

Teddy Turns Eighteen

Written by Laura Packard

Wednesday, 09 January 2019 05:50 - Last Updated Wednesday, 09 January 2019 06:12



“Pick me, pick me,” a tender voice pleaded from the middle of an aisle at the back of a toy store. There were hundreds of stuffed animals spilling over wire racks in every size, every shape, every color. And beneath what appeared to be a rainbow waterfall of wonder, there he was: almost entirely hidden, deep within the lowest shelf. Only a tiny white paw stuck out like a friendly wave. The man had finally found what he was looking for. The one who he would take to his forever home.

“Pick me,” the teddy bear said again. The man stopped, stooped down, and said out loud, “this has to be the one.”

Only, there really wasn’t anything super fancy or special about the bear. There were no batteries needed, no silver sequins, decorative sparkles, elaborate jewels, or swanky seams. Not even an expensive price tag with an important designer name.

It was just a plain, white teddy bear. It was just something that needed to be loved and taken care of. An innocent thing, much like the newborn coming home from the hospital any week now.

“Pick me,” he whispered softly, knowing this time the man had seen him.

This *absolutely* has to be the one, he thought to himself, standing in the checkout line. It just HAS to be. He handed the cashier the ten dollars, and without waiting on his change, rushed home to set the bear in the nursery’s rocking chair. And once his daughter was old enough, teddy would lie next to her in the crib while she slept. Like fairy tales and happy endings, the girl and the bear have never been apart since.

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This is how the story has been retold for 18 years now. It used to be recited all the time. Now, it's reserved for her birthday. The telling of Teddy is akin to the reading of *The Night Before Christmas* on Christmas Eve

She stills loves hearing it every single time. Just like Teddy, it has taken on some magic of his own.

For the past eighteen years, Teddy has always been there for her, even at times when I couldn't be. He's been there through the scary stuff: first shots, first airplane ride, bad dreams, a broken arm, long car trips, and the flu. He's been there through the good stuff, too: 18 Christmases, 18 birthdays, hundreds of bike treks, camp outs, sleepovers, and movie nights.

Yes. You might say he's been through a lot. And he has been, to be loved like that.

He's been washed, bleached, patched, re-stuffed, stitched up, and even glued. But he helped heal her, too. He's nursed the all too familiar hurts that happen in childhood: the skinned knees, the first day of school fears, broken friendships and broken hearts.

It's true she doesn't carry him everywhere like she used to. She is just 18, too, you know.

Experts call Teddy a transitional object. Something she's held on to all these years to ease the separation from us as she grows older, and more confident in herself and of her own choices. Only, I think it is more than that. See, it can't just be that *simple*. He's not just an object. And I can never imagine him not being a part of her life, something discarded once she is done learning the business of becoming a bona fide adult.

As Teddy is the whole world to Livi, my girls are that to me. They are what I hold dear while I try and navigate life, still learning, still making mistakes, and still trying to make sense of senseless things without abandoning pure joy. They are what I celebrate every day for all the blessings, lessons, and unconditional love they have given me. I will never be able to articulate

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how much they mean to me. I am simply lucky to be here to tell stories and love them.

So, maybe that's what it's all about . . . being able to love something or someone so much it seems, well, magical. And like Livi and Teddy, some things are destined. They are quite simply meant to be.

Happy 18th birthday to Liv and Teddy and a Happy New Year to all of you. I sincerely hope your 2019 will be full of magic and wonder, held up and filled, like Teddy, with a whole lot of love.