

A House is not a Home

Introduction

This story is written by Zan Gaudioso who is an American author. This story reflects the challenges of being a teenager and the problems of growing up.

Summary

The author narrates her story through a teenage boy. The boy has just joined a high school. After leaving his junior school, where he was the head of his class, he felt strange to start over as a freshman. Also his old friends had been sent to a different high school. So, the narrator feels isolated. He visits his old teachers who motivate him to adjust to his new environment.

One Sunday afternoon, he was doing his homework. His red tabby cat was lying on top of all his papers. The author noticed smoke pouring in through the ceiling. The house was on fire. The smoke began to fill in the room quickly and they could barely see. Groping their way to the front door, they all ran out into the front yard.

The author went to his neighbours house to call the fire department, while his mother ran back into the house. She brought out a small box full of important documents. She again ran back into the house to bring some pictures, the narrator screams at her and wants to follow her. But he was held back by a fireman. Another fireman brought his mother out.

Five hours later when the fire was finally out, their house had completely burned down. There was no sign of the narrator's cat. The narrator, along with his mother, went to his grandparents' house to spend the night.

The next day, Monday, the narrator went to school without proper dress, books, homework and backpack. The narrator was totally embarrassed. He did not want to grow up, change or to handle life in that way. He just wanted to curl up and die. He felt that all the security that he had known, from his old school, his friends, his house and his cat had all been ripped away from him.

They rented an apartment and borrowed money from his grandparents to tide themselves over. The narrator kept returning to his home with the hope of finding his cat but the cat was nowhere to be found. The narrator missed his cat terribly. In school also everyone was aware of the hardships faced by him and this made the narrator all the more embarrassed. One day while he was getting ready for his gym class, his classmates told him to hurry. He thought it to be strange but still hurried into the gym. There he found a big table set up with a collection of school supplies, notebooks, jeans, tops, sweatsuits, etc. Everyone had made a contribution and bought the things for the narrator. The narrator was overcome with emotion. People came and introduced themselves and invited him over. He made friends that day.

A month later, he was at his house which was under construction. But he was not alone, he was with two of his new friends from school. The narrator stopped focusing

on his feelings of insecurity and understood the goodwill of all the wonderful people around him. Just then a woman approached him and enquired whether the cat that she was carrying belonged to him. Narrator was overjoyed to see his cat. The cat also purred happily.

As he sat there with his friends and his cat, all the overwhelming feelings of loss and tragedy seemed to diminish. He felt gratitude for his life, his new friends, the kind lady and his beloved cat's purring. He realises that he has got his life back.

Message

The story conveys the message that we should not give up in the face of adversities and also that we should be willing to embrace the changes in our lives.

Extract Based Questions ↘

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1 "The firemen wouldn't let us go back into the house that night. It was still too dangerous. Dead or alive, I couldn't imagine leaving without knowing about my cat. Regardless, I had to go. We piled into the car with just the clothes on our backs and a few of the firemen's blankets, and made our way to our grandparents' house to spend the night."

(a) State whether the given statement is True or False.

The Firemen let the narrator go back into the house that night.

(b) Where did the narrator and his mother stay on the night of the fire?

- (i) At a hotel
- (ii) At the house of narrator's grandparents
- (iii) At their friend's house
- (iv) At their uncle's house

(c) The narrator wanted to know about before leaving.

(d) Find a word from the extract to complete the following analogy:

anyway : regardless :: hazardous :

Answers

- (a) False
- (b) (ii) At the house of narrator's grandparents
- (c) his pet cat
- (d) dangerous

2. A month later, I was at my house watching them rebuild it. But this time it was different—I wasn't alone. I was with two of my new friends from school. It took a fire for me to stop focusing on my feelings of insecurity and open up to all the wonderful people around me. Now I was sitting there watching my house being rebuilt when I realised my life was doing the same thing.

- (a) 'Them' here represents
- (b) Why was the house being rebuilt?
- Because it had been destroyed in fire
 - Because it was in a bad condition
 - Because of an infestation
 - Because it had been destroyed in a storm
- (c) It was different this time as he had
- (d) The word 'wonderful' means the same as

Answers

- (a) the people rebuilding the narrator's house.
- (b) (i) Because it had been destroyed in fire
- (c) two friends with him
- (d) admirable or marvellous

Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. Why did the narrator often visit his old school? How did his old teachers encourage him?

Ans. The narrator had joined high school after finishing his Junior High. He was the head of his class in old school and he felt strange on starting over as a freshman. His closest friends were sent to a different high school. So, he felt isolated and missed his old school and his teachers. So, he visited them regularly. His old teachers encouraged him to get involved in school activities and told him that if he tried to adjust himself then he would end up loving his new school more than he loved his old one.

Q 2. Why did the narrator break down in tears after the fire?

Ans. When, the fire was finally out. The narrator's house was almost completely burned down. Then it struck him that he hadn't seen his cat. Then all at once he remembered about his losses, his old school, the fire, his house and his cat. He broke down in tears and cried bitterly.

Q 3. Why was the narrator deeply embarrassed the next day in school? Which words show his fear and insecurity?

Ans. A fire had broken out in narrator's house and all his belongings have been burned down. So, he did not want to go to school. But his mother insisted that he should go. The clothes that he was wearing looked weird. He had no books or homework and his back pack was gone. He was wearing tennis shoes which he had borrowed from his aunt. He thought of himself as an outcast and was deeply embarrassed. The words which show his fear and insecurity are, "I just wanted to curl up and die".

Q 4. Where was the cat after the fire? Who brought it back and how?

Ans. The cat had been so frightened by the fire that she had ran over a mile away. Her collar had the narrator's phone number on it, but the phones were disconnected. A kind woman took the cat in and worked hard to find out it's owner. She brought the cat back to the narrator.

Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. What did the narrator notice one Sunday afternoon? What was his mother's reaction? What did she do?

Ans. One Sunday afternoon the narrator was doing his homework. It was a cold and windy fall day. His mother kept stroking the fire to keep the house warm. Suddenly, he noticed smoke pouring in through the ceiling. The smoke filled the room quickly and they could not see anything. They groped their way to the front door. They all ran out into the front yard. The fire engulfed the whole roof. He ran to the neighbours house to call the fire department, while his mother ran back into the house.

His mother took out a small box full of important documents. She dropped the box on the lawn. She again ran back into the house to get his father's pictures and letters. The narrator screamed at her and wanted to run after her but a fireman held her back. Another fireman ran into the house and brought his mother out. She had inhaled a little smoke. So, the fireman put an oxygen mask on her. The author ran over and hugged her.

Q 2. The cat and the narrator were very fond of each other. How had this been shown in the story? Where was the cat after the fire? Who brings it back and how?

Ans. The cat and the narrator were very fond of each other. In the early morning, he would disturb her while getting out of bed. She would tag along after him, climb up his robe and crawl into his pocket to fall asleep.

When the narrator used to do his homework, his red tabby cat would lie on top of all his papers. She used to purr loudly. She occasionally swatted at his pen for the sake of entertainment, but the narrator never got angry with it.

When narrator's house caught fire, the cat was so frightened that she ran over a mile away. A kind lady took her in. Her collar had narrator's phone number on it. But his phones were destroyed and disconnected. The kind lady who took her in worked hard to find out the cat's owner. The narrator also regularly visited his house in the hope of getting his cat back. It was during these visits only that the kind lady was able to find him and he got his cat back. He was overwhelmed with joy and his cat also purred happily on being united with him.

Q 3. How does narrator's loneliness vanish and how does he start participating in life?

Ans. The narrator faces one tragedy after the other. First he had to change his school, then his house is burnt down and he loses his pet cat. All this makes him lonely and withdrawn. Then one day, the people at his school planned a surprise for him. When he entered the gym room, he found a big table which

was piled with school supplies, notebooks, jeans, tops and sweatshirts. The students had collected money and bought the things which the narrator needed. People who had never spoken to him before came

forward to introduce themselves and invited him over. Their genuine outpouring of concern touched the narrator and he felt his loneliness vanish. He started participating in life again. ●

