The Saturday Garden Project (B2 · English B2)

Tekst / Transcript

When the old factory site behind our street was finally cleared, nobody knew what to do with it. For almost two years it stayed empty, full of weeds and broken bricks. Then a retired biology teacher called Marta put a handwritten notice on the bakery door, inviting anyone interested to a meeting. She wrote that the work would be entirely voluntary, and that people could give as much or as little time as they liked.

Only nine people came to the first meeting, which was held in the back room of the bakery on a cold Tuesday evening. Marta had prepared a rough plan, drawn in pencil on the back of an old calendar. She explained that the council would allow the neighbourhood to use the land for five years. Everyone agreed that the idea was attractive, but several people worried that the project would collapse after a few enthusiastic weekends. Marta admitted that a garden needs constant discipline, because plants do not care whether you feel tired or busy. That honest warning, oddly enough, convinced people rather than frightening them away.

By March there were more than forty names on the list. Each participant signed a simple agreement promising to appear at least one Saturday a month. The rule was gentle, but it created a rhythm that the group could rely on. Marta herself decided to devote almost every weekend to the project, and she was usually the first to arrive with her thermos of coffee. Her neighbour Tomasz, who had never grown anything in his life, turned out to be brilliant at repairing tools. An architecture student designed raised beds that could be reached from a wheelchair, and a local carpenter built them for the cost of the wood alone. Nobody had planned these things; they simply happened because people were willing to offer whatever skills they had.

The garden changed slowly, then all at once. In April the first potatoes went in; by July the beds were heavy with beans, tomatoes and enormous, ridiculous pumpkins. Children came after school to water the plants and to argue about whose sunflower was tallest. The bakery agreed to sell the surplus vegetables and to contribute the money to a food bank two streets away. What surprised everyone most was not the harvest but the conversations. People who had lived opposite each other for a decade finally learned each other's names.

There were difficulties too, of course. Someone broke the shed lock in August and stole a wheelbarrow, and a long dry spell killed half the lettuces. Attendance dropped badly during the summer holidays, and for a while Marta wondered whether she had promised the council more than she could fulfill. But in September the participation rose again, partly because the school began sending a class every Friday morning. At the harvest supper, the group ate soup made entirely from their own vegetables. Marta stood up briefly and said that no single contribution had been more important than another, and that the garden belonged to everyone who had ever pulled a weed in it. Then she sat down quickly, because she hated speeches, and asked somebody to pass the bread.

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