

## **The Lonely Bear**

By Andrew Conlyn

*A Tale for children ages five through ten.*

On the side of a tall mountain in the western woods lived a lonely bear. He was lonely because he hadn't seen another bear for a long time. It hadn't always been like this. He remembered the days, not long ago, when bears were everywhere. He whiled away long summer hours playing bear games and telling bear stories. Things were different now. It had been weeks, maybe months since he had seen another bear. He was so lonely he wandered down the mountainside in search of a friend, any friend, it didn't matter who.

He hadn't traveled long until he came across a raccoon. A raccoon looks like a bear, just much smaller. This didn't bother our bear. He ran up to the 'coon yelling, "Hell-O there raccoon—you and I are now best friends!"

The raccoon started backing away saying to himself, "This does not look good." The bear pressed forward saying "Yeah, we'll be great friends!" The raccoon continued backing away grumbling. "Why does this type of thing always happen to me?" He backed into a tree.

The bear continued, "We can tell stories... We can play games..."

With that, the raccoon started climbing the tree. The bear said "Yeah, that's great. We can climb trees together, too!" and started up after him. The raccoon climbed higher and higher, but as

he did the bear climbed higher too. The tree was tall and spindly, and as the bear went up, the tree bent over. All the higher the raccoon went, all the higher the bear went. All the higher the bear went, all the more the tree bent. Finally, the tree bent so far the bear's back was touching the ground. When he noticed this, he said to himself, "Gee, I wonder how I got down here, I thought I was climbing a tree." He was also a very forgetful bear. He let go of the tree. When he did the tree sprang back into the upright position with such force it sent that poor raccoon flying through the air into a distant snowbank. He scurried off in the opposite direction as fast as his four flat little feet could take him.

The bear said, "Guess he wasn't a best friend after all. Maybe I should mosey down to the old frozen river to see who might be there. Usually, somebody's playing on the ice." When he got there he was in for a surprise. Instead of the ice-covered river he had grown used to, the river was filled with icy cold fast-flowing water.

Carefully, he walked on large rocks over the swirling water. He saw a large striped fish. "How would you like to my friend?" he asked the fish.

"Oh yeah, what's in it for me?" the fish responded.

"Well, we could tell stories, or maybe play games."

"Games? What kind of games do you have in mind, Bear?"

"Oh, gee, uh, we could play chase. That's where I go just as fast as I can and you try to catch me!"

"Oh, I could catch you!" said the fish.

"Oh, no you can't!" said the bear.

"Of course I can," said the fish.

With that, the bear hollered, "Catch me if you can!" and bounded back across the big rocks and up the side of the mountain as fast as he could. When he looked back over his shoulder to see how the fish was doing in catching him, the fish was nowhere to be seen. He waited so the fish could catch up, but the fish didn't catch up. He wandered back down the mountain, walked across the rocks, and looked down into the river. Sure enough, there was that fish. The bear asked "Fish, what happened? We were playing a game, you were supposed to try to catch me."

The fish said, "Bear, I'm a fish. I can't get out of the water. If you want to play games with me, you'll have to do it in my river."

"Oh yeah," cried the bear "I forgot."

The fish yelled, "Catch me if you can!" and took off down the river as fast as he could.

The bear jumped in and started swimming after him. Well, a fish can swim faster than a bear and in no time the fish was out of sight. The bear kept trying, swimming as fast as he could to find the fish.

Unfortunately, the only thing he found was a fast-moving current, and it was carrying him toward more large rocks.

"OUCH!!!" BANG. BOOM! He hit one rock after another until he was able to pull himself out of the water and onto the river bank.

Now he was one sore bear. He was also tired. He was hungry, too. Mostly he was still lonely. He might have just lain there on the river bank and gone to sleep except he saw a cabin. He said to himself, "There will be people in that cabin and I bet they'd be great friends!" He headed toward the cabin. He had never been near a cabin before. As he walked he asked himself, "I wonder how are you supposed to get into one of these things?" When he got there he wandered around outside until he came upon a window. He could see inside, but something was in the way. He pushed on it but nothing happened. He banged on it. It broke into small pieces. As he started pulling himself in he said, "I knew I could figure out how you are supposed to get into these things!" Unfortunately, the opening provided by the window was a little bit smaller than the area taken by the bear's lower half, and he had to struggle and flail around to squeeze himself through. As he did he knocked over everything in reach. He knocked over boxes and cans, tables and chairs and shelves full of all kinds of goods. Everything, including one large brown bear, ended up in a pile in the middle of the floor.

He decided now would be a great time to start tasting things. He discovered he really liked chocolate bars, wrapper and all. He loved molasses. Honey was a taste he already knew and loved. Mustard was a taste he could live without, and the soap tasted just awful! He concentrated on the things he liked best and forgot all about why he came into the cabin in the first place. Forgot, that is until the door opened and a woman walked in. Slowly, the bear turned to tell her he wanted to be friends, but she wouldn't listen. Instead, she yelled, "Oh my gosh, there is a bear in my kitchen!" She grabbed a shovel and started swatting at the bear, screaming "OUT! Get out of my house!" The bear tried to explain he wanted to be friends, but the woman wouldn't stop swatting him. Finally, he gave up and moseyed out the door the woman had left open.

Now he was a sad bear. He had tried so hard to find a friend, and there were none to be found. He was lonely. He was sore from the rocks, but not as hungry as he had been. Instead, he had a tummy ache. He rolled over on the side of the mountain and cried himself to sleep.

Nobody knows for sure how long that bear slept, but what we do know is that he woke up because something was licking his toes. Slowly he opened one of his big eyes, and peered across his enormous tummy, down to his huge feet. There he saw two cute little bear cubs playing with his toes!

He couldn't believe it. He opened both eyes wide, sat up and looked around. There were bears everywhere. His friends were back!

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"We've been sleeping," one of the old bears answered. "You know, bears sleep all winter. It's called hibernation."

"Oh no, I forgot! I am so forgetful. I'm a happy bear now, because I've got all of my old friends back and some cute new ones too. I'm also happy because I'll be able to play bear games and tell bear stories all summer long. Do you know what makes me happy? It makes me happy just to know that I'll be able to sleep all next winter, if only I can remember. What makes me happiest is to know that I will never again have to put up with raccoons who fly away, with fish who play too rough, and with women and their shovels!"

All of the other bears looked at him as if he were crazy, because they couldn't imagine what he was talking about, but he knew. Something else he knew was that this was one winter he'd never forget, that is if he could remember.