



CHAPTER 8

The next afternoon, Christopher rode his bicycle to the offices of *Friends of the Earth*. They were in a beautiful house near the centre of the town. Christopher rang the doorbell and a young woman opened the door.

Inside the house, everyone was very busy. A secretary was sitting at a desk in the hallway. She was busy answering the phone and working at a computer terminal.

Christopher went to her desk. "Excuse me," he said. "I have an appointment with Mrs Wiffin. My name is Christopher Andrews."

"Oh, yes," said the woman. "Mrs Wiffin is expecting you. Please sit down and wait."

While Christopher was waiting, he looked around him. The walls were covered with posters. One showed a dirty beach covered with black oil. "Save Our Seas," it read. Another poster had a picture of a rain forest, and a third poster showed a black-and-white panda bear with her baby. A dolphin poster caught his eye. It showed a group of dolphins trapped in fishing nets. It read, "Free our Dolphins."

A man came up to Christopher. He had long brown hair in a ponytail, a beard, and he was wearing jeans. "Are you Christopher Andrews?" he said immediately. "I'm Ricky Douglas. I'll take you upstairs to Mrs Wiffin's office."

Christopher liked Ricky. He had a friendly manner and he seemed very nice. Mrs Wiffin was nice, too. She was a middle-aged woman with grey hair, and her office was a mess. Books and papers were everywhere, and the walls were covered with posters and photographs.

Mrs Wiffin shook hands with Christopher. "Thank you for coming. You were very brave to go on television about Aylesworth Forest."

"Can you save the forest?" asked Christopher.

"We're going to try," said Mrs Wiffin.

"Forests are very important," said Ricky Douglas. "They aren't just pretty, peaceful places. They aren't just homes for animals and birds. Trees make the air clean. They produce oxygen. Also, forests bring rain. When people cut down all the trees in an area, the climate changes."

"I didn't know that," said Christopher.

"It's true," said Mrs Wiffin. "In hot countries, areas without trees become deserts. In South America people are cutting down the rainforests for farmland. That's a big mistake because now the rain has stopped and those areas won't grow anything. They're turning into deserts."

"Wow!" said Christopher, "That's really scary. I'll have to read the book that Mr Edwards gave me."

"We need our forests," said Mrs Wiffin. "Aylesworth Forest isn't very big, but we need it. We're going to work hard to save it."

"There isn't much time," said Christopher. "They're going to start cutting down the trees tomorrow."

"Tomorrow! No, they aren't," Ricky said. He looked angry. "We're going to be there first. We're going to bring a lot of people and we're going to stand in a line between the foresters and the trees. That's called picketing. We can picket the forest every day if we have to."

"I'll come, too. I'll bring all my friends. We'll help you picket the forest," said Christopher.

"We're going to do other things, too," said Mrs Wiffin. "We need people to picket the forest because we must stop people from cutting down the trees. But we can't do that forever, so we must also persuade the town not to sell the forest."

"I have written a letter to the Mayor of Aylesworth," said Christopher. "I begged him not to sell the forest. I'm going to ask all my friends to sign it. Will that help? I have a copy of it, would you like to see it?"

"Yes," answered Mrs Wiffin. "Your letter is called a petition. We need many, many people to sign it. Then we will march to the Town Hall and give it to the Mayor of Aylesworth."

"I want to help in every way," said Christopher. "I'm going to talk to my friends. We will all go to the forest tomorrow after school."

Mrs Wiffin stood up and shook hands with Christopher. "Thank you for coming here today," she said.

Ricky walked downstairs with Christopher. "See you tomorrow," said Ricky. "Welcome to *Friends of the Earth*."



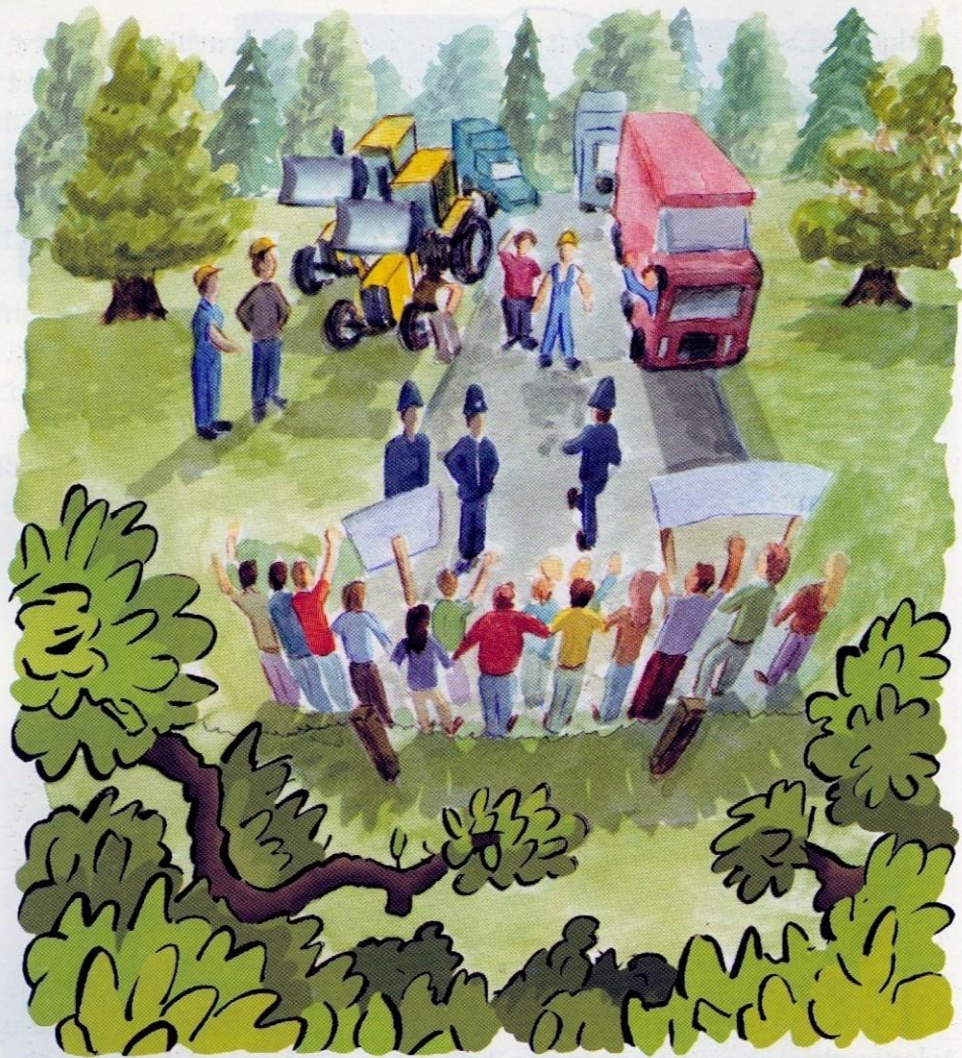
CHAPTER 9

In the morning, Christopher stood in front of the class. "I have some news to tell you," he said. "*Friends of the Earth* will try to save Aylesworth Forest. They need our help. They need people to picket the forest so that the men who want to cut down the trees can't get in. I have written a petition to the Mayor of Aylesworth and I need people to sign it. Who wants to help save the forest?"

Christopher looked at the class. All the boys and girls raised their hands. He looked at Mr Edwards. Mr Edwards raised his hand, too.

"After school today, we can go to the forest," said Christopher.

"I will tell the other teachers," said Mr Edwards. "And they can tell their students. Perhaps students from other classes will want to go, too."



After school, Christopher, Michael and Brenda rode their bicycles to the forest. A lot of other students went with them. Mr Edwards and some of the other teachers went in their cars. When they arrived at the forest, they were very surprised. The road to the forest was blocked with bulldozers and big lorries full of equipment for cutting down the trees. At the end of the road was a long line of people. They were holding hands and blocking the road. The bulldozers and lorries couldn't get into the forest. The men who had come to cut down the trees were very angry.

The people who were blocking the road were all from *Friends of the Earth*. Some of them carried large signs on poles. One sign read, "Save Aylesworth Forest!" Another sign read, "YES to Trees, NO to Bulldozers!" Some policemen were walking up and down between the people from *Friends of the Earth* and the angry lorry drivers. They made the lorry drivers stand aside, so Christopher and all the people from school could join the picketers.

"Wow!" said Brenda. "This is really exciting!"

Now the picketers were shouting together. "Save our forest! Don't cut down our forest!" they shouted.

"We have a job to do!" one lorry driver shouted back. "If we can't work, we won't get paid! This is our job!"

A policeman waved his arms and blew on a silver whistle. Everyone stopped shouting.



Ricky Douglas saw Christopher and his friends. Mrs Wiffin was with him. "We're going to stay here all night," said Ricky. "Our people will stay here every day and every night until the Mayor of Aylesworth changes his mind," he continued.

"And if he doesn't?" Michael asked.

"A mayor has to do what the people in a town want," said Mrs Wiffin. "If the people of Aylesworth really want to save the forest, the Mayor will agree."

Ricky showed his friends a piece of paper. "I have photocopied your letter," he said to Christopher. "Now we need signatures. We have made many, many copies of this letter. You can help us collect signatures. You can go all over the town and ask people to sign their names on the petition. This will show the Mayor what the people want."

"I can do that," said Brenda. "I can ask all the people in my neighbourhood. My sister will help me."

"We can, too," said Michael. "Our friends from school will help."

"That's great!" said Mrs Wiffin, and she smiled.

"Look at this," said Ricky. "We also have many copies of this pamphlet." He showed them a small book with a picture of a forest on the cover. The cover said, *Who Needs Trees?*

"You must give everyone a copy of this pamphlet," said Mrs Wiffin. "It explains why trees are important. If people read it, they will understand about this forest."

Mr Edwards came up and joined the group. "I'm Christopher's teacher," he introduced himself. "I want to help, too. I can come here every day after school, and at weekends."

Christopher was impressed. Mr Edwards was a very strict teacher and sometimes Christopher was afraid of him. Now he was beginning to like Mr Edwards very much. "I must try harder in school," Christopher thought to himself.

The children picketed the forest until it was time for dinner. Then they had to go. When they left, everyone took some petitions and a box of pamphlets.

"We will collect signatures tomorrow," Christopher told Ricky.

"Good luck!" said Ricky.



CHAPTER 10

For the next week, Christopher and his friends worked very hard. Every day they collected signatures on the petition to the Mayor. Brenda and her sister Annie stood in front of the supermarket every afternoon. They stopped all the people who were going into the supermarket. "Please read this letter to the Mayor," they said. "If you want to save Aylesworth Forest, please sign your name here."

Christopher and Michael didn't stand in one place. They rode their bicycles and went from one neighbourhood to another. They parked their bikes at the end of each road and walked from house to house. They went up one side of the street and then down the other side. They knocked on every door and rang every doorbell. It was very tiring work. They met all kinds of people.

Some of the people they met were very nice. They congratulated Christopher and Michael for helping to save the forest, and they were happy to sign the petition. One woman invited the boys into her house for tea and cake.

"I saw you on television," she told Christopher. "My daughter was watching *Brian Hunt's News for Children*, she loves that programme. She goes to your school. Her name is Julia, and she's twelve."

"I'm sorry, I don't know her," said Christopher.

"Never mind," said the woman. "Julia will be so excited when I tell her about you! Now where's that petition? I will sign it at once!"

Some people were angry about the petition. They didn't want to save Aylesworth Forest. One old man shouted at Christopher.

"My daughter lives in London," he said angrily. "She lives with her husband and three children in a small flat, and there isn't a park nearby. She wants to move to Aylesworth but there aren't any houses. If the forest is cut down, there will be lots of new houses. Then she can buy a flat and live near me and I will be able to see my grandchildren."

"I'm sorry," said Christopher. "The building company can buy some farm land instead. There is lots of farm land in this area. Then we can have a forest and your daughter can have a new flat."

"Pooh!" the old man shouted. He refused to sign the petition.

"I was a little bit scared of him," Christopher told Michael as they walked away. "He is so angry!"

"I understand his problem," said Michael. "But I agree with you. The building company can find another place to build blocks of flats."

Some people didn't know about the forest, and they didn't care about it very much. When they met these people, Christopher and Michael gave them pamphlets. They talked to these people and explained the problem.



"Forests are very important," Christopher told one woman. "If we cut this forest down, the birds and animals that live there will leave or die. They need the forest. We need it, too! The trees produce oxygen and help reduce air pollution. They bring the rain which farmers need to grow things. And they give us a place where we can go when we want to be close to nature."

"When I was little, I went to the forest a lot," said the woman. "Now I don't go there any more because I don't have time. Still, I think that you children need forests to play in. I will sign your petition."

The children from school worked all day Saturday and Sunday. They worked on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons. They talked to many, many people, and most of those people signed the petition to the Mayor. On Thursday after school, Christopher collected all the petitions from all the students and took them to Mrs Wiffin at *Friends of the Earth*.

Mrs Wiffin was very impressed. "There are thousands of signatures here!" she said. "More than half the people in town have signed this petition. Good work, Christopher!"

Christopher smiled. He was very tired from talking to so many people, but he felt very proud of himself.

"More and more people are coming to the forest every day," said Mrs Wiffin. "The bulldozers and foresters can't get in. Now we are ready for the next step in our campaign."

"What's that?" asked Christopher.

"On Saturday morning," said Mrs Wiffin, "we will march from the forest to the Town Hall and give these petitions to the Mayor. Tell all your friends to come."

"I will," Christopher promised.



CHAPTER 11

Early on Saturday morning, Christopher went to the forest. This time he didn't ride his bicycle. His father drove Christopher and his mother in their car. Mrs Andrews wanted to join the march, too.

Lots of people were at the forest. Christopher saw many of his friends from school. Mr Edwards was there, together with some other teachers. So were some of the people who had signed the petition. They all waved at Christopher.

Not everyone was going on the march. About one hundred people were staying behind at the forest to keep the foresters out. The rest of the people were going to march to the Town Hall.

Ricky Douglas called Christopher to help him. He had a big banner with the words, "Save Aylesworth Forest!"

"I will hold one pole," he said. "You can carry the other pole."

"No problem," said Christopher.

The march started. Christopher and Ricky were near the front of the huge crowd of people. Christopher looked back. He could see Michael and Brenda a little way back. They had a banner, too. Theirs read, "Aylesworth Forest Forever". Brenda and her sister had made it.



The march went from the forest to the centre of town. The police stopped all the cars and cleared the streets for the marchers. A lot of people didn't want to march, but they came to watch. They stood on the footpaths as the marchers went past.

On the way, Christopher talked to Ricky. "Thanks for all your help. I couldn't have done this all by myself," Christopher said to Ricky.

"You have done more than you know," said Ricky.

"I will be sorry when this is over," said Christopher. "Saving the forest is exciting and meaningful. School is so boring," he added.

"That's a pity," said Ricky. "I liked school."

"Are you paid for working at *Friends of the Earth*?" asked Christopher.

Ricky shook his head. "No, I'm a volunteer. I am a member because I care about our environment. I'm a zoologist. I have a PhD in Zoology from Durham University, and I study the habits of wild animals. Right now I am studying badgers. They are very interesting animals, but we don't know very much about them."

"That sounds interesting," said Christopher. "Most people that I know have boring jobs. My father manages a shoe factory. Michael's father is an engineer. Brenda's father is an accountant. I don't want to be any of those things."

Ricky laughed. "There is nothing wrong with those professions. But I must agree I don't, either! I always liked nature, so I wanted to study it. There are many useful and interesting jobs you can do. You can study botany or forest management if you like plants. If you like animals, you can study zoology or veterinary medicine. You could become an ecologist or a marine biologist."

"The trouble is, I just don't like school," Christopher said. "Mr Edwards says I don't try very hard."

"Maybe Mr Edwards is right," said Ricky. "I think you are very intelligent, but you don't know what you want."

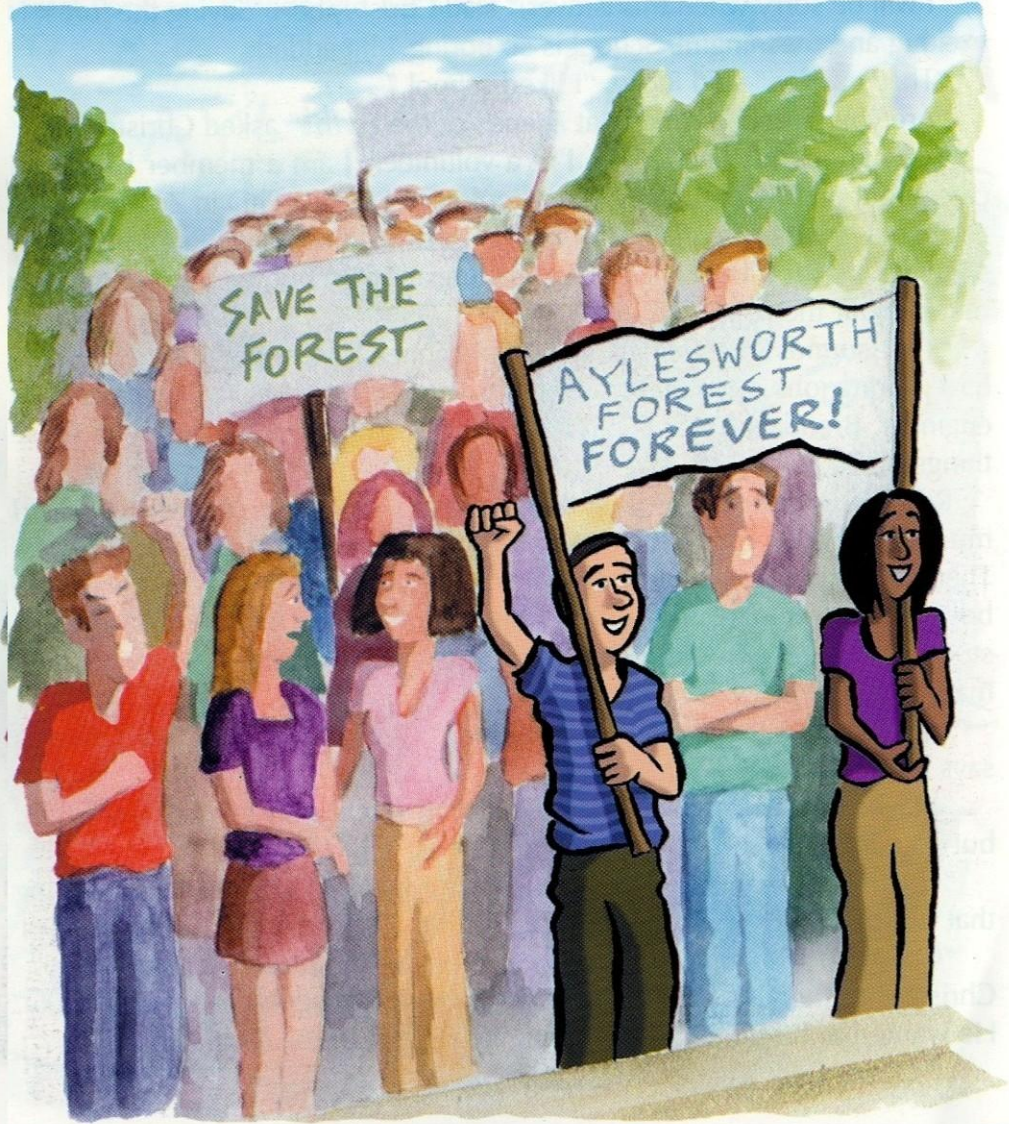
"I want to save more forests," said Christopher. "I want to do something that will make this world a better place."

"Great! You could really help if you were better educated," said Ricky. Christopher thought about that as they walked along. He respected Ricky. He wanted to be like Ricky and work for *Friends of the Earth*.

Now they were near the Town Hall. Mrs Wiffin turned around and called Christopher. He gave his pole to another boy and went to her.

Mrs Wiffin gave Christopher a big, thick envelope. "These are all the petitions to the Mayor," she said. "We want you to go and give them to him. We want you to do this because you started the fight to save the forest."

Christopher was very nervous. "Maybe Ricky can do it," said Christopher.



"No, you must do it," said Mrs Wiffin. "Don't be nervous. We are all very proud of you."

The Mayor of Aylesworth was waiting outside the front door of the Town Hall. He was a big, tall man with a moustache, and he stood like a soldier. Christopher felt very small as he started to walk up the front steps of the building. Behind him, people were shouting "Hurray!" and calling his name. He heard Michael's voice. "Go, Christopher!" shouted Michael.



Christopher gave the envelope to the Mayor. "The people of this town don't want you to sell Aylesworth Forest," he told the Mayor. "Please change your plans."

The Mayor took the envelope and he shook hands with Christopher. A newspaper photographer ran up the stairs and took a picture. The Mayor promised to think about it.

The march was over.

