

Saving Anna's Family

by ReadWorks

Christine closed the door to Anna's room. Inside, her friend had fallen asleep while they watched their third movie of the evening.

Downstairs, Christine's mom, Donna, was grasping Anna's mother Sheila around the shoulders. "We should go," she said. "Get some rest, huh?"

Sheila nodded, blew her nose, and then reached an arm out for Christine. Christine snaked her own skinny arm around both women, awkwardly, patting them both on the back.

On the car ride home, Christine worked up the courage to ask the question on her mind.

"Mom? Why was Sheila crying?"

She thought she knew the answer, of course: Anna's cancer. Anna had been missing a lot of school, losing hair, and sitting through, Christine knew, hours of chemotherapy sessions, in which her doctors dripped poisonous drugs into her veins in order to pinpoint and kill the cancer cells. The poison was never enough to kill Anna herself, luckily, but she'd told Christine that it left her bones feeling rubbery and her tongue rough and raw.

In the past, Anna had been the neighborhood do-gooder, always going door to door for various causes: the local animal shelter, suffering children in Africa, or the families who'd lost their homes to fire or foreclosure that she'd seen on the news. Now Anna could barely feed herself, when she had an appetite at all.

The doctors had hope for her recovery, Sheila had told Donna before, because Anna was strong and young and ready to fight. But still, Christine thought, it seemed so unfair when bad things like this happened to good people.

After a moment, Christine realized her mother hadn't answered her question. "It's Anna, isn't it?" she prompted her.

"Well, yes and no," said Donna.

"What do you mean?"

"Well..." Donna trailed off, then looked at her daughter, sitting tall and attentive in the passenger seat. "It's complicated, but I guess you're old enough to understand."

"Understand what?"

"Understand that Anna is sick, yes, but Anna actually gets a lot of help. The government helps pay for a lot of her medicine. She gets meals delivered to her by a nonprofit. She even gets massages from local volunteers."

"Wow!"

"Her life's still very hard, of course, and no one would trade places with her, but when you have cancer, everyone can see that you need help," continued Donna. "They don't always see that the people around you are suffering."

"People like Sheila?"

"Yes, and that's why it's so hard to talk about," said Donna, looking uncomfortable. "Anna's whole family is struggling, and yet they don't want to complain because of poor Anna. They feel invisible."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, did you know that Sheila took a break from her job to stay home with Anna?"

"No!" Christine was surprised. She had never thought about who took Anna to her appointments, or fed her when she was too weak to lift a spoon. Of course it was her parents.

"Yes. So that means that many of the things they used to do with that extra money-pay for braces, vacations, new school supplies-that's all out the window now. Not just for Anna, but for her brothers, too."

"Wow." Christine looked down at her lap. She remembered spending each summer in a new state park with Anna and her family, exploring the mountains of Yosemite or the beaches of Maine. That was all gone now? For her, too?

"Yes. They're even worried now about keeping the house."

"Their *house*? So Anna might have to move, while she's sick?"

"If she doesn't get better soon, and the bills keep piling up..." Donna pulled into the driveway, and just in time. Her cheeks were shining with tears. She fumbled around with the latch to the glove box, where she always kept a stash of wrinkled Kleenex.

"Mom, we have to do something!" Christine balled her hands into fists, cutting into her palms

with the edges of her nails.

"Honey, we're not so rich ourselves," Donna said, then buried her face in the tissue. Her shoulders heaved. "I don't know what we can do."

"There has to be something," Christine said firmly. "We just have to ask ourselves: What would *Anna* do?"

TO: JESSE, ANDRES, EMILY

FROM: CHRISTINE

RE: ANNA

Guys. Anna's family needs our help. They're low on funds. They might lose their house while they're taking care of Anna. What can we do?

TO: ALL

FROM: JESSE

RE: ANNA

I could sell my guitar?

TO: ALL

FROM: ANDRES

RE: ANNA

Uh, we could give them free coffee from my aunt's cafe??

TO: ALL

FROM: EMILY

RE: ANNA

Not sure? My dad and I take yummy food to my grandma sometimes... we could bring them some?

TO: ALL

FROM: MADDIE

RE: ANNA

I could make them a cheer-up card in Photoshop. My brother just started teaching me!

TO: ALL

FROM: CHRISTINE

RE: ANNA

Music, coffee, food, art...all good ideas. Sounds more like a party though...

WAIT THAT'S IT!

Okay, I've got it! Meet at lunch tomorrow!

The day of the party seemed to fly by. After school, the friends lugged a big cardboard box of supplies to Andres' aunt's coffee shop, where Jesse was setting up his guitar, and Emily and her father were laying out baked goods and soup for sale. Christine pulled out a shoebox they'd decorated for donations, several photos of Anna they'd printed the day before, and some of the flyers that Maddie and her brother had made to advertise their fundraising bash.

At 6 p.m., the friends were surprised to see a line of impatient middle schoolers and their families circling the block, waiting for the party to start. Everyone who'd been touched by Anna's good deeds, it seemed, had come to return the favor: the animal shelter employees, the families from the news, plus the many kids from school that she'd tutored or saved from

bullying or just said hello to in the hallway when no one else would. They scarfed down the cookies and they stuffed the donation box, and when Jesse strummed the chords to Anna's favorite songs, they all sang along.

All together, they raised several thousands of dollars, more money than Christine had ever seen in her life. "No wonder Anna loved doing this for people," she thought. "It feels amazing."

But the best part, she mused later, was when Anna came through the door with her family, lured there with promises of chocolate cake and live music. Sheila saw the photos of Anna on the walls and started to bawl. Anna's brothers couldn't stop laughing and high-fiving their friends. Her dad lingered over the food, lapping up soup like he hadn't had a home-cooked meal in weeks. And Anna, wrapped in a blanket and tucked into a booth, just sat there smiling as Christine held her tightly.

"I was never going to give up," Anna whispered to her friend. "But I was afraid they were going to." She kissed Christine on the cheek.

"Now, I know that they've got a reason to keep going, too. They know that they've got a family to look out for them, to take care of them when they're too tired," Anna said. "They know that they're not invisible anymore."

"No way," Christine said, motioning to the group of teenagers who had come to her aid, to the roomful of neighbors all singing together. "We're *all* family."

"I think," said Anna, "that they see that now."

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What illness is Anna struggling with?

- A. influenza
- B. pneumonia
- C. cancer
- D. bronchitis

2. How do Christine and her friends attempt to solve Anna's family's money problem?

- A. They throw a party to raise money for Anna's family.
- B. They sell their most valuable possessions, like Jesse's guitar.
- C. They hold a bake sale to raise money for Anna's family.
- D. They cook soup for Anna's family so they don't have to make dinner.

3. Anna's family earns less money than they used to before Anna got cancer. What evidence from the passage best supports this conclusion?

- A. Anna's family is struggling, but they don't want to complain because of Anna.
- B. Anna gets help from the government to pay for a lot of her medicine.
- C. Anna's family is worried about what will happen if the bills keep piling up.
- D. Anna's mom is taking a break from her job to stay home with Anna.

4. How has Anna's illness impacted the rest of her family?

- A. Her family has gotten sick.
- B. Her family has had to make sacrifices and alter their lifestyle.
- C. Her family has lost their home and has been forced to move away.
- D. Her family has been alienated by their friends and members of their community.

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A. Christine and her friends brainstorm ways to help Anna's family keep their house.
- B. Anna's family struggles to pay their bills while taking care of their daughter with cancer.
- C. Christine and her friends throw a party to support Anna's struggling family.
- D. Christine learns that Anna's family is having money trouble due to Anna's cancer.

6. Read the following sentences:

"Mom? Why was Sheila crying?"

"[...] After a moment, Christine realized her mother hadn't answered her question. 'It's Anna, isn't it?' she **prompted** her.

"Well, yes and no,' said Donna."

As used in the sentence, what does the word "**prompt**" mean?

- A. make a person be quiet
- B. speak in a quiet voice
- C. speak in a loud voice
- D. push a person to talk

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Christine and her friends want to help Anna's family, _____ they organize a party to support Anna's family and raise money for their bills.

- A. so
- B. but
- C. like
- D. first

8. Why is Anna's family having money problems?

9. Why does Anna's family feel invisible?

10. Were Christine and her friends able to help Anna's family feel less invisible? Explain why and how. Support your answer with information from the passage.