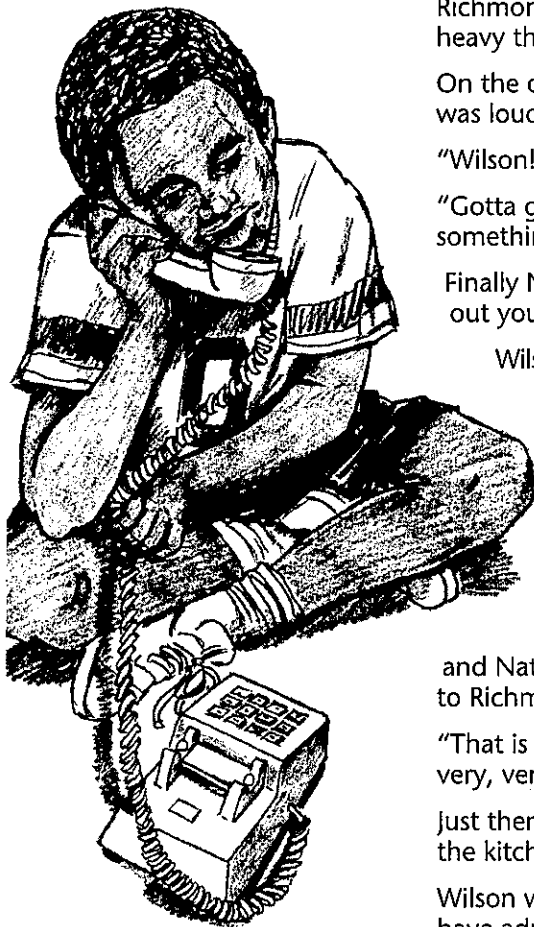


# BETWEEN FRIENDS

***otta go, Nathan,"  
Wilson said. But he  
shed Nathan  
ould say  
omething—anything.***



**W**ilson was in his room doing his homework when the phone rang. He heard his mother answer it in the kitchen. Then her voice came echoing up the stairs: "Wilson! For you. Don't stay on long—I'm expecting some calls from my church group."

Wilson padded out to the hall in his stocking feet, plopped down on the carpet, and picked up the phone that lay on the floor.

"Who were the Bulls playing when Michael Jordan scored 63 points in one game?" It was Nathan.

Wilson thought for a moment. "Uhh . . . Let's see . . . The Cavaliers?"

"No! The Celtics. I'm so disappointed in you."

"Yeah, well, I guess I must be losing my touch. Anyway, I can't talk now, okay? My mom's expecting some calls."

"Okay, I'll see ya 'round school tomorrow."

"I won't be in school tomorrow—remember?"

"You playing hooky or something?" Nathan asked.

"I already told you! Tomorrow is the day I take the test to get into Richmond High. Now I gotta go so I can rest my mind after all this heavy thinking."

On the other end of the line was a long silence. To Wilson, the silence was loud.

"Wilson!" His mother called from the kitchen. "Are you still on?"

"Gotta go, Nathan," Wilson said. But he wished Nathan would say something—anything.

Finally Nathan spoke. "Don't think too hard, Mr. Genius. It might burn out your brain." The phone clicked as he hung up.

Wilson hung up too. Then he called downstairs, "I'm off, Mom. Sorry."

"I just wish I didn't have to keep asking you." His mother came to the bottom of the steps.

"But Mom," Wilson said in a playful tone, "I'm a teenager. I'm supposed to be difficult."

"Very funny."

"Anyway," he told her, "you don't need to worry about me and Nathan spending so much time on the phone any more. If I get in to Richmond High, he'll probably never talk to me again."

"That is *not* very funny," Wilson's mother said. "If it were true, I'd be very, very sorry."

Just then the phone rang. "That's for me, I'm sure." She rushed back to the kitchen.

Wilson was glad for the interruption. If they had kept talking, he might have admitted how upset he was. For weeks now, he and Nathan had

• • • • •  
 been arguing about Wilson taking the test for Richmond High. Richmond was a magnet school with lots of science and math courses. The kids with the best grades went there, the ones who wanted to be doctors and biologists and engineers.

For Nathan, school was a kind of game; his object was to avoid as much work as possible, unless it was learning basketball trivia. Wilson had a completely different attitude about school, but he'd almost rather not go to Richmond High than lose his best and oldest friend.

The day after the test, Wilson was walking down the hall of Franklin Junior High toward his English honors class. He was still thinking about the test and didn't notice Nathan coming toward him.

"Hey, man! What's up?" Nathan asked.

Wilson smiled as he stuck out his hand for their usual handshake. "Hey!"

Wilson noticed a strange glint in Nathan's eye as Nathan squeezed Wilson's hand extra hard.

"How many times was Kareem voted most valuable player?" Nathan asked.

"That's easy! Six. Give me something more challenging."

"Why? So you can exercise your brain some more?" Nathan asked.

"Come on, Nathan. Don't start bugging me about that. Just give me another question."

"Okay. I got a good one. Who was the tallest player in NBA history?"

"Hmm. I gotta think about that one."

"Come on, Mr. Brain. You should know this! Haven't you been reading that sports trivia book I gave you for your birthday?"

"Give me a break! I've been sort of busy. Wait! I think I know! Manuel Bol?"

"Manute Bol!"

"Hey, I was close. Now I gotta run. I gotta get to English class," Wilson said.

The look in Nathan's eyes was downright unfriendly. "Oh, you wouldn't dream of being late. You wouldn't dream of making dear Mrs. Benson mad."

Suddenly Wilson was angry, too. "Lay off it, Nathan. I gotta go."

"Yeah," Nathan said. "You gotta go to fancy English honors class, and you gotta go to fancy Richmond High School, too."

So that was it! "All I did was take the test," Wilson said. "I didn't say I was gonna go. I may not even get in."

"Oh, you'll get in," Nathan said. "And then you'll go. And then you'll turn into this creepy kid I won't even recognize. I bet the only thing

.....

***"I don't think there's much you can do." Wilson stared at the floor.***

the kids at Richmond High think about is what universities they're applying to."

The bell rang. "Now I *am* late," Wilson said. "Thanks a lot. Thanks for nothing. Some friend you are."

Wilson spent the rest of the day thinking about what Nathan had said. By the time dinner rolled around, he was pretty depressed. He was just glad that dinner at the Davis house usually meant everyone trying to talk at once: Wilson, his older brother and sister, and their parents. Tonight he hoped his usual part in the conversation wouldn't be missed.

He made it through dinner okay. Then there was a break in the chatter as everybody paid some serious attention to a chocolate pie 16-year-old Aisha had made.

"Wilson," said his father, "you're awfully quiet tonight. I have a feeling something's bothering you. Got a problem?"

"I'd rather not talk about it," Wilson said. The rest of the family stared at him. "It's something . . . I don't want to talk about it."

"I bet I know," said Arthur, Wilson's brother. "It's about Nathan." Arthur played basketball with Wilson and Nathan sometimes.

Wilson clenched his teeth. "I don't want to talk about it."

Wilson's father looked at him a minute. Then he said, "Arthur and Aisha, please clean up tonight. Wilson, I think you and your mom and I need to talk."

When the three of them were seated in comfortable chairs in the living room, Wilson's father said, "We have to know what's bothering you, son. This is not a family where people keep secrets from each other."

"I don't think there's much you can do." Wilson stared at the floor.

"Just tell us about it," his mother said quietly. "Sometimes when you just talk, things don't seem so bad."

"I've been thinking . . .," Wilson began. His parents waited patiently. "I've been thinking that even if I get in to Richmond High, I'm not going there. I can go to Jones High, where all the other kids are going. Where Nathan's going."

Wilson's father looked at his wife. Then he turned to Wilson and asked, "Is that what you really want to do?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know, Wilson?" his mother said. "After all your hard work at school, you don't know what your goal is? Tell me, who was saying the other day he wanted to go to a good university and become a doctor so he could help other people? Was that you? Or was that someone else?"

For a minute, Wilson didn't say anything. Tears stung his eyes. "I don't want to lose my friends!"

"Yes," his father said. "Your friends are very important. Friends *should* be

important. But tell me, son, what direction is Nathan going? What is his goal? Is it the same as yours?"

"I don't know what *my* goal is any more!" Wilson said.

"Well," his mother said, "goals don't mean anything unless you really believe in them."

Wilson's father nodded. "If you go to Richmond High School, it won't be for our benefit. If you decide to do all that hard work, you'd better be darn sure you're doing it for yourself."

"So," his mother said, "it looks like you have some big decisions to make. Whatever you do, we believe it'll be what's right. We have a lot of confidence in you, Wilson."

"You mean it's up to me?" Wilson asked.

"We hope you'll go to Richmond High," his father said. "But it has to be something you really want. Otherwise, you're just going through the motions."

"I agree," his mother said. "I agree completely."

Wilson was more confused than ever. He'd expected them to be upset by the idea that he might not go to Richmond High, but here they were, being understanding. "I have homework to do," he said finally. "Excuse me."

Wilson lay on his bed for hours that night, listening to his radio and thinking. Every once in a while, he glanced over at an old photograph pinned to his bulletin board. It showed him and Nathan, arms around each other's shoulders, grinning for the camera. It had been taken four years earlier, the first summer they went to camp.

Finally Wilson got up, went out to the hallway, and dialed the number he'd dialed so many times before. Nathan answered the phone after half a ring.

"How many points did Wilt Chamberlain score when he set an NBA record in '62?" Wilson asked.

"In the whole season, or one game?"

"One game."

"Let's see. I think it was. . . 100?"

"Shoot! You weren't supposed to know that one."

"Hey! I got a brain, too, you know. I can even remember things. I'm smarter than you think," Nathan said.

"You're as smart as anyone I know."

"Well, thank you for the compliment," Nathan said mockingly. "What is this? You want to borrow money or something?"



**Wilson wondered where Nathan was, but he didn't ask.**

Wilson took a deep breath. "I want you to know that I'm gonna go to Richmond High School—if I get in. And I think I *will* get in. I'm gonna go because I want to. It could be the most important thing I ever do in my life. I have to try."

Wilson waited for an answer. His heart was pounding fast.

"Yeah, I know," Nathan finally said. "It's okay."

"So lay off me, will ya? Stop talking about it the way you do. Okay? 'Cause I'm gonna do it no matter what you think."

Nathan sighed a long, loud sigh. "I hear ya. Sure. You gotta do what you gotta do."

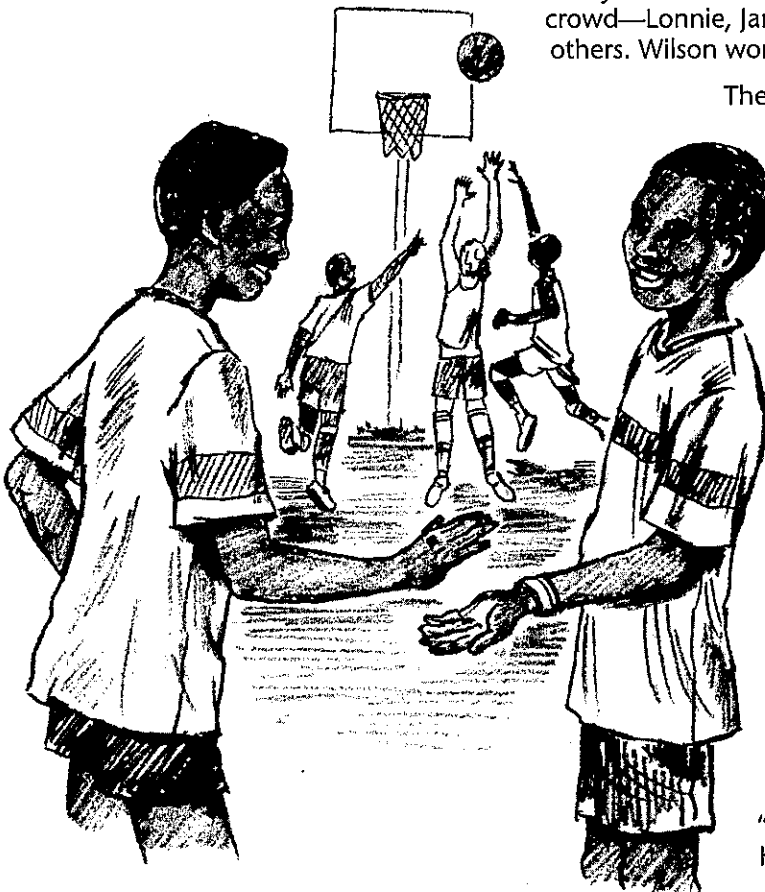
"That's right. I gotta do *this*. For myself!"

"Look," Nathan said. "I better get some sleep. I'll catch ya later."

"Yeah. See ya." Slowly Wilson hung up the telephone.

For a long time he couldn't fall asleep. He just stared at the ceiling, trying not to look at the picture of himself and Nathan at camp. He wondered if their friendship would ever be the same. So much was changing.

One afternoon a few days later, Wilson was playing basketball in the schoolyard near his house. The basketball players were the usual crowd—Lonnie, James, Skip, Leroy, William, and some of the others. Wilson wondered where Nathan was, but he didn't ask.



They hadn't talked since that night on the phone. Since most of Wilson's classes were honors sections, they could have gone for days without seeing each other at school!

Sweat dampened Wilson's T-shirt as he played. Running and dodging, shooting from all over the court, he was starting to feel great. After a beautiful jump shot, he was startled to hear a familiar voice saying, "Way to go! Lookin' good!"

Nathan was smiling at him from the sidelines. *Really* smiling. "Hey, Nathan!" Wilson shouted. "Wanna play?"

"Yeah, sure." As Nathan jogged onto the court, he slapped Wilson's hand, gave him a big smile, and said, "How you doing?"

"I'm all right. How you doing?"

"All right."

After the game, the two boys walked home together.

"Hey, Wilson. They got hoops at Richmond High?" Nathan asked.

• • • • •  
"Sure! There's a court right outside the school. Some guys were playing when I went for my test. Why?"

"Well, I was thinking. If you plan on going to that school, I'll probably have to at least check out the neighborhood. You know, make sure it's all right and everything. I wouldn't want my best friend hanging out in some dump!"

Wilson was stunned. Then he began to realize that this was the beginning of a new and different kind of friendship.

**FACTUAL QUESTIONS:**

1. How do you know Wilson and Nathan are good friends at the beginning of the story?

---

---

2. In what ways are Wilson and Nathan similar? Different?

---

---

3. Why does Wilson want to go to Richmond High School?

---

---

4. Why is Nathan so angry?

---

---

5. How do Wilson's parents help him handle his problem?

---

---

**INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS:**

6. Why is the decision about school difficult for Wilson?

---

---

7. How has the friendship changed by the end of the story?

---

---



8. How are the situations in the story realistic? In what ways do you think they are unrealistic? .

---

---

---

9. How do we decide between our goals and our friendships if we have to choose between the two? What, things do we have to think about?

---

---

---

---