

The Gospel According to Pooh-Bear

Laura Urista



I AM A “POOH” COLLECTOR. Not quite a “Pooh-holic” or a “Crazy Pooh lady”—but close! Lots of friends have asked me what made me decide to collect all things “Winnie-the-Pooh” over the years. It’s a long story, going back over 55 years.

It was the summer of 1966 and my family had just moved from a tiny town in North Dakota to a slightly larger little town in Texas. My Dad had just become a member of a strict, legalistic church and he was determined that his four school-age children should attend “God’s school”—a private school founded and run by the church he had recently joined.



A few months after our move, I received a special gift in the mail from my dear Grandma Olga (affectionately known as “Dee Dee”), who was still living in North Dakota. She was a widow living on a fixed income, so she couldn’t afford to send many gifts—which made this one all the more special. My gift was a Winnie-the-Pooh toy of some kind, perhaps a puzzle. I can’t remember exactly, because shortly after I received it, I was told I couldn’t keep the special toy from Grandma. You see, God’s school/church taught that “talking animals are pagan.”

Bye-bye Pooh-bear.

I remember thinking (at age four): *That’s dumb! Pooh-bear isn’t bad. He’s just a nice, happy bear. When I grow up, I’m going to have all the Pooh-bear I want!*

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LESSONS FROM THE HUNDRED-ACRE-WOOD

Later, having processed my experiences, I realized many other fundamentalist religions and schools prohibited fantasy and imagination in general, and talking animals in particular. Some schools (including the one my siblings and I attended) went as far as removing certain books from their libraries, or ripping the offending pages out of children’s books. Just because talking animals were considered “pagan”—*really?*

I understand the church/school and concerned parents wanted to protect us. But due to those and other misguided actions by religious authorities to protect us from such “worldly evils,” I and most of my friends grew up thinking: *God/church sucks all the joy out of life.*

But if only those church leaders, parents and educators had actually read some of these banned books (like *House at Pooh Corner* and *Many Adventures of Winnie-the-Pooh*), they

might have recognized how many thoughtful lessons are featured within their pages. Lessons about kindness, caring, loving your neighbor and learning to understand and accept others who might be different. Sound familiar?

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22).

Most of the main “Pooh” characters had personality challenges, perhaps today they might even be diagnosed with disorders.

Winnie-the-Pooh was an over-eater with low self-esteem. Piglet was an introvert with a speech impediment. Tigger was hyperactive and showed signs of ADHD. Hyper-tidy Rabbit likely suffered from OCD. Poor Eeyore was a prime example of clinical-depression if there ever was one! When I first gave my granddaughter (then about age two) a stuffed Eeyore toy, she instinctively called him “Sad Donkey.”

Yet this misfit crew of talking animals in the A.A. Milne stories played happily together in the Hundred-Acre-Wood. No-one was excluded from the parties, picnics and games, but rather, they learned to enjoy each other’s differences and worked together to solve problems on their many adventures. Not to mention all of these “Pooh Pals” were (and are) completely different types of animals of all different colors.

So, the short answer to the question of why I’m a Pooh collector? *Winnie-the-Pooh and*

his pals have become for me a symbol of the gospel of love that is greater than the law.

The lesson that stuck with me for over half a century? My Grandma’s loving sacrifice and kindness revealed a truer example of Jesus’ life and teachings than the condemnation of legalistic dogma.

Most of all, I’ve learned over these five decades that God loves us and wants us to enjoy a life full of good things—including friendships and loving relationships with him and all his children—children who may be extremely different from us. ***God doesn’t want to suck all the joy out of life.*** Rather, as Jesus said in John 10:10 *“...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”* □

Laura Urista is the managing editor of CWRm and PTM and a big fan of all things Winnie.

A few of Laura’s favorite inspirational Pooh quotes

“If you live to be a hundred, I want to be a hundred minus one day, so I never have to live without you.”

“You’re braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think.”

“Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart.”

“If there ever comes a day when we can’t be together, keep me in your heart; I’ll stay there forever.”

Piglet:
“How do you spell love?”

Pooh:
“You don’t spell it, you feel it.”

