

Peanut the Elephant

For many, childhood is a breeze; happy memories made, friendships forged, and few real worries. This was not my reality. My childhood was a scarred and miserable reality, from constant bullying at school to physical and mental abuse at home. Of all my childhood, there is one event that I cannot forget. A day whose events are permanently etched into my memory, from every scent and sound to every emotion I felt. This is that story. The story of the death of Peanut the Elephant.

I was unhealthily attached to my first ever stuffed animal, an elephant that I carried everywhere with me. The toy itself was in a mediocre shape: the elastic band that held the left ear together was protruding out, and there was a small gash in the back of the neck where stuffing could be seen. The elephant sat in an unrealistic upright position, with its hind legs bent and its front legs stretched such that it was resting on its bottom. The face was pointed straight out, with its trunk bent upwards in an S shape. Its large ears stretched out to its sides, grey on the back and pink on the front. Its mouth was open, revealing a pink and smooth texture like the ears and the tip of the trunk.



On the day of the incident, I was merely eight years old. It was like any day. As a mischievous child, I refused to brush my teeth on a timely basis. After a large amount of

my fussing, my father gave me a “timeout” for ten minutes, consisting of sending me into a dark closet and closing the door. I distinctly remember that the closet door was a sliding door with a mirror front (and it is easy to remember because my dad shoved me into it and cracked it once). As I was sobbing in the closet, I was so mad that I took off my glasses, and with great effort, snapped them in half down the middle. My sobbing immediately ceased as my heart came into my mouth. I felt a giant rush of adrenaline rush through my veins, and I sat silently, waiting for the impending discovery.

A few minutes later my mother walked in, all calm.

I told her “it caught on something,” with no context. She just said “okay”, and I repeated myself several times, as she clearly didn’t understand what I was talking about. Finally, I held up my glasses and said,

“My glasses caught on something and broke.” Her expression changed as she realized what I was talking about. She made a chilling remark about how my father would not be pleased. She then left to tell my father.

A few minutes later my father comes in, and drags me into the “office” room. This particular room was cooler than the rest of the rooms upstairs, and it was painted a tealish green color. The only window directly opposed the entrance to the room, and in front of it was a computer desk with a computer and a chair, in which my father proceeded to sit. He grabbed a ruler from the desk and asked “Did you break your glasses?” I shook my head, repeating my lie that they “caught on something.” He smacked my knuckles and asked me again, to which I lied again. On the third attempt, I told the truth. He proceeded to leave the room for a few minutes, and I thought that it was over. I couldn’t have been further from the truth.

He re-entered the room a few moments later with a lighter in one hand, grabbed me firmly by the wrist, and walked me downstairs and out our back door and onto our deck. To the right was a large square patch of dirt where my mother used to plant fruits and vegetables. However, at that moment, the patch was empty except for one thing: my stuffed elephant was laying there.

I was confused as he dragged me off the deck and onto the grass in front of the patch. I noticed our red tank of gasoline sitting by the side of the field. A realization came to me and I was flooded with agonizing fear as my dad set fire to the elephant. He immediately went back inside the house, and I stood there, staring for a few seconds, before I began to uncontrollably cry. I raced back inside the house and started screaming

“Mom, he’s burning Peanut!” Both my sister and mother came racing down to watch the chaos unfold. My sister sat on our recliner started to cry as well. I remember telling my mother “I want another one”, to which she responded, to my surprise, “no.” I also remember my mother making a comment about the possibility of the house catching on fire to my father. My father mentioned wanting to traumatize me, and my mother was upset that he traumatized my sister as well.

I went back outside and stared at the burning elephant as it rolled around in the field, waiting for the flames to subside. When they finally did, I remember walking through the field, picking up the coarse black hardened chunks of ash, wishing I could put it back together, knowing very well I couldn’t. I sat in the field, tears streaming down my face for hours, holding the remains of Peanut, my elephant. And so too began my obsession with elephants.