

The Enchantments of the Hundred Acre Wood
By James Sherry

Pooh Bear moved into my apartment a few months ago. I can't say exactly when because it was some time before I knew it was him. I was helping my 5-year old son, Michael, into bed one night when I learned of Pooh Bear's arrival. "And here's Smokey," I said, tucking a soft, brown, stuffed bear beneath the covers. "That's not Smokey," Michael replied. "That's Pooh, Winnie the Pooh." "Oh..." I said, somewhat surprised. "I hadn't recognized him. When did *he* move in?" "Weeks ago," came the reply, as if I should have known.

That was fine with me. I had grown very tired preventing forest fires when Smokey was Smokey. And I thought even a bear with very little brain would be an improvement over one with an obsession with pyromania.

Pooh was, in fact, a welcome addition to the household. For though he was always ready for "a little something"—especially around eleven o'clock—I never noticed that my grocery bill went up. And he was such a good friend and companion for Michael that I could hardly refuse to let him stay. Indeed in no time at all his hums, his poems, his foibles, and his befuddlements seemed very much a part of us.

Our problems began when I was informed that Pooh was sad. I suggested that he might be suffering from a mid-life crisis. But this was quickly rejected. It seems that Pooh was sad because he missed Piglet. So Michael had invited *him* to live at our house too. I frankly doubted that Piglet would be

able to make such a long trip alone. But Michael assured me that he was not only capable of the trip but had made it, arriving on the same train from New York that I had taken. I looked around involuntarily, but there was nothing to be seen. Michael waited expectantly. I cleared my throat. And sure enough, with an awkward squeak, broken no doubt from the exhaustion of the trip and the intense emotion of being reunited with Pooh, Piglet's voice sounded within our halls. Piglet had arrived.

Piglet was not as visible a presence as Pooh of course. But we soon realized that this was because he was afraid of "large animals"—meaning me—and so preferred to remain hidden behind Pooh's back where he couldn't be seen. But he was just as real as Pooh, and was soon adding his fears and anxieties to Pooh's nonsense and Michael's enthusiasm in our evening conversations. Now we were four.

I must say I often felt a good deal of pity for poor Piglet. For though Pooh had his troubles falling out of trees and getting stuck in tight places, Piglet was continually harassed by fears of getting mugged by Heffalumps, Woozles, or some of the other fierce animals that lurk just about everywhere when the lights are off. And Michael seemed to find a certain catharsis in listening to Piglet dissolve in fright before these creatures of an overactive imagination. Piglet was so easily rendered harpless...hellified...scared. Fortunately, at the end of such an evening when Michael and Pooh had dropped off to sleep together, Piglet and I could compose our nerves with a drink or two. This helped us both

considerably, and I think he now sees my therapist.

I suppose it was inevitable, once Piglet had come, that the other animals from the forest would arrive sooner or later. And they did--Roo excitedly, Kanga contentedly, Owl self-consciously, and Eeyore reluctantly. Rabbit, of course, had organized this "expotition," and most of his friends and relations, we discovered, had sneaked in amid the luggage. I protested against this sudden influx of population and wondered if the Immigration Service was aware of it. But how do you return an imaginary stuffed animal to the country of his origin when he has so successfully made the voyage across time and space in a 5-year-old's imagination? Pooh and his friends were here to stay.

There was now a veritable herd of animals in my apartment--all of whom had to be greeted when Michael and I arrived home in the evening. And from Owl's stilted attempt at geniality --- "How's things?" to Piglet's frightened cockney stammering (from behind Pooh's back), "Aow, it's...it's...only yew," to Eeyore's rueful, "I don't suppose you're talking to me," each of the animals responded in his own way.

Eeyore was, of course, discontented with his new life in New Jersey and openly disdainful of the neighborhood ("suburbia and whatnot"), complaining bitterly of the lack of good thistles. But his enormous self-pity was as well tolerated in our house as it was in the Hundred Acre Wood and it called forth the same generous response from Michael that it did from Piglet and Pooh. Indeed only

Eeyore could have been oblivious to the genuine love and affection he inspired.

There were times, however, I must admit, when the sheer number of imaginary creatures who shared our living space began to seem overwhelming, if not insane. Now and again it occurred to me that some mighty catastrophe might be contrived which would sweep off all of them at once and leave us to ourselves again.

But whenever I thought of Michael's reaction to such a tragedy, I knew I could never let it happen. For these were no longer stuffed animals or storybook creations but cherished friends. And like all good friends they brought out aspects of ourselves that we might never have discovered otherwise. Though we gave them voices, they enabled us to speak and to express many things that under "normal circumstances" get locked away from the conversations of a father and son. They were a part of us now.

So Pooh and Piglet, Eeyore and the rest still have a home with us...and always will. They are not as vocal these days, being content to sit and watch as C-3PO complains of stiff joints and R2D2 squeaks and burbles his way in and out of trouble. But it came as no surprise to me that Pooh and Piglet are as much the opponents of darkness as Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia (occasionally joining them in their struggles against the Empire), for I knew that wherever we went or in whatever galaxy we traveled, even in the remote deserts of Tatooine, there would always exist the enchantments of the Hundred Acre Wood.