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Stuffed Animal Wisdom

Tigger

The first stuffed animal I remember in my life was Tigger. She (and she was a she) had been with me since before I can remember anything. In those earliest memories she was already worn and dingy from being held and loved for years.

My Tigger was a cat. And not particularly cuddly. Her legs were straight and stiff, her body was rigid though her tail moved. Her ears bent but her head was otherwise stiff. Her head was attached to her body in a way that allowed it to turn round and round and round. There must have been a ribbon around her neck at one time. But in my earliest memories the ribbon was gone and her eyes were knots of tufts of thread. And her whiskers were bent or broken.

I loved her. She slept next to my pillow every night, followed me to the breakfast table every morning and played with me throughout the day.

Sometimes we're hard on those we love. She was well worn and didn't mind.

The fact that I named her "Tigger" is a clue that my mother must have read me *Winnie-the-Pooh* stories from a very young age. Those stories by A. A. Milne are, of course, about a whole collection of stuffed animals and their adventures with their favorite human, Christopher Robin.

Winnie-the-Pooh was a stuffed bear of very small brains who nevertheless wrote poetry, loved honey and had a simple and decidedly philosophical view of life.

Little Piglet was his constant companion. Being very small, Piglet was more high-strung and worried easily. The two were good friends.

A. A. Milne tells us that one night Winnie-the-Pooh was awakened by a strange sound: Worraworrworrorra. So:

He got out of bed and opened his front door.

"Hallo!" said Pooh, in case there was anything outside.

"Hallo!" said Whatever-it-was.

"Oh!" said Pooh. "Hallo!"

"Hallo!"

"Oh, there you are!" said Pooh. "Hallo!"

"Hallo!" said the Strange Animal, wondering how long this was going on.

Pooh was just going so say "Hallo!" for the fourth time when he thought that he wouldn't, so he said: "Who is it?" instead.

"Me," said a voice.

"Oh!" said Pooh. "Well, come here."

So Whatever-it-was came here, and in the light of the candle he and Pooh looked at each other.

"I'm Pooh," said Pooh.

"I'm Tigger," said Tigger.

"Oh!" said Pooh, for he had never seen an animal like this before. "Does Christopher Robin know about you?"

"Of course he does," said Tigger.¹

¹ A.A. Milne, *The House at Pooh Corner*. (E.P. Dutton & Co. Inc., New York). 1928, 1961. p. 22-23.

And thus Tigger came into the forest and into my life.

In the Winnie-the-Pooh stories Tigger is soft, big, stripy, hungry and, as Piglet put it, "full of bounces." He was playful and energetic and often more sure that he wants *something* than he was sure of *what* that something was he wanted.

The next morning, Tigger is sure he wants breakfast, but Pooh and Piglet are can't to find something Tigger likes.

So Pooh and Piglet decide to take Tigger to visit Kanga. Kanga is mother-like and knows about such things.

As they head out through the forest:

Tigger bounced in front of them turning around every now and then to ask, "Is this the right way?" ...

Pooh and Piglet walked slowly after him. And as they walked, Piglet said nothing, because he couldn't think of anything, and Pooh said nothing, because he was thinking of a poem. And when he thought of it he began:

*What shall we do about poor little Tigger?
If he never eats nothing he'll never get bigger.
He doesn't like honey and haycorns and thistles
Because of the taste and because of the bristles.
And all of the good things an animal likes
Have the wrong sort of swallow or too many spikes.*

"He's quite big enough anyhow," said Piglet.

"He isn't really very big."

"Well, he seems so."

Pooh was thoughtful when he heard this, and then murmured to himself:

*But whatever he weighs in pounds, shillings, and ounces,
He always seems bigger because of his bounces.*

"And that's the whole poem," he said. "Do you like it, Piglet?"

"All except for the shillings," said Piglet. "I don't think they ought to be there."

"They wanted to come in after the pounds," explained Pooh, "so I let them. It is the best way to write poetry, letting things come."

"Oh, I didn't know," said Piglet².

Song "What Shall We Do?" - Music by H. Fraser-Simson

*What shall we do about poor little Tigger?
If he never eats nothing he'll never get bigger.
He doesn't like honey and haycorns and thistles
Because of the taste and because of the bristles.
And all of the good things an animal likes
Have the wrong sort of swallow or too many spikes.
But whatever he weighs in pounds, shillings and ounces,
He always seems bigger because of his bounces.
Bounces.*

Tigger Reflection

I think I liked Tigger because of his bounces.

My father didn't like bounces. My mother told me she picked up all my toys, put them away and put me in a playpen before my father got home from work. He didn't like the clutter and noise of children.

In the Pooh stories, Tigger's bounces are a little scary to Piglet. But they're never seen as bad. It was just who he was: Tiggers come with bounces.

And everyone loved him and cared for him, bounces and all.

Eeyore

When I was a little older, my favorite Winnie-the-Pooh stuffed animal was Eeyore. Eeyore was a donkey with a button-on tail, gloomy nature and dry sense of humor.

One day Tigger's bounces landed Eeyore in the river where he floated around for a while with his legs up in the air. When he got out, Piglet rushed over:

² Ibid p. 32-33.

Or something much more colorful like that

*It's not easy being green
It seems you blend in with so many other ordinary
things*

*And people tend to pass you over
'Cause you're not standing out
Like flashy sparkles in the water
Or stars in the sky*

*But green's the color of spring
And green can be cool and friendly-like
And green can be big like a mountain
Or important like a river
Or tall like a tree*

*When green is all there is to be
It could make you wonder why
But why wonder why wonder
I am green, and it'll do fine
It's beautiful, and I think it's what I want to be*

Blessing of the Animals

These are a few of the stuffed animals that have graced my life.

This morning I've invited you to bring a stuffed animal or doll or pillow or any object that has been a companion for you.

I have brought some of our UUSS holy water to bless them. This is water from our Fall in-gathering water ceremony where we invite people to bring water from their summer travels far or near.

I invite you to come forward with your soft animal or other object. We'll use this water to bestow our gratitude and blessings upon him or her.

If you didn't know we were going to do this or forgot, that's okay. You can come forward and we'll bless them long distance.

If you'd like to participate, please line up on the left side of the congregation. When you step forward, please tell us your animal's or doll's name and one quick thing about him or her. If you tell us two or three things or give us a biography, we'll simply run out of time.

< *Blessing Ceremony* >

Offertory

Jimbo's Lullaby

- *Claude Debussy*

Stuffed Animal Wisdom

Am I okay if I'm bouncy?

Am I okay if I'm gloomy?

Am I okay if I'm green?

Am I okay if I want to bop my little brother on the head ... don't want to eat broccoli ... feel like pulling the chair out from under the boss ... don't know how to comfort my friend sadness ...?

Am I okay if I'm a Democrat?
Republican? Progressive? Tea Partier?
Uninvolved? Sick-of-the-whole-process?

We all have our thing: Am I okay if I _____ (you fill in the blank: fat, thin, cry easily, never cry, think too much, feel too much ...)?

This is the most fundamental religious question: "Am I okay given who I am and what I have done?" We humans have been wrestling with this question since before we were humans.

We are Unitarian Universalists. We affirm and promote the worth and dignity of every person. We value the goodness of everyone and say so every Sunday morning.

That should settle it.

But it doesn't. Our affirmations are general. Life is lived in the particular.

Sure, I'm okay as a generic human being. But what about as someone who just said awful things to a friend and don't know how to take them back. Am I okay as someone who is sick, out of work or hates school? Maybe I'm okay in general. But what about in particular?

When we feel the stress of life's many questions we tend to talk out loud – particularly when we're alone. Ever notice that? Or maybe we talk back to the computer or the TV or the radio or some other non-breathing object.

If we're too self-conscious to talk out loud, we may talk in our heads. Or type emails on a computer. Or write in a journal. We do something to say what we're feeling and to be heard even if we are both the speaker and the listener.

We humans are relational creatures. Without communication, we dry up inside. We're wired to be in connection with others.

So it's natural to talk out loud or in our heads or to stuffed animals. It's a way to exercise our relational muscle as we work through a problem or search for more depth or meaning.

"Oh, but it's irrational to talk to a wad of cloth or doll."

Is it?

Mirabai walked into the living room as her husband, son and their friends were watching a football game. They were passionate in their commentary on the game. Their comments weren't addressed to anyone in particular – just things said out loud. And their comments could be very loud.

Mirabai was not a sports fan. "What's the big deal?" she asked. "It's only a little ball."

They all looked at her with eyes wide in consternation. "Oh no," they said. "It's so much more than that."

She realized it was. But she wasn't sure exactly what.

Stuffed animals are so much more than wads of cloth. But sometimes it's hard to figure out exactly what.

To figure it out, it helps to remember there are many different ways we learn and come to know things.

Rational statistics can tell us something about poverty, the environment, racism and war. But hearing stories from people who lived in those conditions us a richer understanding.

Dreams aren't rational, but we can learn much about our life from them. Art and music touch us in ways that thought or words cannot. Imagination can enrich our lives in ways mundane reality does not.

So stuffed animals – whether they are literal animals of cloth or metaphorical animals like diaries or conversations with ourselves or prayer or gestalt dialogs or internal musings or just a pillow to hug – are helpful in sorting out and deepening our lives.

Talking with a living, breathing human being can be helpful, of course.

But sometimes stuffed animals are smarter and more tuned in. They don't interrupt (as much). They are patient and don't have to cut the conversation short to go somewhere else. They understand what we're saying without us going through every single last detail.

They can be wise, heartfelt listeners.

And if we can explain our issue to one wise listener, that may be enough to figure out how to say it to someone who is less wise – like a partner, parent, child or boss.

When I was a therapist, 80% of my time I was a breathing, stuffed animal doing my best to hear what my clients were telling me so they could figure out their difficulty.

Carl Jung, the famous student of Sigmund Freud, said that all of us have parts of ourselves that we don't fully accept – boucyness, gloominess, greenness. Then we meet someone who is able to accept what we don't. In their presence we feel more of who we are. We feel more whole. That experience of wholeness is what we call "love." It is not something we get from someone else as much as the way we feel when we feel more complete.

And the more we accept all aspects of ourselves, the more we feel loved and loving no matter who is around us.

Stuffed animals or dolls whether literal or metaphorical can help us find that wholeness.

What do you use to find your wholeness?

I close with the question I started with, "Am I okay if I'm ...?" A. A. Milne writes:

For a long time [Pooh, Piglet and Christopher Robin] looked at the river beneath them, saying nothing, and the river said nothing, too, for it felt very quiet and peaceful on this summer afternoon.

"Tigger is alright really," said Piglet lazily.

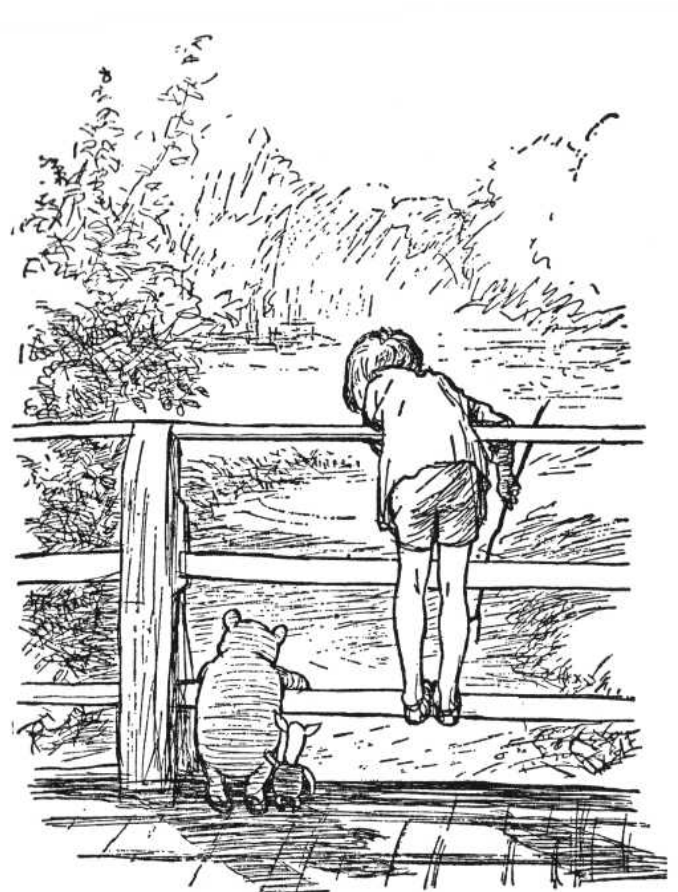
"Of course he is," said Christopher Robin.

"Everybody is really," said Pooh. "That's what I think," said Pooh. "But I don't suppose I'm right," he said.

"Of course you are," said Christopher Robin.⁴

Song How Could Anyone

*How could anyone ever tell you
That you're anything less than beautiful
How could anyone ever tell you
that you're less than whole
How could anyone fail to notice
That you're loving is a miracle
How deeply you're connected to my soul.*



⁴ Ibid p. 108