



The Boy Who Saved His World

Citizenship, Patriotism, Courage and Caring - GRIT

As the story goes, there was a young Dutch boy named Jan (pronounced Yan) who loved to help anyone in need. He would help with chores, he would happily take food to the elderly, and he would help his father mind the levees – the walls that protected his village from the sea.

Now everyone in Holland knew that they needed to keep their country safe from floods. Holland, is one country which actually is lower than sea level and storms always threaten to push the waves over the banks. In an instant fields of wheat or flowers could be underwater and when things really got rough the houses could be flooded too. So keeping the levees strong was a very important job and the little boy's father was known for being one of the most responsible and dependable caretakers there was.

One day, Jan's mother asked him to take some food to an old blind friend who lived on the other side of town. Jan was very happy, not only because he loved the old man, who would always tell him stories of the old days. But also because he got to walk along the levee and view the flowers and fields and enjoy the birds he met along the way.

It was still a bright sunny day when he left. His mother cautioned him to be home before dark. But Jan enjoyed the man so much and the man entertained him with so many stories that he stayed longer than he should have.

Starting back, he was also distracted by the beautiful flowers that he would stop to pick for his mother and just being the curious boy he was, he didn't realize, until the shadows had started to lengthen, that the sun was going down and he was still a long way from home. He was about to climb back up to a clearer path on the levee when he heard water dripping.

Now if you remember, it's one thing to have a leaky faucet at home, the drip, drip, drip, can be annoying, but in Holland, the drip is a sound of danger – as it could only mean there was a leak in the levee. So quickly, Jan looked closely and found a small hole where the water was slowly coming through. Well anyone knows that once water has found a small hole, it won't take long to make a big hole and pretty soon the water can break through the levee and flood the fields. After all the water can make the Grand Canyon. Without giving a second thought he shoved his thumb into the hole and the water stopped.



Jan was very pleased with himself. After all it's not every boy who can stop a leak and save the town. But suddenly he realized it was getting dark, he was getting cold, and there was no one in sight. So being a hero was not much fun. He yelled as loudly as he could but there was no answer. So as the darkness surrounded him and all he could do was huddle up close to the levee – shivering and cold as he was and try to keep his finger in the levee.

His parents thought he had stayed overnight with the old man and so they stopped looking for him. In those days there were no telephones.

The next thing he knew, the sun was rising and people started to walk along the path on the levee. Finally someone heard Jan's calls and quickly jumped down to see what the matter was.

When he saw the boy's finger in the levee he yelled for help and quickly a crowd gathered. They quickly patched the hole and wrapped the boy up in blankets and carried him home on their shoulders, shouting his name - Jan, the boy who saved their world!

Thoughts

And so my fellow travelers, there are many "leaks" even small fingers can plug. Sometimes the best citizens are the ones who help others the most, who care as much or more about others than they do for themselves.

Background:

Amazingly enough, this story does not originate in Holland. It was written by an 19th century American woman, Mary Mapes Dodge (1831-1905), who was born in New York, in her classic, Hans Brinker or The Silver Skates. The Dutch had never heard the story until enough tourists came look for the whole in the levee that Hans Brinker had plugged. Finally, in 1950 the Dutch Bureau for Tourism decided to make a statue of Hans Brinker at Spaarndam to satisfy the curious people.

Questions

What do we mean by a "leak" – what kind of leak can we help fix.

Have you ever seen a lake or a river flood the land around it