

# Green and Clean



Illustration by Josiene Saibrosa da Silva

By Mrs Sproulle and Mr Sproulle

GREEN and CLEAN      by Mrs Sproulle and Mr Sproulle

One day David and his sister, Angie, were out walking in the woods behind their house when they noticed something unusual - and incredibly messy.

“Where did all this rubbish come from?” asked Angie. “I’ve never seen so many plastic bottles and bags and packages.”

“Wow! This is a real mess!” said her older brother looking around. “Look at that badger hollow! Stuffed full of bottles! Who’d do something like this?” They both loved the wood and the birds and wildlife and it was upsetting to see it so dirty.

“Let’s tell Mum and Dad,” said Angie and they rushed back.

Their parents were also upset to think that anybody could be so disgusting and ruin such a lovely piece of nature.

“But why do people throw their bottles and bags away?” asked Angie. “They bring their rubbish with them so why can’t they take it back home with them?”

“Because they’re selfish and lazy!” said David, still very angry. “They just can’t be bothered.”

“Yes,” said their mother, “the other day I saw our neighbour scoop up her dog’s mess and put it in a plastic bag. Then she dumped the bag by the side of the road. Instead of putting it in the bin! How selfish is that?”

“I agree,” said their father. “Some people don’t think about the effect their actions will have on others. Or on the place they live. Or visit.”

They had often noticed on their holidays to the seaside that there was rubbish scattered all the way along the beach. It made the view so ugly and not very pleasant trying to swim.

“We really need to do something about this,” the children agreed. But what?

The next day they returned from school very excited. “We had a talk by Professor Finch. He’s a scientist who does research on the environment. He was really interesting! Did you know that plastic can last for hundreds of years?”

“Usually it ends up in landfill,” said David, ‘or is burnt and creates more pollution.”

“And the oceans are full of plastic!” added Angie. “Every year almost 9 million tons of plastic waste enters the oceans. It kills millions of marine animals - fish, dolphins, whales!” Their parents could see how excited - and angry - the children were.

“But we can do something about it!” said David. “We can take cloth bags to the shop - like you do, Mum - instead of asking for a plastic bag. And - this was really interesting - they can make bricks from recycled plastic to build schools. By slotting them together.”

“Yes,” said Angie. “Like Lego. They really can do this!”

“We’ve decided to form an Environment Club at school,” said David, “to come up with ideas for saving our planet. Especially from litter! We’re calling ourselves “The Green Kids Club”.

Angie thought forming a club wasn’t good enough. “All we’ll be doing is talking about the environment. We need to get more active.” She was looking very determined.

Her family knew that look. They worried what ‘more active’ meant.

The next day the siblings organised a meeting with their friends. May and Michael agreed it was going to take a lot of work to make people aware. Perhaps Angie had the right idea: they just had to become more active.

“We could pick up litter around the village,” suggested May. “That would give people a good example of what to do.”

“Or make them ashamed that they’re not doing it!” said Angie. “Oh, I’ve got an idea. We could hand out signs saying ‘I’m doing this for you!’. Or maybe get a group together that would help us pick up the rubbish.”

“What a good idea,” May agreed. “Let’s do it!”

“How about asking the village shop to take back plastic bottles that people buy and recycle them?” suggested David. “Or perhaps give them a refund of 10p per bottle?”

“Great idea!” exclaimed Michael. “Just think how much money we could make if we collected all the bottles people dump around this village.”

“You know, we could do even more. Let’s scatter bee-friendly plant seeds on verges. That would make the area prettier and encourage bees and bugs!” Angie was just buzzing with ideas.

“I wonder,” said May, “whether we couldn’t also persuade more people to drive electric cars. My dad has one and it is so quiet and doesn’t stink up the air and cause pollution.”

“Yes! We could stick notes on the windscreens of those big, polluting cars saying ‘Selfish Ugly Vehicles’.”

David thought he’d better try to restrain his little sister’s enthusiasm for rescuing their village. “We’ve got to be careful not to damage people’s property.”

“It’s not damaging!” retorted Angie. “It’s making them aware of their actions. Isn’t that what we’re supposed to be doing?”

May thought she should support her friend. “And then there are the people who dig up their gardens and trees and plant car parks! We’ve got to make them aware, too. Grass is so much better for the environment than concrete.”

David and Michael agreed that yes, it would be a good idea to make people aware of their actions and the harm they might be doing to the environment but they had to proceed cautiously.

Angie and May looked at each other. 'Cautious' was not what they had in mind when it came to being 'active'.

The next day at school the two girls discussed their ideas. They didn't think the boys would approve so they kept them secret.

"I think we should put signs up telling people how much pollution their cars are creating. Especially those that keep their engines running while they're waiting."

"Good idea," agreed May. "And I think when we see people dump their dog poo in plastic bags, we should collect it and dump it on their doorstep."

"That might work," said Angie. "At least when they stepped on it, they would realise how disgusting it was!"

A few more ideas came up before the bell sounded. Angie and May agreed to meet after dinner to carry out their actions. They would tell their parents that they were at each other's houses, doing homework.

"It wouldn't really be lying," said Angie. "Studying the environment, and protecting it, is important homework."

They set off, putting up signs and notes on cars. On the way they met several dog walkers, some who collected their dog mess and dumped it into the bins provided - and some who didn't. In two cases they managed to pick up the plastic bag and drop it on the person's doorstep. Angie left a note which said "We're bringing this back."

David and Michael asked them why they weren't helping with collecting litter around the village. The boys had managed to persuade others to join and a little group met every Saturday to help keep their village tidy. Gradually less and less litter needed to be picked up. The message was slowly getting through.

But Angie and May still weren't satisfied. They felt they needed to do more.

They had their eyes on the car around the corner. It was always speeding and once the driver nearly knocked a cyclist off her bike! And the smoke and fumes were incredibly smelly.

May suggested a sticky sign over his tail pipe. But Angie was prepared to go further.

“We could tie tin cans to his tail pipe. That would make an incredible noise and really annoy him!”

“Hmm, I don’t know. Remember what your brother said about annoying people. We don’t want to do that.”

So Angie didn’t take May with her on the night she went to tie the tin cans on the tail pipe of the speeding car. As she ran back home, she could hear the revving of the engine and then the clatter, clatter of the cans as the car sped past.

But then came the day when they were caught. Angie and May’s parents had a talk with them. Rumours had circulated around the village about the signs and the tin cans and the stickers on cars. And, of course, dumping the dog mess outside the owners’ houses.

“We understand that you want to help keep our village tidy - and green. But you mustn’t offend people and annoy them. Try to find ways to get them to listen.”

“But they won’t listen!” cried Angie.

“They don’t want to listen,” echoed May.

“Then think of ways to get them to listen. Write letters to the parish newsletter, to the council. Ask them to put up recycling bins so it’s easier for people to dump their rubbish. Look what you’ve achieved with your and the boys’ litter campaign. More and more people are joining in!” said Angie’s mother.

“Sometimes baby steps lead to bigger steps,” added May’s father. “Evolution rather than revolution.”

The girls agreed that they would no longer be active on their own. And they tried really hard not to annoy anyone. They joined the boys and the anti-litter group on Saturday mornings. It was good to know that more people were getting involved in keeping their village tidy.

\*\*\*\*\*

Angie and David sat in their garden looking at the sun set over the wood. They were pretty proud of what they and their friends had achieved. It wasn't everything they'd wanted but there would be other days and other actions.

"I know I got into trouble and annoyed a few people" said Angie. "But at least we got them talking about the environment."

David agreed. "Yes, the Green Kids Club got people to realise that we're all in this together. We all need to work together. One person can't do everything.

"But," added Angie, "everyone can do something. And that's what makes a difference."