

## The Mighty Oak

It was autumn in the forest. The days were short, and the air was crisp and cool.

The tall graceful pine trees whispered to each other all the time, talking about the creatures who lived in the forest. They were most puzzled about the skinny tree in the middle of their stand.

“Look at the funny looking tree in the center named, Oakey,” they would say over and over. Oakey was different.

“You can’t be a pine tree like us because your leaves are big and wide and red and yellow. Your trunk is short and skinny. Our leaves are narrow and graceful and our limbs cover our solid trunks completely.”

At times, nasty laughter rang through the forest. The Pines teased and teased little Oakey until he could hardly hold his branches up to the sun.

Oakey tried not to listen, but the whispering went on day after day. He knew he was different, very different than the graceful green pines.

After a few very cold nights, Oakey looked at all his empty branches. He had no leaves left at all, and felt very tired and sad.

The Pines laughed and laughed and said he looked like a skinny stick.

One of the tallest Pines said, “No birds can nest in your branches and no squirrels can race up and down your trunk. You are a useless stick. Deer could never bed down under your limbs.”

The Pines began to believe Oakey had no value as a forest tree. Over the long winter, they never even talked to him again. It was the saddest loneliest time of his life.

Oakey wished he could go somewhere else, be like the graceful Pines with graceful needle leaves all the time, wished he could protect birds and be a friend to the squirrels and other creatures.

As the daylight began to get longer and warmer, Oakey noticed he had more energy, and his branches were covered with delicate bright green buds. Deer of the forest munched on his bark and delicious green buds.

The Pines were confused.

As time went on, Oakey's bright green buds burst into large shiny dark green leaves that covered every branch. Even light green flowers formed near the shiny leaves.

The Pines could not believe the change they were seeing. Oakey was not a skinny ugly stick anymore. He stood taller in the sunshine and displayed his crown to the sky.

A cardinal sang a beautiful song, and built a nest on one of Oakey's strong limbs. Squirrels tickled Oakey until he burst into laughter by racing up and down his trunk and through his branches. Dozens of butterflies flew in formations around Oakey in the sunshine.

The Pines were upset and jealous of all Oakey's new popularity. He was definitely not a graceful pine, he did not have thin green needle leaves through all the seasons.

Oakey did not want the Pines to be jealous and unhappy. He knew how it felt to be sad. So he said to the pines, "We can be friends, too. When I rest in the winter, you can protect all the creatures that live and play in my branches. Then in the summer, we can all play and whisper together. We are all trees, just different kinds. We can share the forest and make it better for everyone who lives here."

The Pines, thankful for the kind heart of Oakey, nodded in agreement.

Each year Oakey Oak grew taller and taller and stronger and stronger. Each summer, more and more bird families lived in his branches, and more squirrels played on his trunk. Even a wise old owl lived in his top story. The butterflies and bees were happy to fly circles around their friend, the Oak. In the winter, his friends, the deer depended on his bark for food, and all the small creatures used the seeds of the oak, the acorns, for food.

Towering above all the other trees, Oakey became the Mighty Oak of the forest protecting the Pines during storms and providing homes for the small creatures, his

friends. The Mighty Oak was never sad again, and neither were the Pines. They lived together working in harmony respecting differences.

**The End**