

March 17, 2009

"The Power of Pook"

I agreed to present a paper prior to our attending the meetings and hearing such wonderfully researched, thoughtfully written, and well delivered and scholarly the Torch papers are supposed to be.

I have never loved research. I tend to react to reading in an emotional rather than an analytical way. I laugh and cry and have an occasion ah-ha moment, but I have always pretty much accepted what is as being what is.

One of my favorite college courses was freshman English. This was called creative writing. At one point our assignment was to read a short story by some famous author. I have forgotten his name or the title of the story. I do remember that it was dark and unpleasant to read.

The story was an allegory. Our job was to interpret the allegory and explain its REAL, underlying, DEEP meaning.

Oh for heaven's sake. This is a story! It's entertainment. Why make it difficult! I had no idea what the REAL, DEEP meaning was, and I always felt that if you were trying to say something, you should just say it.

So I made up a story about how this was a veiled reference to the Christian Holy Trinity.

I won't bore you with the details, but I can tell you that I almost had myself convinced. The father, the son and the holy ghost. It all made sense.

The teaching assistant who wanted to be a professor so he could devote most of his time to writing his own weird stuff gave me an A.

I saw the A and said, wow! I must have guessed correctly. I am good! I have insight! Way to go!

Then I read his reason for not giving me an A plus. He wrote that my interpretation was as wrong as wrong could be but that my argument for that interpretation was as good as he had ever read.

I should have dropped out of school right then and started selling the Brooklyn Bridge to the masses, but I did not have the interpretive gene to tell me that this meant that I could be a great salesman.

What, I am sure you will ask, does this have to do with the Power Of Pooh. ²
It has everything to do with ~~that~~ ^{it}.

You see, I have read aloud, have had read aloud, and have read silently the 2 books of Pooh easily a few hundred times.

I have heard these books and these poems read at innumerable funerals, usually of mothers.

And I think of Eeyore and Piglet and Kanga and Roo and Christopher Robin and Rabbit and Owl and of Winnie the Pooh at least once a day.

What is the Power of Pooh? The Power of Pooh ~~is that it is~~ whatever you want the stories to be at whatever stage of life you are in and for whatever reason you need reassurance and hope. The Power of Pooh is that what appears to be the truth may be or may not be.

When we look at the world through our own eyes rather than someone else's, we fret less and enjoy more.

Can't ask for more ^{power} than that.

I think we all know that a famous and successful playwright and author, Alan Alexander Milne, wrote the Pooh books and poems as entertainment for his son, Christopher Robin, who was born in 1920.

Using Christopher's stuffed animals as characters in the stories, Milne describes the confusion of youth and process of maturity and the occasional ah-ha moment of clarity as a child, on a funny ol' bear, reaches some understanding of how the world works.

Each of us has our own memories of Winnie the Pooh. My mother had

~~My~~ Our favorites were Winnie the Pooh and the House and Pooh Corner. Mom really liked the poems of Now We Are Six and When We were Very Young, but I liked the stories the best.

Re-reading them over and over again thirty years later to my son, Christopher Seth, gave me a much deeper understanding of Milne's message. I still like the stories better, and my son loves the verses!

I am happy to report that my relationship with my mother and also with my son were and are much better than that of Alan and Christopher Milne, who remained estranged ~~from his father~~ for most of ~~his~~ adult life.

Remember the series Sex and the City? I loved that program and not just because I love shoes. I loved the program because each of the main characters learned how, eventually, to look at the world through ~~their~~ ^{her} own eyes.

I have not seen the movie, so perhaps my conclusions are misguided. However, by the end of the series

Miranda stopped caring what the partners thought and found her niche as a wife and mother.

Carrie gave up trying to fix Mr. Big and accepted who he is.

Samantha let down her tough exterior and allowed life and love in.

And Charlotte stuck to her, very unmodern, very retro desire to be a wife mother first and foremost.

So it is with the characters in the Pooh books.

When starting to read the stories, we determine that Pooh is a bear with very little brain.

Piglet is little with a squeaky voice who is easily frightened.

Owl has great knowledge

Rabbit is important because he is so busy.

Kanga and Roo are very normal.

Tigger is Mr. Energy and disruptive, the original ADD child.

Eeyore is all about negativity.

And Christopher Robin is a child who rescues his friends and loves them all, in spite of themselves.

But after a couple of readings we are able to see that Pooh may be simple but he is wise.

Piglet can be brave.

Owl has knowledge but can't see the forest for the trees.

Rabbit is busy doing nothing.

Kanga and Roo remain normal

Tigger has a sense of purpose and destination.

Eeyore can be convinced that he is loved.

And Christopher Robin grows up and leaves the Hundred Acre Wood.

Before he goes, we are shown, as in *Sex and the City*, that we possess all of the same attributes of all of the characters, just in varying degrees.

One of the joys of Milne's work is the sound of his words. These are not pages to be read silently. Nor are they to be read in the Disney version. These are to be read aloud, preferably shared, and with great feeling. Our tongues need to wrap around the syllables. Our ears need to hear the lilting, the exclamation, the wonder....

"But this isn't easy. Said Pooh to himself, as he looked at what had once been Owl's house. Because Poetry and Hums aren't things that you get,

they're things which get you!. And all you can do is to go where they can find you."

The speaker here is the bear with little or no brain. But how profound! My interpretation of that when I was a child is that inspiration is magic - we just have to be in the right place.

And you know what, that is my interpretation now. Although I would add that the inherent talent doesn't hurt. But one needs to be in the right place to recognize that. And in modern speech, being in the "right place" is not just a physical location but also an attitude. Open, calm minds absorb; closed and busy minds are, well, closed and busy.

So, in a little while they came to the house that Eeyore had found (for Owl, whose house had been blown down), and for some minutes before they came to it, Piglet was nudging Pooh, and Pooh was nudging Piglet, and they were saying, it is! And it can't be! And it is, REALLY to each other.

And when they got there, it really was.

There! Said Eeyore proudly, stopping them outside Piglet's house. And the name on it, and everything.

Oh cried Christopher Robin, wondering whether to laugh or what.

Just the house for Owl. Don't you think so, little Piglet?

And then Piglet did a noble thing, and he did it in a sort of dream, while he was thinking of all the wonderful words Pooh had hummed about him.

Yes, it's just the house for owl, he said grandly. And I hope he'll be very happy in it. And then he gulped twice --- because he had been very happy in it himself.

What do you think, Christopher Robin? Asked Eeyore a little anxiously, feeling that something wasn't quite right.

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Christopher Robin had a question to ask first, and he was wondering how to ask it.

Well, he said at last, it's a very nice house, and if your own house is blown down, you must go somewhere else, mustn't you, Piglet? What would you do, if your house was blown down?

Before Piglet could think, Pooh answered for him. He'd come and live with me, said Pooh, wouldn't you, Piglet?

Piglet squeezed his paw.

Thank you, Pooh, he said, I should love to.

Daffodowndilly

She wore her yellow sun-bonnet,

She wore her greenest gown;

She turned to the south wind

And curtsied up and down.

She turned to the sunlight

And shook her yellow head,

And whispered to her neighbour:

Winter is dead.

Halfway Down

my mother's favorite

Halfway down the stairs

Is a stair

Where I sit.

There isn't any

Other stair

Quite like

It.

I'm not at the bottom,

I'm not at the top;

So this is the stair

Where

I always

Stop.

Halfway up the stairs

Isn't up,

And isn't down.

It isn't in the nursery,

It isn't in the town.

And all sorts of funny thoughts

Run round my head:



"It isn't really

Anywhere!

It's somewhere ~~else~~ *else*

Instead!"

Vespers

Little Boy kneels at the foot of the bed,

Droops on the little hands little gold head.

Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!

Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.

God bless Mommy. I know that's right.

Wasn't it fun in the bath tonight?

The cold's so cold, and the hot's so hot!

Oh! God bless Daddy --- I quite forgot!

If I open my fingers a little bit more,

I can see nanny's dressing gown on the door.

It's a beautiful blue, but it hasn't a hood.

Oh! God bless Nanny and make her good.

Mine has a ^hood, and I lie in bed,

And pull the hood right over my head,

And I shut my eyes, and I curl up small,

And nobody knows that I'm there at all.

Oh! Thank you, God, for a lovely day.

And what was the other I had to say?

I said "Bless Daddy," so what can it be?

Oh! Now I remember. God bless me.

Little Boy kneels at the foot of the bed,

Droops on the little hands little gold head.

Hush! Hush! Whisper who dares!

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But Pooh was thinking too, and he said suddenly to Christopher Robin
Is it a grand thing to be an Afternoon, what you said?

A what? Said Christopher Robin lazily, as he listened to something else.

On a horse, explained Pooh.

A Knight?

O, ^{was}~~what~~ that it? Said Pooh, I thought it was a----Is it as grand as a King and
Factors and all the other things you said?

Well, it's not a grand as a King, Said Christopher Robin, and then, as Pooh
seemed disappointed, he added quickly, but it's grander than Factors.

Could a Bear be one?

Of course he could, said Christopher Robin. I'll make you one.

And he took a stick and touched Pooh on the shoulder and said, Rise, Sir
Pooh de Bear, most faithful of all my Knights.

So Pooh rose and sat down and said Thank you, which is the proper thing to
say when you have been made a Knight, and he went into a dream again...



turn

The End

When I was One,

I had just begun

When I was Two,

I was nearly new.

When I was Three,

I was hardly Me.

When I was Four,

I was not much more.

When I was five,

I was just alive.

But now I am Six, I'm clever as clever.

So I think I'll be six now for ever and ever.

*The title of that
last verse is
THE END !*

What we learn and relearn and reaffirm and rejoice in each time we read A.A. Milne's ode to his child, is that life is good if we don't take ourselves too seriously, love everyone else for their differences, not in spite of them, and just wait to be in the right place for magic to find us.

*reference = my childhood & motherhood
also THE COMPLETE TALES AND POEMS OF
WINNIE THE POOH, A.A. MILNE
1997 BOOK OF THE MONTH CLUB
E. A. DUTTON + CO., INC.*