

## Novel Resource #1

**Title:** Willow Run

**Author:** Patricia Reilly Giff

**Copyright Date:** 2005

**Publisher:** Yearling, a division of Random House, Inc, New York



Photo © Tomberg Associates

### **About the Author**

#### *Interesting Facts, Background, Anecdotes*

Patricia Reilly Giff grew up and has lived much of her life on the East Coast. She has written several books, including series of books and novels that she then writes companion books for. Most everything she writes about is something that she has experienced in her own life or in the lives of her family and friends. Giff has said that her inspiration for writing comes from her own children and the children she taught.

Although she writes about topics that are familiar to her, she always has to conduct research before writing a novel. That research, in the past, has included trips to Ireland to learn about Irish immigrants' trips to the United States before writing novels such as Nory Ryan's Song and Maggie's Door.

She began her career as a teacher before moving on to writing many children's novels. She is so in love with reading and the idea of children being absorbed in books that she now owns her own children's bookstore called The Dinosaur's Paw.

*Author's Official Webpage*

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/patriciareillygiff/>

*Author's E-mail and Mailing Address*

Patricia Reilly Giff, 159 Plymouth Ave., Trumbull, CT 06611

*Author's Connection to the Book*

Giff believes that one of the best ways to research for a book that is being written is to interview people who are connected to the story. Therefore, Giff conducted interviews to learn about life in the United States during World War II for both the men who served, families who had members serving, and for Americans “contributing to the war effort” back home working in factories.

The Dillons, the main character's family in Willow Run, are originally from Rockaway, New York. Giff herself was also born and raised in New York

*Other Books Written by Patricia Reilly Giff*

Lily's Crossing, Pictures of Hollis Woods (both Newbery Honor books), Nory Ryan's Song, Maggie's Door, All the Way Home, A House of Tailors, Gift of the Pirate Queen, Polk Street School Books Series.

**Annotation**

Meggie Dillon, a young American girl dealing with the hardships of World War II, is about to experience a major life change. Gone will be the lazy summer days of fishing with her grandfather, walking on the beach with her best friend Lily, and tending a garden. Meggie's parents are uprooting the family from Rockaway Beach in New York and relocating to Michigan, where jobs building warplanes are plentiful. Thankfully, she is assured by her parents that the move will only be “for the duration” of the war.

But now she not only has her brother to worry about- he's been serving in the Pacific trying to help win the war- she also has to worry about leaving behind her grandfather. She wonders who will help him with the garden and who will put on a pot of coffee for him at the end of the day. In Willow Run, Michigan Meggie learns that she's not the only one worried

about family. She encounters many new friends who are dealing with similar hardships, such as wondering if they'll ever go back to their own lives as they were before the war and wondering if those family members fighting will ever come home.

This book transports the reader back to a time that most kids today, and even their parents, are not familiar with. In social studies class students read extensively on the lives of pioneers and Native Americans, but are not often caught up to social issues during World War II. Giff really pulls the reader into the setting of home life for families during the war, discussing leather rations, the need for Spam, and cheaply made homes. The repeated phrases and language used, such as "the war effort," "for the duration," and the popular songs that are often sung, help the reader picture a more innocent, yet infinitely more socially stressful, period of American life.

I loved Meggie's character in Willow Run. It is easy to relate to a young girl who is trying to act older and tougher, but who underneath is still a sensitive girl. My relationship and attitude toward my family is similar to Meggie's. I completely understood her desire to keep her family, friends, and home exactly as it had always been. Change can be very difficult for some individuals to endure.

### **Booktalk**

How many of you have moved to a new house at some point in your life? I'm sure many of you experienced sad feelings about missing your family, friends, the places you used to hang out.

In Willow Run by Patricia Reilly Giff, Meggie Dillon is a young girl living in New York during World War II. Life was difficult during this time period, so Meggie's dad moves the family to Willow Run, Michigan so that he can work in a factory building warplanes.

Meggie's very nervous about the move and worries about family members she's leaving behind. Her grandpa has to stay in New York and she worries that no one will be around to protect him and to go fishing with him. She also worries that her older brother, whom she loves very much and is off fighting in the war. She wonders if he'll come home and if he does, will he know where they are?

If you like historical fiction books, you'll definitely want to read Meggie's story in Willow Run.

## **Characters**

Margaret "Meggie" Dillon-The main character. Meggie is a young girl, around 12 years old, who has grown up in Rockaway Beach, NY. She is the youngest in the family and has a very close relationship to her brother and her grandfather. She is family-oriented and feels a strong connection to Rockaway Beach.

Josef von Frisch- Meggie's grandfather, a German immigrant who was a soldier in World War I. He is very close to his grandchildren and likes to spend his days fishing and gardening in Rockaway Beach.

Mr. Dillon- Meggie's father. He moves the family to Willow Run, Michigan to make money working in factories that build warplanes. Meggie's father is excited about a job that helps the war effort.

Ingrid Dillon- Meggie's mother. She is a stay-at-home mom and worries about her son, Eddie, who is fighting in the Pacific in World War II.

Eddie Dillon- Meggie's brother. We don't actually meet Eddie in the book, but we know about him through flashbacks from Meggie and through letters he writes home from the war. He is fighting in the Pacific in World War II. He is protective and has a close relationship to his younger sister.

Lily Mollahan- Meggie's best friend in Rockaway Beach. She is a good friend to Meggie during these hard times. We only meet her briefly at the beginning of the story, and we later learn that she has a father fighting in the war.

Patches- A neighbor girl that befriends Meggie when they move in next door in Willow Run, Michigan. Patches has a rough-and-tumble persona and is originally from the mountains of Tennessee.

Harlan- A boy from Detroit whose family has also moved to Willow Run to work in the factories. Harlan is one of the Dillons' mischievous neighbors who befriends Meggie.

Arnold- Willow Run's local ice cream man. The children of Willow Run are a bit suspicious and frightened of him since he is a young man who is not off fighting in the war.

Rochelle- The Dillons' neighbor. She is a young mother living by herself and working at a factory in Willow Run while her husband is off flying missions in the war.

### **Conflict**

In Willow Run Meggie Dillon struggles to be happy and keep her family together after her family moves from Rockaway Beach, NY to Willow Run, Michigan. But everything seems to be against her due to the war and the way society must live. She had to leave her grandfather behind, she worries about whether her brother will every be found and return safely from the war, she must live in a house with thin walls, and she must learn to take care of herself when her mother goes to work in a warplane factory.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Meggie is able to stay in touch with her family and friends in Rockaway Beach through letter writing. She keeps the hope alive that her brother will be ok and their family will be together again by sending for her brother's photo and helping bring her grandfather to Willow Run to be with the family.

**Genre:** Historical fiction

**Tara Deters**

**St. Luke Catholic School**

**[taradeters@hotmail.com](mailto:taradeters@hotmail.com)**