

# *Willow Run*

by Patricia Reilly Giff  
Wendy Lamb Books, 2005

*Margaret “Meggie” Dillon is living during uncertain times. The year is 1944 when WWII is going strong. Enjoying life in colorful, beachside Rockaway, New York, Meggie’s life is turned upside down as her brother Eddie leaves to fight in the war. Upon coming home one day, she learns her family must leave their safe-haven and move to Willow Run, Michigan so her father can work in a factory that builds war planes. Doing their part to help the war effort, the Dillon’s reluctantly leave behind Meggie’s German American grandpa with whom she has a love-hate relationship. With mixed feelings but ever hopeful, Meggie calls this move an adventure, but is surprised by the meager sights of her temporary home. Gone are the green, grassy yards, the smell of the salty Atlantic, and her expansive home with her private room. Faced with living in a rabbit-hutched size house surrounded by dirt and a lack of trees, Meggie comes to rely on the items in her treasure box, and her fond memories of better times with Grandpa and Eddie to comfort her. Maggie befriends Patches and Harlan who are in Willow Run for the same reason. Together they pass the time with movies, stealing ice cream pops from a “spy” and telling stories, all the while maintaining courage and hope during oppressive times. When things couldn’t get much worse, the Dillon family receives heartbreaking news that Eddie has been lost in action after landing on the beaches of Normandy, France. Young Meggie must face this new challenge, and in doing so, makes an unexpected friend along the way and builds hope in her parents with a surprise house guest who is sure to bring happiness to a dismal time. Patricia Reilly Giff uses vivid details to portray how a child’s life can be transformed during difficult and unfamiliar times. Readers will learn that the power of hope is strong, and that friendship is the tie that binds.*

## **Interest Level/Reading Level**

Ages 9-11

## **Point of View**

Third person, Limited Omniscient

## **Theme**

Hope will pull you through difficult times.

## **Genre and Setting**

Historical fiction

1944

Rockaway, New York

Willow Run, Michigan

## **Book Title Meaning**

The novel receives its title based on the setting of the story. Willow Run was a small town named for a stream that ran through long ago. It is where Meggie and her family currently live to help in the war effort.

## **Read Aloud Pages**

“Something was growing inside my chest again, something so big it felt as if I couldn’t get my breath, as if I were going to explode. I sat up in bed and then my breath did come, and I was crying, crying loud enough for them to hear me on the other side of the wall.”

~Chapter 7, page 53

Meggie finally breaks down from the stress of the war and from leaving behind Grandpa and the comforts of home.

“I remember the old Germany, Margaret, not hooligans like Hitler who started this war. And when this is over, maybe it will be different. Maybe people will remember and try to be better to each other.”

~Chapter 14, page 102

Meggie is recalling memories of talking with her beloved Grandpa.

### External Conflict

After leaving her Grandpa behind, Meggie makes a new home in Willow Run, Michigan and confront the challenges of living in uncertain times during wartime without her beloved Grandpa and her brother Eddie.

Meggie befriends Harlan, Patches, and Arnold and builds a friendship with them while relying on fond memories to bring her through the stress in her life. Meggie sends for Grandpa who moves in with the Dillon family to lift their spirits.

### Characters/Traits

Meggie Dillon, main character, age 11

- Anxious
- Conscientious
- Sad
- Hopeful
- Changeable
- Dreamy
- Fearful
- Honest
- Mischievous
- Sentimental
- Sensitive
- Determined

Patches, friend to Meggie

- Poor
- Humble
- Proud
- Courageous
- Tough
- Mischievous

- Dirty
- Determined
- Mischievous
- Care-free
- Generous
- Honest
- Reckless
- Soft-hearted
- Ambitious

#### Grandpa

- Sad
- Loud
- Outspoken
- Generous
- Hard-working
- Courageous
- Wise

#### Arnold, friend of Meggie

- Pushover
- Cowardly
- Sleepless
- Afraid
- Brave
- Quiet
- Timid
- Understanding

## About the Author



After teaching for almost two decades, Patricia Reilly Giff began her writing career in her early forties. Her background as a teacher and reading consultant enabled her to address the interests of middle grade readers. The author of over 60 books, Ms. Giff has been surrounded by books her entire life. To pursue this childhood dream, she left teaching and “began [her] writing career in a closet.” All of her books are based from personal experiences and those of family members. Living with her husband Jim in Weston, Connecticut, Patricia Reilly Giff also occupies her time enjoying bubble baths, movies and popcorn. Readers can see a part of Giff when shopping at The Dinosaur Paw, a children’s bookstore she opened with her husband. This entrepreneurial adventure was launched to inspire a love for reading in all children. Ms. Giff is a well accomplished author who travels to schools and libraries throughout the country to promote her books and share her passion for writing. Patricia Reilly Giff is a multiple recipient of the prestigious Newbery Honor Book citation for her books *Lily’s Crossing* and *Pictures of Hollis Woods*.

If you liked *Willow Run*, then you’ll enjoy *Lily’s Crossing*, a novel set during WWII that shares the life of young Lily and depicts what life was like on the home front. Other books by famed author Patricia Reilly Giff include *Nory Ryan’s Song*, *Maggie’s Door* and *All the Way Home*.

For more information on Patricia Reilly Giff and her books, please visit <http://www.patriciareillygiff.com> and <http://www.inspire.net>.

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**Booktalk**

Meggie Dillon has to cope with the harsh reality that her brother is fighting in WWII and is missing in action after landing in Normandy, France in 1944. With only her parents and beloved grandpa by her side, Meggie learns that they must move to Willow Run so her father can build war planes to support the war effort. However, grandpa must remain behind, and Meggie is faced with living in a new town completely opposite of where she came. She befriends Harlan and Patches who are there for the same reason. As their friendship unfolds, the reader learns each character's strengths, weaknesses, feelings and anxieties. Will these new friends help ease the pain of Eddie and Grandpa's absence, and will Eddie be found and come home safely to the Dillon family?

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