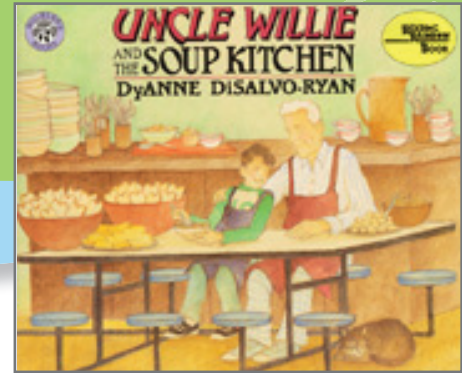




Author Interview with

**DyAnne DiSalvo**



In *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen* by DyAnne DiSalvo, a young boy is curious about the people he sees on the streets. He accompanies his Uncle Willie on a trip to the soup kitchen where Willie regularly volunteers. While there, the young boy encounters many different types of people and learns that each individual has different needs. The young narrator helps us learn that hunger is not simply a statistic.

Q. What motivated you to write this book?

A. *I used to volunteer at a soup kitchen in Brooklyn, New York. I decided to volunteer simply because, I wanted to help. One day, while I was filling up soup bowls with the vegetables and meat that the "Monday Crew" had prepared, I looked up and saw all these hungry people eating. It was noisy from the sounds of talking and laughing and feet shuffling back and forth. I thought, how can I write a children's book about a situation that is so sad, but yet, tell it in the positive way I saw and heard it happening.*

Q. I noticed that you lovingly dedicated your book to the friends and family of Mr. William Hearne. Could you tell us more about him?

A. *Mr. William Hearne is the real Uncle Willie. He wasn't MY Uncle Willie, but he told everyone who came into the soup kitchen to call him that. It was through Uncle Willie that I came to realize that I could write my story. He would be the main character. The one who could tell the story the way I felt it. Uncle Willie was funny and warm and really did say things like, "Hello, already!" I dedicated the book to his family and friends, because I knew Uncle Willie would never want to have all the credit. Before he died, he let me take a lot of photographs of him. Unfortunately, he never got to see the final publication. But the art is a pretty good representation of what Uncle Willie looked like. His memory lives on for all of us through this book.*

Q. What can kids do to help? Are there really opportunities for elementary and middle school kids to serve in soup kitchens?

A. *I remember a group of teenagers that came in every Monday morning to help us make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The adult volunteers would give these sandwiches to all the late comers who missed the usual soup time. There were some schools that would make colorful drawings to decorate the soup kitchen for the holidays. It really helped to make things festive. And the patrons always enjoyed it.*

Q. What message were you trying to get across about the patrons of soup kitchens?

A. *I was trying to let my readers know that everyone needs to eat. Everyone gets hungry. We are all the same in that way.*

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Q. What other resources about hunger (for young people) can you suggest?

A. *Since there are so many opportunities and organizations that help feed the hungry people in our neighborhoods, I would suggest a little help from parents, guardians, teachers and friends to encourage and direct our young people to seek them out. I always tell kids when I visit their schools that they are helping already. I remember one Monday when the food we usually got from the local supermarket and butcher was not enough. It was Brother Mike who remembered the school that had just donated boxes of canned goods over the weekend. Well, we were very busy that morning opening up a lot of vegetables to mix in with what we had. It was just what we needed and it was enough. Everyone appreciated that lunch.*

Q. Some people who go to soup kitchens might look scary to young people. How do you prepare the children ahead of time for the people they will see there?

A. *First of all, you would be surprised at the kinds of people who come to eat at soup kitchens. Some of them are senior citizens who live alone and just want company. Sometimes there are families who have just enough money to pay their bills, but need a little extra help. When I brought my son and daughter to help me work one day, I didn't prepare them for anything except how busy it would be. They did a lot of the beginning work, like putting out bowls of peanuts and plates of cheese on the tables. They helped sort out the bread we got each week from a local supplier. When I wrote my story I didn't want children to think that just because someone was homeless that it was OK to talk to them. People are still strangers, until you get to know them.*

*Working at the soup kitchen gave me the opportunity to think less of myself and more for others. It also inspired me to continue writing community stories that have to do with neighborhoods and helping. Since 1990, a percentage of my royalties have gone to the soup kitchen where Uncle Willie volunteered. It is my way of giving back to a wonderful experience and a wonderful man that helped inspire the story, Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen.*



DyAnne has published many other children's books, all wonderfully written with great messages. Included in these books are: Grandpa's Corner Store about a little girl helping her grandpa keep his corner store open; A Dog Like Jack about a boy's first pet; City Green about a little girl who starts a community garden; and many more! Please take the time to check out her website at [www.dyannedisalvo.com](http://www.dyannedisalvo.com)

GenerationOn Kids Care Clubs thanks DyAnne DiSalvo for the wonderful story of Uncle Willie.