

ANGEL IN OUR FOREST



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Angel in Our Forest

A Story for Children

Based on the life of
Sister Dorothy Stang
Modern Martyr

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When Rosa woke up, the morning sun was shining warm on her face. The huge tree outside her window made blue shadows on her sister Anna next to her. It reminded her of the shadows in the forest where she was born.

Rosa smiled, remembering the giant trees in the Amazon forest, stretching their arms to the sky. She could still see the ripe fruits, the vines of flowers and the monkeys playing high above her head.

When her sister Anna was three, she would giggle as her brother Pedro jumped up to swing on the low branches of a mighty tree. But now, two years later, Anna couldn't even remember the forest. Rosa felt sad. She really missed her home in the Amazon.

“What if I forget the forest?” she worried.
“Could I forget the cool wet morning dew, the fire-red macaw parrots swooping through the trees or...”



“Rosa, Anna, wake up! It’s time to get up!”
Her mother called. “Come and eat.”

Rosa dropped her toes into her flip-flops and pattered softly into the kitchen as Anna rolled over.

“Anna’s still sleeping, Mama” whispered Rosa. Her mother was stirring the beans at her shiny white stove. Mama whispered back loudly, “That Anna loves to sleep! But it’s okay. There is no school on Saturday.

“Did you have a good dream last night?” asked Mama.

Rosa shivered as she remembered the scary dream that had wakened her again in the middle of the night.

“Yes, Mama,” she said.

She didn’t want her mother to know that she was still having nightmares. Some nights in her dreams she ran through the dark forest all night. But last night she had dreamed of the trees falling and crashing with a terrible roar. It was so good to wake up to the shiny sun that made her feel safe again.

“Good morning, Mama, Rosa.” Pedro sat down at the table, next to Rosa and shook his head at the way she had hidden the truth of her nightmares.



Mama and Papa had enough problems, since they had left the Amazon to come to America. Last night Pedro had heard Rosa scream and had left his bed to gently shake her awake.

He was ten years old, but even after two years away from the Amazon, he shivered when he remembered that horrible night and the events that followed it.





Rosa hurriedly gobbled her beans and rice, dropped her dish in the sink and pulled open the apartment door. "I'm going to sit on the steps downstairs, Mama, and watch the cars go by."

She ran down the hall with the scary dream like a TV program in her mind.



As she opened the heavy front door, Rosa saw the red-haired girl from her class. She was gliding up and down the street on her skate board. She ignored Rosa sitting on the steps. Soon another dark skinned girl joined her and began to practice loops on her scooter. Rosa decided that it would do no good to say hello.

“American girls aren’t friendly,” she thought. “They probably think that I don’t understand English, but I do.”

She didn’t try to talk to them. She turned to admire the great red-orange maple tree over her head. A squirrel was busy chewing on a nut. High above him a black crow made noisy cawing sounds that sounded like he was scolding the squirrel.

“This fire colored tree, tall with great arms that stretch and twist and seem to wrap around the sky! But it’s not as big as or as pretty as the trees in my Amazon Forest,” sighed Rosa. Anyway, this beautiful maple tree almost made her feel at home.



“You shouldn’t hide your bad dreams from Mama, Rosa,” said Pedro as he opened the door and sat down next to her. “Don’t worry. I won’t tell.”

Rosa said nothing. “I wonder if I’ll ever stop being scared and feel I belong in this place,” she worried.



A white van with a big blue telephone on its side turned the corner and stopped under the maple tree. Two men in blue cover-alls got out and began to take things out of the back

of the van. An older man took out a ladder, and pulled on its ropes until the ladder grew up and up to almost fifteen feet high. He leaned it on the tree.

The other man removed a large machine from the back of the van. He held it with his strong arms as he climbed up the ladder. Up, up, up went the man until he got close to the top. From there he could reach the tree's long limb which hung over the street. He placed his chainsaw against the branch. He gave a pull on its cord and the saw let out a roar and began to bite into the wood.

"Co-o-ol!" squealed the red-haired girl who had come over to watch.

Pedro stood up slowly as Rosa felt a sick fear grab her stomach.

In an instant Rosa jumped from the steps and grabbed on to the ladder. "No-o-o!" she howled. Before she knew it, she was shaking the ladder.

Up at the top, the worker hung on tight to the huge limb to steady the bouncing ladder. The other man was at the back of the truck, but now he jumped to hold the ladder, along with the howling little girl.





Rosa fought and screamed, "Let me go! Stop killing the tree!" In her mind she saw herself running wildly through the forest. She had to stop the killing of the trees! Someone grabbed her! "No, don't kill me!" she cried.

"Whoa! Whoa, hold on young lady! I won't hurt you." The worker on the ground had taken hold of her shoulder. "But you can't shake the ladder. It is dangerous."

"What are you doing, Rosa?" called her mother as she ran up to them and grabbed her weeping daughter. "It's all right," she murmured in Portuguese. "Rosa, mine, what's wrong?"

"He's cutting down the tree, Mama," wailed Rosa.

The worker at the top of the tree yelled down, "We have to cut the tree branch, Ma'am. The branches are next to the telephone wires and they might fall on someone in a storm."

"But Sister Dorothy said not to cut the trees. They give our world oxygen to breathe. We won't be able to breathe!" Rosa sobbed into her mother's dress.

"I am only going to cut one branch," said the man as he came down the ladder.

"Not the whole tree, Rosa," said Pedro in Portuguese. "Just one branch."

"One, just ONE branch?" whimpered Rosa.

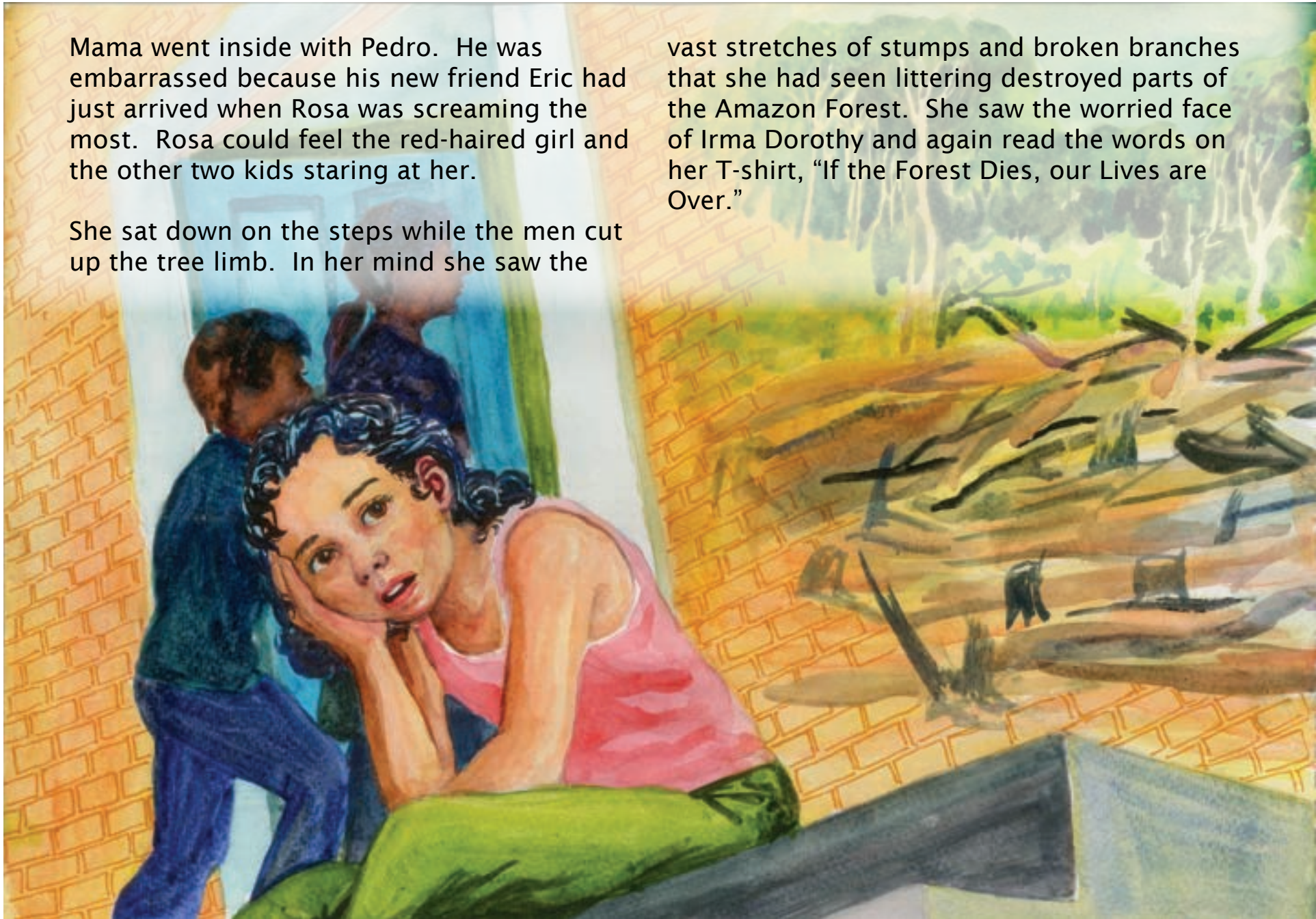
Yeah, kid. I promise just ONE branch over the street. Okay?" the worker said softly.

"Okay. But only one..." sniffed Rosa as she wiped her face and walked slowly to the steps with her mother. Behind her she heard the whine of the chainsaw begin again as the men finished the job. She tensed as she heard the sickening crack and a familiar thud when the great branch hit the ground.

Mama went inside with Pedro. He was embarrassed because his new friend Eric had just arrived when Rosa was screaming the most. Rosa could feel the red-haired girl and the other two kids staring at her.

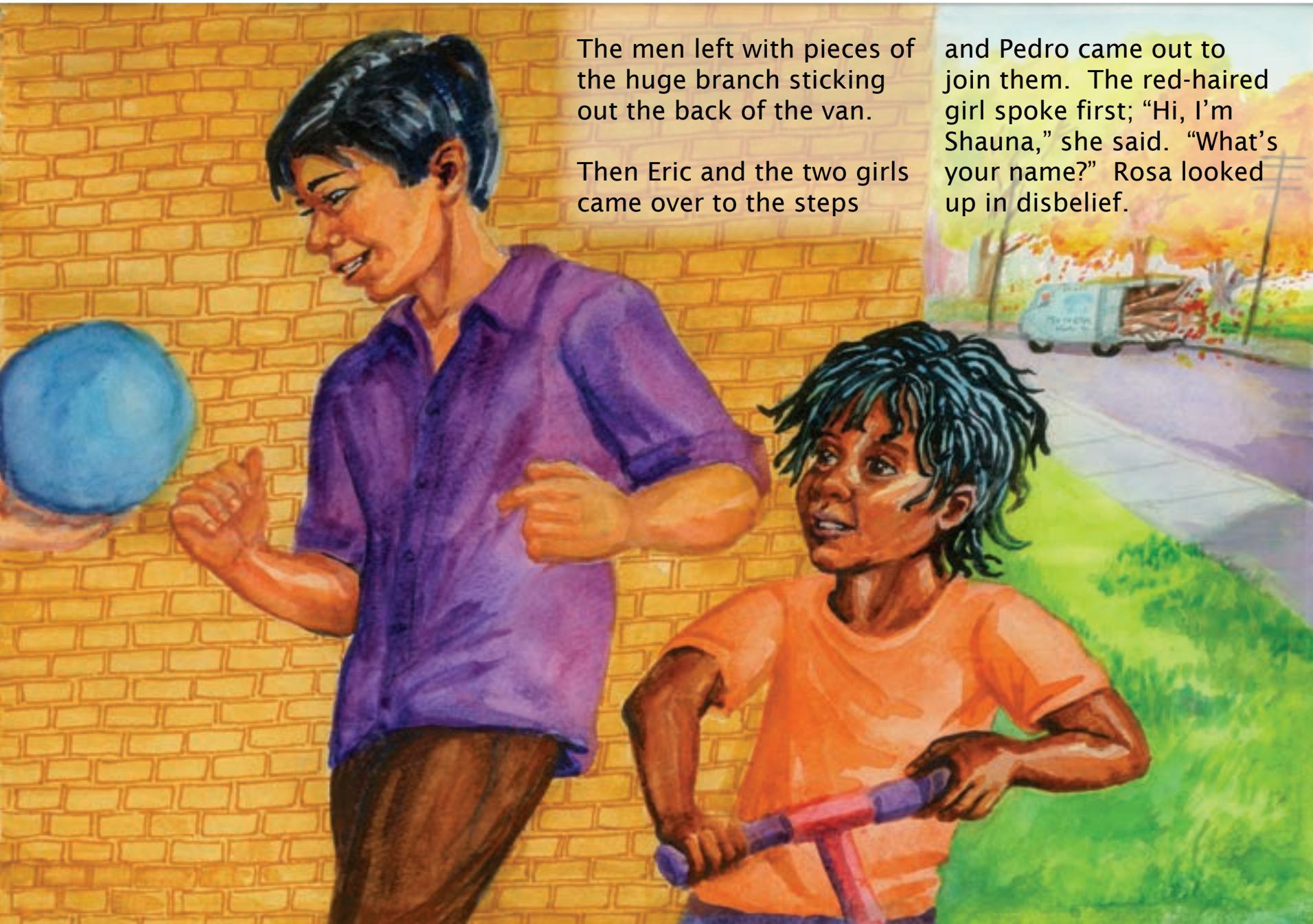
She sat down on the steps while the men cut up the tree limb. In her mind she saw the

vast stretches of stumps and broken branches that she had seen littering destroyed parts of the Amazon Forest. She saw the worried face of Irma Dorothy and again read the words on her T-shirt, "If the Forest Dies, our Lives are Over."









The men left with pieces of the huge branch sticking out the back of the van.

Then Eric and the two girls came over to the steps

and Pedro came out to join them. The red-haired girl spoke first; “Hi, I’m Shauna,” she said. “What’s your name?” Rosa looked up in disbelief.

“I’m Rosa,” She mumbled.

“Boy, you really showed those tree cutters, Rosa,” said Eric. “Oh, and I’m Eric.”

“This is Kristin,” said Shauna, “and what’s all the fuss about cutting down trees?”

“Yeah, I love that old tree too, but you’re a real tree freak!” said Kristin. “And who’s Irma Dorothy?”

Rosa look at Pedro and smiled. He winked at her. Pedro knew that there was no one that Rose loved to talk about more than Irma Dorothy.

“Okay, “ she began slowly. “My family is from Brazil. Pedro and I and our brothers and sisters grew up in the forest of the Amazon. Our parents were farmers, doing farming and harvesting that would preserve, not kill, the forest. It was their dream to own their own land and to build a new life for us all. That was why we left the slums of the city of Belem and moved into the Amazon Forest.”

Wait!” interrupted Eric. What is the Amazon?

”It’s the name of the largest tropical bio-region in the world. It’s a giant rainforest growing around a huge long river called the Amazon which flows through five countries in South America,” Pedro explained proudly.

“It’s so beautiful! The trees are giants compared to the ones here. Our forest is filled with plants, trees, animals, birds and insects that are found only in the Amazon. They date back even to the time of the Dinosaurs because the last Ice Age didn’t reach the Amazon.” sang out Rosa, waving her arms.

“Scientists are studying thousands of rare species and 25% of our modern medicines now come from plants of the Amazon. Some day maybe researchers will find a cure for cancer,” said Pedro.

“And Irma Dorothy says that the trees purify the air and if the forest dies, we won’t have enough oxygen to breathe!” added Rosa.









“Does the forest make oxygen?” asked Shauna.

“Of course it does, Silly! And, when they cut the trees and burn the brush and stumps to plant soy or cattle grass, it adds to global warming.” Eric proclaimed importantly. “We learned that in science last year.”

“That’s right,” said Pedro. “We’ve seen it. The flames reach thirty feet in the sky and the clouds of smoke don’t clear for days and days.”

“Wow, I didn’t know that,” Kristin whispered in awe. “But who is Irma Dorothy?”

“Oh, let me tell about her, Pedro!” pleaded Rosa.

“Okay, Rosa,” grinned Pedro. “That’s your part. But why don’t we have lunch first. Mama made beans and rice and you are all invited for lunch. So run home and ask your mothers if you can come.”

After lunch they all gathered under the great orange maple tree to solve the mystery of the woman named Dorothy.

Rosa began the story. “When Papa and Mama moved to the forest to begin their farm, it was *Irma* Dorothy, or as you say in English, *Sister* Dorothy who helped us get our land. Papa said that she was an angel! In fact, everyone called her the Angel of the Forest.

“Angel?” asked Eric. “Because she got people land to farm?”

“Not just because of the land,” Rosa responded. “But because of so many other things that she did.”

“She taught our father and his friends how to farm without destroying the forest. They harvested the natural fruits of the forests and other products like rubber and cacao. My

mother and the other women learned how to use the forest plants and fruits to make healthy meals and medicine when we were sick,” continued Rosa with a glow in her eyes.

“Irma Dorothy taught us all to work together to make our villages into real communities,” Pedro added excitedly. “We would meet together and pray, work and celebrate as one family. She helped us to be proud and to stand up for our rights. Even the children!”

“*Sim!*” cut in Rosa, meaning “*Yes!*” For us she organized a school and got training for teachers. They say she helped built more than 25 schools. Of course, everyone helped,” Rosa remembered with a grin. “They were even building fruit factories to make products from the forest fruits – jams and muffin mixes. So then, even the people in the city could eat the fruits of the forest.”







And the best thing was that, after forty years of working with the Brazilian people, Dorothy, an American, was made an honorary Brazilian citizen. She was given a great award by the

government of Brazil for all the good work that she had done with the farmers. We were all so excited and full of joy. It was like they had given us a reward!"



“And then...” Pedro dropped his head and a cloud came over his face.

Rosa’s eyes shined wetly. She groaned softly. “There were greedy, terrible people there. They wanted our land. They wanted to cut down the giant trees and sell the wood.”

“Other men wanted to burn the forest so they could use the land for planting cash crops like soy and raising cattle. They could make lots of money from selling the soy beans and beef,” Pedro said angrily.

“But it wasn’t their land!” yelled Kristin. “Those robbers!” cried Eric.

“That wonderful forest..” moaned Shaun. “And now we won’t be able to breathe!”

“What happened next? Did they take your land? What did Irma Dorothy do?” Eric asked urgently.

“Late one night a gang of armed men came and circled our house. They were drinking and they started yelling, ‘Pack your things! This isn’t your land now.’ They told Papa to come out and fight like a man,” gulped Pedro nervously.

“They were shooting guns, too!” said Rose, her voice shaking. “We were so scared.”





“Papa told them that it was our land but they said we only had until 6:00 next morning to get out or they would kill us all,” Pedro continued. “Before dawn the next morning, we left our house with clothes and pots and pans in bundles made from our hammocks. We went deep into the woods.”

“As we turned to see if the gang was coming after us, we saw the robbers throw gasoline on our house and farm. They burned everything down. We lost everything!”

“Mama cried” whispered Rosa. Then in a louder voice she exclaimed, “We all ran deeper into the forest so they couldn’t find us.”





36 Pedro added, “We slept outside for many days until Dorothy came to find us. Other families had been chased away too. Dorothy came in a huge old yellow truck filled with food, clothes and blankets.”

Wow!” Eric exclaimed in awe. “Irma Dorothy was a real hero.” The two girls nodded in agreement.



“That’s not all she did,” Pedro asserted. “She went with our parents to report the burning to the local police and showed them a map to explain the boundaries. But they wouldn’t come

to see for themselves. They didn’t seem to care.”

With tears in her own eyes, Rosa said, “Mama told us that Dorothy was so upset that she burst into tears.”

“Dorothy had gotten many death threats from those gunmen, but she would not stop helping us. She wasn’t afraid,” Pedro said confidently. “Finally she set up a meeting with all the people for February 12 to support the families who had been burned out. The police promised to go on that day, but they did not keep their promise.

“What did you children do?” asked Kristin.

“We couldn’t do anything,” admitted Rosa. “I felt so helpless. The night before the meeting Dorothy saw me sitting alone with my head in

my lands and she came over and said, “What’s wrong, Rosa? Are you afraid?”

“I said, ‘Sim, Irma. But I am also sad because I am just a child. I can’t do anything!’”

“I’m also afraid,” she told me. “Sometimes I feel helpless too. But then I remember that there is a spirit in the forest and we are not alone. When we work together, we have that spirit. Even one little person can make a difference!” Then she hugged me and whispered, “Rosa, you can make a difference!”



Rosa continued the story, “On the morning of February 12, 2005, Irma Dorothy walked up hill to attend the meeting which she had called to support the farmers and their families. As she walked up a hill, two men stepped out of the forest.

“She greeted them, but they didn’t answer. Then as she got closer, the first man asked if she had any weapons. She saw their guns. Dorothy said, ‘My only weapon is this.’” She took her bible from her bag and read blessings to them like ‘Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth’ and ‘Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.’”





“The men were not listening. Dorothy closed her bible and started off to the meeting. One man called, ‘Irma.’ She turned and he shot her!”

“She died there, on the floor of the forest that she loved, fighting for justice for our people.” Pedro said sadly.



When the story was over, the children were silent. Rosa looked at their faces and saw that Shauna had tears on her cheeks and the faces of Eric and Kristin were very serious. Rosa looked up at the fire red maple. She saw the squirrel looking at her as if he had been listening.

And then the crow, perched high above, called out, "Ca-a-aw, ca-a-aw!" The bird's cry broke the quiet and Eric said, "Dorothy...she's..she's awesome! I guess she really is an angel!"

"Yes, and she's still alive," Rosa asserted quietly, staring into the flaming maple tree. "She's still alive in our people...And she is alive in the spirit of the forest!" she said confidently. "And...just maybe..now...she's

alive here with us because..."

"I know," shouted Kristin. "Eric just called her an angel. She really is still really alive! Now we can be filled with her spirit too."

"Right!" said Pedro. "After she died everyone was so upset and confused, but we all understood that Dorothy would want the farmers to stay together, to fight for their lives and for the life of the forest."

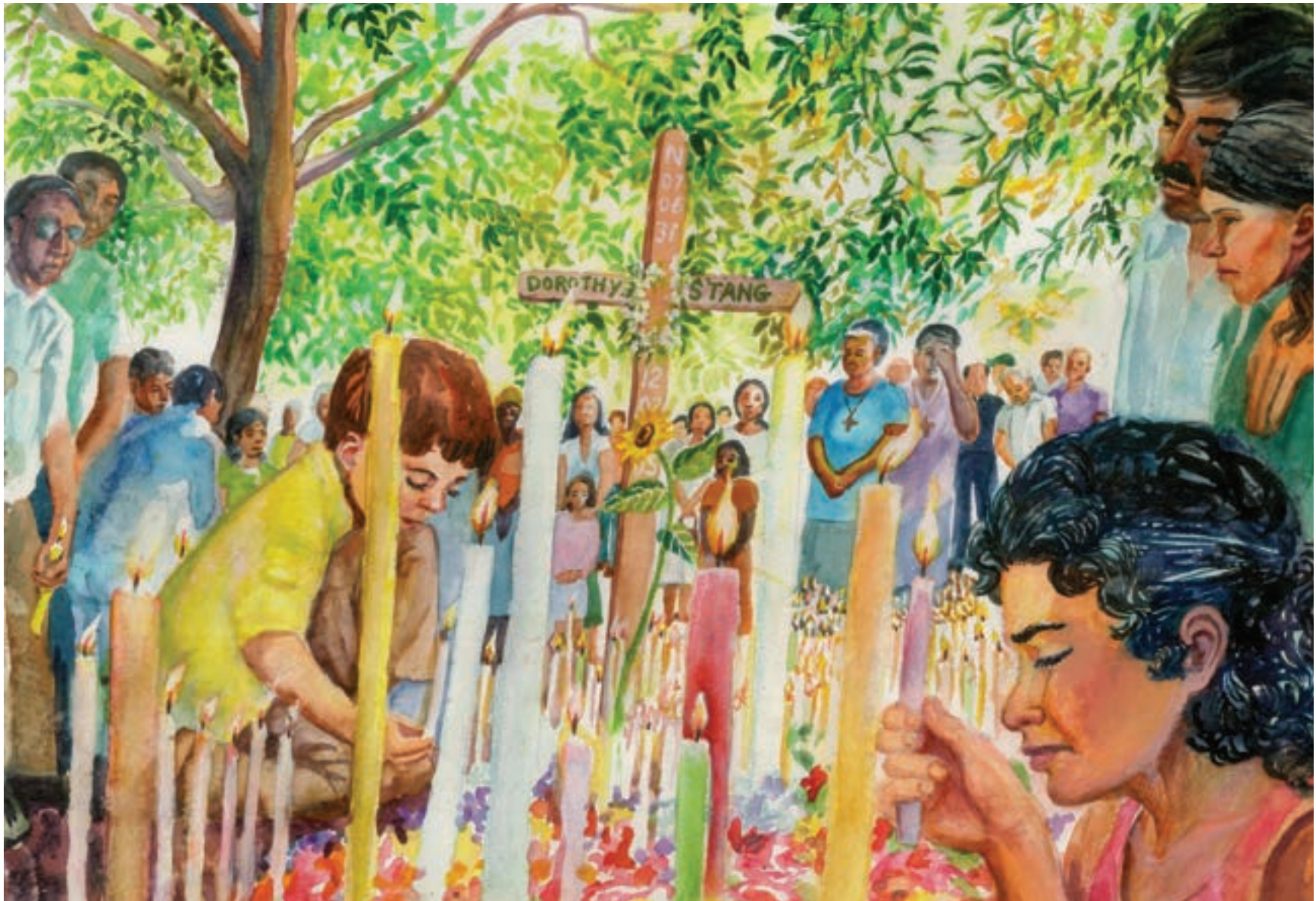
Rosa cried out, "The men who killed Irma Dorothy thought she was destroyed, but her spirit has spread among the people. Everyone loves Dorothy because she loved each one of us."

"The people of our village carried her body



down from the forest and as we walked many miles, the people of village after village joined with us until we were hundreds. She was

buried in her beloved Amazon forest. We will always have an angel in our forest!”
“Yes, everyone said they feel that Dorothy’s



46 spirit is living in our hearts,” answered Pedro. “Our farm families will stay together and continue to fight for our land. The people will

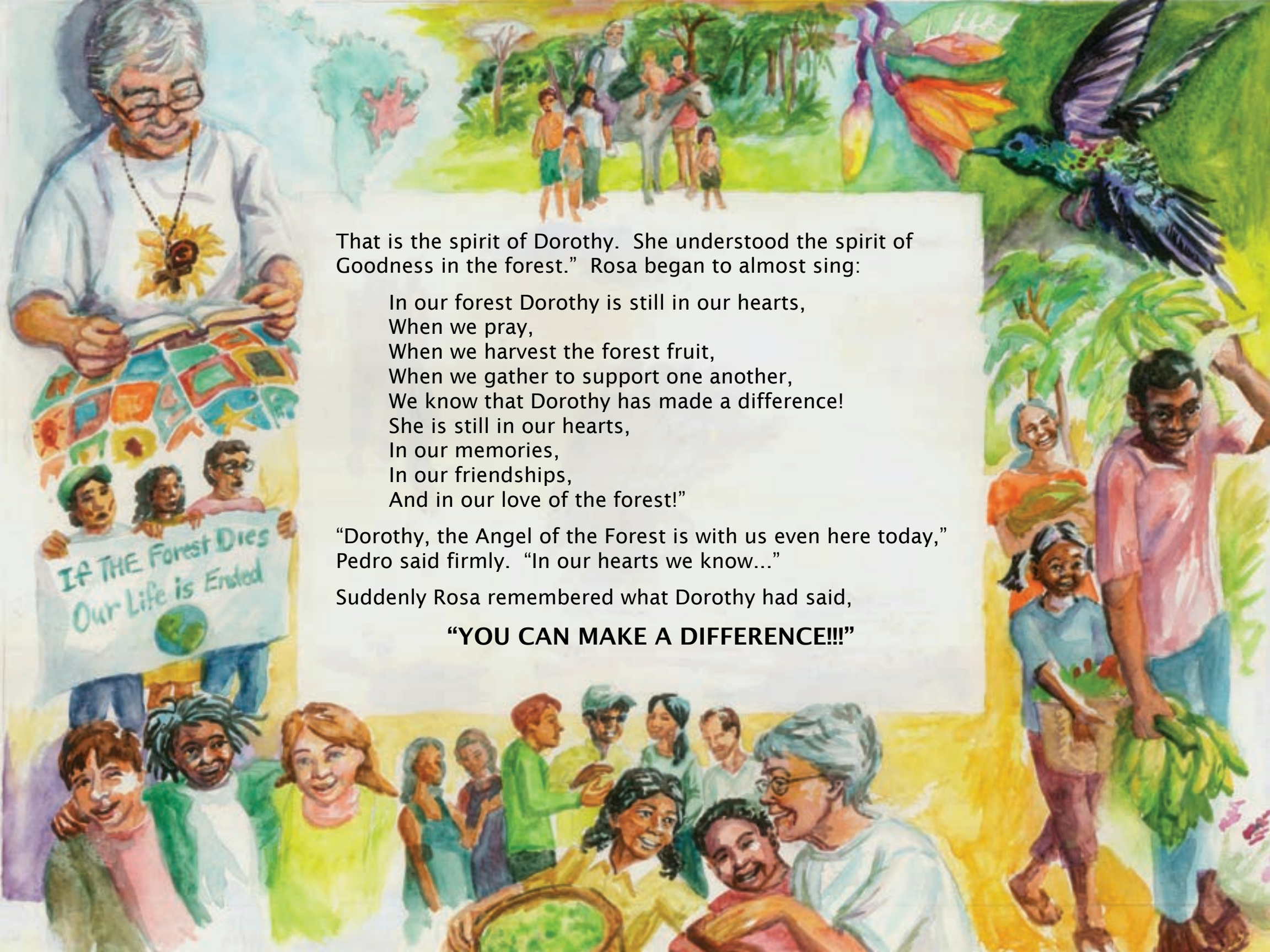
continue to help one another to build and to develop their farms and products.” “When the killers were arrested, Papa was



threatened again. So our parents and we younger children came to the United States. Later, after Papa returns to Brazil to testify at

the trials of the killers, we want to return.

“We love each other and we love our forest.



That is the spirit of Dorothy. She understood the spirit of Goodness in the forest.” Rosa began to almost sing:

In our forest Dorothy is still in our hearts,
When we pray,
When we harvest the forest fruit,
When we gather to support one another,
We know that Dorothy has made a difference!
She is still in our hearts,
In our memories,
In our friendships,
And in our love of the forest!”

“Dorothy, the Angel of the Forest is with us even here today,” Pedro said firmly. “In our hearts we know...”

Suddenly Rosa remembered what Dorothy had said,

“YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!!”

We can make a difference!!





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