

READING CHALLENGE

The Parrot Who Saved a Baby

A small green bird became a big hero in Denver, Colorado

| | |
|------------------|------------------|
| Level | A2 (Elementary) |
| Age Group | Teens (11-16) |
| Topic | Animals & Nature |
| Duration | ~15 minutes |
| Skill | Reading |

This is the true story of a small green bird with a very big voice. His name was Willie, and he was a **parrot**. In November 2008, Willie did something amazing. He saved the life of a little girl by screaming two words: “Mama! Baby!” This is how it happened.

Meet Willie

Willie was a Quaker **parrot**. Quaker parrots are small, bright green birds from South America. They are very social animals and they love to talk. Quaker parrots can learn many words and phrases. Some of them can say more than 50 different words! Willie was very good at copying sounds and words. He could say “hello,” “come here,” and many other things.

Willie’s **owner** was a woman named Megan Howard. Megan lived in Denver, Colorado, in the United States. She loved Willie very much. He was part of her family. Megan often talked to Willie, and Willie talked back. He was a happy, noisy little bird who liked attention.

A Normal Morning

On that November morning in 2008, Megan was working as a **babysitter**. She was looking after a two-year-old girl named Hannah. Hannah’s parents had left her with Megan for the day. It was a normal, quiet morning. Megan gave Hannah some breakfast — a Pop-Tart, which is a small, sweet pastry that many American children eat.

Hannah was sitting in her high chair in the kitchen, eating her breakfast. Willie was in the same room, sitting on his perch. Everything was fine. Then Megan left the kitchen for a moment. She went to the bathroom. She was only gone for a few minutes. She thought everything was okay. But it was not.

Something Goes Wrong

While Megan was in the bathroom, Hannah took a big bite of her Pop-Tart. The piece was too big. It got stuck in her throat. Hannah could not breathe. She could not cry for help. She could not make any sound at all. Her face started to turn blue. She was choking.

This was a very dangerous **emergency**. When a small child chokes, they can die in just a few minutes if nobody helps them. Hannah was only two years old. She could not help herself. She could not call for Megan. She was sitting alone in her high chair, and she could not breathe. But she was not completely alone. Willie was there.

Willie to the Rescue

Willie noticed that something was wrong. He could see that Hannah was in trouble. The little bird became very, very loud. He started to **scream** at the top of his voice. He screamed the words “Mama! Baby!” again and again. He flapped his wings wildly. He jumped up and down

on his perch. He was making as much noise as he possibly could.

Willie had never said “Mama! Baby!” before. He knew the word “Mama” and he knew the word “Baby” separately, but he had never put them together like this. It was as if he understood that the baby needed her mama right now. He kept screaming and screaming, louder and louder: “Mama! Baby! Mama! Baby!”

Megan Comes Running

Megan heard Willie screaming from the bathroom. At first, she thought maybe he was just being noisy — parrots can be very loud birds. But then she heard the words: “Mama! Baby!” Something about Willie’s voice was different. He sounded scared. He sounded urgent. Megan ran back to the kitchen as fast as she could.

When she got there, she saw Hannah. The little girl’s face was blue. She was not breathing. Megan immediately knew what was happening — Hannah was choking. Megan grabbed Hannah from the high chair and performed the Heimlich manoeuvre. This is a **rescue** technique where you press on someone’s stomach to push the stuck food out of their throat. Megan pressed on Hannah’s small body. After a few tries, the piece of Pop-Tart came out. Hannah took a big **breath** and started to cry. She was alive.

A Very Close Call

Megan was shaking. She held Hannah close and looked at Willie. The little **parrot** was still excited, still moving around on his perch. Megan later said in an interview: “If Willie had not screamed, I would not have come back to the kitchen in time. Hannah might have died.” The doctors who checked Hannah afterwards said that she was very lucky. A few more minutes without air, and the situation could have been very different.

It took a long time for everyone to become **calm** again. Hannah’s parents came to pick her up later that day. When they heard what had happened, they were shocked and grateful. They thanked Megan — and they thanked Willie. The little green **parrot** had saved their daughter’s life.

Willie Becomes Famous

The story of Willie and baby Hannah quickly spread across the United States. Newspapers wrote about it. Television stations came to Megan’s house to interview her and to film Willie. People all over the country were amazed by the story of a small bird who had saved a child’s life. Willie became a celebrity.

In 2009, the Red Cross gave Willie a very special **award** — the Animal **Hero Award**. This is a prize that the Red Cross gives to animals who save human lives. Willie was the first bird ever to receive this honour. At the ceremony, a local leader placed a small **medal** on Willie’s cage.

Megan cried with happiness.

Can Parrots Really Understand Us?

After Willie's story became famous, many people asked the same question: did Willie really understand what was happening? Did he know that Hannah was in danger? Or did he just repeat words he had heard before?

Scientists who study animal behaviour say the answer is complicated. Parrots are very intelligent birds. Their brains are small, but they are very powerful. Parrots can learn hundreds of words. Some parrots can even use words in the right situation — for example, saying “hello” when someone arrives, or “goodbye” when someone leaves. A famous African Grey **parrot** named Alex could count, identify colours, and answer simple questions.

In Willie's case, many experts believe that he could sense that something was wrong. Animals are often very good at reading the emotions and body language of the humans around them. Willie probably saw that Hannah was in trouble — her face was changing colour, she was not moving normally, and she was silent when she should have been making noise. Willie's reaction was to make as much noise as possible. And the words he chose — “Mama! Baby!” — were exactly the right words.

Willie's Later Life

After his moment of fame, Willie continued to live happily with Megan in Denver. He remained a talkative, energetic bird who loved attention. Megan said that Willie became even more popular after the news stories. Friends and neighbours often came to visit him. Children from local schools sometimes wrote letters to Willie.

Quaker parrots can live for 20 to 30 years, and Willie lived a long and happy life. Megan always said that Willie was the best pet she ever had. “He's not just a bird,” she told a newspaper. “He's a **hero**.”

What Can We Learn?

Willie's story teaches us some important lessons. First, animals are often smarter than we think. They **notice** things around them and can react in surprising ways. Second, heroes come in all shapes and sizes — even small, green, and feathery. Third, it is important to **swallow** food carefully, especially for young children. Small children should always eat small pieces of food, and an adult should always be nearby.

The story of Willie the **parrot** reminds us that sometimes the smallest creatures can make the biggest difference. A little bird with a loud voice saved a child's life on an ordinary morning in Denver. It is a story that people still talk about today, many years later. And it all started with two simple words: “Mama! Baby!”

Vocabulary

| Term | Definition |
|-------------------|--|
| parrot | a colourful bird that can copy and repeat human words |
| babysitter | a person who takes care of children when the parents are not home |
| choke | to have difficulty breathing because something is stuck in your throat |
| scream | to shout very loudly, usually because of fear or danger |
| hero | a person or animal that does something very brave to help others |
| award | a prize given to someone for doing something special |
| rescue | to save someone from a dangerous situation |
| owner | the person who has and takes care of a pet or thing |
| flap | to move wings quickly up and down |
| breath | the air that goes in and out of your body through your mouth or nose |
| calm | quiet and peaceful, not excited or afraid |
| emergency | a sudden, dangerous situation that needs quick action |
| notice | to see or become aware of something |
| swallow | to make food or drink go from your mouth down your throat |
| medal | a small piece of metal given as a prize for bravery or achievement |

Comprehension Quiz

1. What kind of bird was Willie?

- A) A red macaw
- B) A Quaker parrot
- C) A yellow canary
- D) A white cockatoo

2. What happened to the baby Hannah?

- A) She fell out of her chair
- B) She started crying very loudly
- C) She started choking on her food
- D) She ran out of the house

3. Where was Megan when the baby started choking?

- A) She was sleeping in her bedroom
- B) She was in the bathroom
- C) She was outside in the garden
- D) She was at the supermarket

4. What did Willie do to get Megan's attention?

- A) He flew to the bathroom and pulled her hair
- B) He bit the baby to wake her up
- C) He screamed 'Mama! Baby!' and flapped his wings
- D) He knocked a glass off the table

5. What award did Willie receive?

- A) The American Pet of the Year trophy
- B) The Red Cross Animal Hero Award
- C) The Denver City Gold Star
- D) The National Bird Medal

Answer Key

| # | Answer | Question |
|---|----------|---|
| 1 | B | 1. What kind of bird was Willie? |
| 2 | C | 2. What happened to the baby Hannah? |
| 3 | B | 3. Where was Megan when the baby started choking? |
| 4 | C | 4. What did Willie do to get Megan's attention? |
| 5 | B | 5. What award did Willie receive? |