

## **Dear Michael Oak Community**

I shared this this story at last year's AGM. A story about change, transformation, keeping the flame alive and true, while allowing for growth and movement; standing in integrity as we meet the future as it comes towards us.

Warmly,  
Alison Tobler  
Kindergarten

## **The Garden of the First Flame**

Long, long ago where the great oaks leaned close, there was a garden. It was known as The Garden of Growing. It was said that the world's very first fire had been kindled there, a fire that did not burn wood or flesh, but lit the inner spirit of all who protected it and all who lived there or passed through it.

The Keepers of the Flame were devoted, they tended it with care, passing rituals from one generation to the next: how to shield it from stormy winds, how to coax embers back to life, how to stand watch through the darkest nights.

Their ideal was simple and sacred: Keep the Flame alive so that all who seek light may find their way.

When people gathered around it, they felt steadier, braver, more themselves. The flame didn't just warm their hands, it warmed their purpose. And for a long time, it burned just as they expected: Bright enough to lead, soft enough to comfort, steady enough to trust.

For centuries, the fire burned steadily.

But over time the world beyond the garden transformed. Travelers came with tools that created quick sparks. Cities glowed with glaring light. The storms changed too, sometimes violent, unpredictable, swirling in ways no ritual had been designed to withstand.

The Keepers began to falter.

Some refused to change their ancient ways, insisting that the old ways were holy and must remain untouched. Others argued that the fire should be moved, harnessed, reshaped; that perhaps it shouldn't be a fire at all, but something new. A few wondered whether the Flame still mattered in a world so bright and so noisy.

One night, a storm unlike any before swept down from the mountains. The winds grew restless, wild and unpredictable. Rains came in long, sad sobs instead of gentle songs. The trees whispered of changes deep in the earth. The great oaks were blown from side to side.

The Keepers shielded the Flame with their bodies, their cloaks, their bare hands. But when the storm passed, the fire was nearly extinguished, just a single trembling, tiny flame left.

The Keepers gathered around it in silence. Their faces were streaked with ash. Their clothing blackened, even burned. Their hearts were heavy.

It was the youngest among them, a quiet girl, called Lesedi, who spoke. She leaned towards the flame and whispered, "Tell me how to love you now?"

The flame flickered and a gentle breath seemed to float away. Lesedi followed the breath. It led her to the oak forest. She met the old river who had carved a new path after the storm. "How did you survive?" asked Lesedi. "By moving differently, but carrying the same water."

She found the mossy gnomes and asked, "Do you fear losing what you were?" The mossy gnome replied, "I grow toward the light that exists, not the one that used to be."

She asked the little robin redbreast "What does a flame need most?" The bird sang, "Space to rise. Space to fall. Space to become what the moment asks."

Lesedi wept because she realised that they had been trying to keep the flame still.

She returned to the garden.

"We keep saying the world has changed," she whispered, "as if the Flame has not. But look: it is smaller now, but still warm. Still alive. Maybe the sacred thing was never the shape of the fire or the rituals around it. Maybe the sacred thing is what we feel when we choose to protect it." The elders listened. For the first time, they truly heard.

Lesedi continued, "The world's storms have grown stronger. So must we. But we do not honour the Flame by preserving every tradition, every structure. We honour it by ensuring it still gives light."

And so the Keepers made a choice.

They rebuilt the fire pit with new strong stones. Their rituals changed, not abandoned, but transformed. The meaning stayed, the form evolved.

And the Flame, once small and trembling, grew tall again. Not the same as before, but strong in a new way, its colours deeper, its heat more even.

Travelers returned to the garden seeking guidance, surprised to find the Flame still alive. Not ancient. Not new. But something brave and true, standing between what was and what is. The Keepers did not claim victory. Instead, they carried a quiet understanding:

**The flame only lives if we let it change shape, only if we protect its warmth and light rather than its form. Only if we protect it with fierce and flexible love that living things require.**

And in doing so, they ensured the First Flame would endure into whatever future awaited it.