”

Uncle Willie: (to Johnny, joking) “Sit down, already. And make yourself uncomfortable.”

(The volunteers—Sandra, Mike, George, Uncle Willie, and Johnny—sit down together at one of the tables.)

Johnny: “Chicken and vegetable soup. My favorite. (Looking around at all the empty chairs) But what if there isn’t enough soup?”

Uncle Willie: (Waving his hands) “It’s just like magic. There’s always a little bit more.” (Uncle Willie reaches into his pocket and pulls out a clicker.) “This little clicker will help us count how many people come here today, so then we can make enough food for tomorrow.”

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

(The volunteers eat together and then clear their dishes.)

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Scene Four: The guests arrive.

(Johnny goes to the window and sees a long line of people from just outside the soup kitchen door all the way to the corner.)

George: "I used to be out there on those lines, but now I'm in here helping."

Johnny: (Reaching for Uncle Willie, whispering) "Are all those people homeless? Is George homeless, too?"

Uncle Willie: (Leaning in toward Johnny) "George rents a room in a building nearby. But some of the people have no place to live. If they're here, they're hungry, and we're here to fill up the bowls."

(Mike ladles the soup into the bowls and places one on every tray. Sandra dishes out the fruit cups and puts them next to the soup bowls. When the first few trays are ready, Uncle Willie yells out,)

Uncle Willie: "Lunchtime!" (Uncle Willie opens the doors, and people begin to come in. Johnny stands shyly just behind Uncle Willie.) "The soup is nice and hot right from the pot."

(Uncle Willie greets each person. He knows almost everyone by name. Some people try to shake hands with Johnny, but he remains removed from the line. Uncle Willie steps back and keeps a hand on Johnny's shoulder as he continues to greet his friends.)

Uncle Willie: "This is Johnny. He has the day off from school. So he came by to see where I work."

Johnny: (whispering) "There's Frank, the Can Man."

Uncle Willie: "Hello there, Frank. (Pointing to boxes of fruits and vegetables) Help yourself. We have extra today."

(Soon, the tables are full. People are talking and eating. The soupspoons make clinking sounds. Johnny observes.)

Guest 1: "This soup is great. Can I have seconds?"

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

Guest 2: "You gave her more chicken than you gave me."

Guest 3: "But I was in line first."

Guest 4: "We need more bread on our table, please."

Guest 5: "We want more butter on ours."

Guest 6: "More cheese on ours."

(Uncle Willie circulates around the room welcoming people. George walks back and forth carrying dirty dishes back to the sink.)

(Johnny sees the woman who was sleeping on the park bench. She puts bananas in her pocket and smiles at Johnny.)

Johnny: (to Uncle Willie) "Mom and I saw that woman the other day. She looked lonely. I'm glad she came here for lunch, because it's not so lonely here."

Uncle Willie: "That's right. I've met some wonderful people and made many friends here."

(The volunteers and a few of the guests clean up after everyone else has left. Then Uncle Willie and Johnny shake hands with all the volunteers.)

Mike: (to Johnny) "Come again any time. We can always use the extra help."

Johnny: "Thanks again for the soup!"

(Uncle Willie and Johnny walk to Johnny's house.)

Uncle Willie: "We fed one hundred and twenty-one people today. That's a lot of citizens."

Johnny: "It was a great day!"

(Johnny and Uncle Willie smile and link arms as they walk the rest of the way home.)

Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen

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“Growing Together” Resources

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