

Martin And Ferdinand

A Memoir

Martin S. Murphy

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Dedicated to the memory of my adoptive mother, Clare Murphy (13 January 1929 – 15 July 2019), who passed away as this book was close to completion. She did not give birth to me, but in every other way, she gave me life.

Oft, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me;

The smiles, the tears,
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimm'd and gone,
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain hath bound me,
Sad memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

When I remember all
The friends, so link'd together,
I've seen around me fall,
Like leaves in wintry weather;
I feel like one
Who treads alone
Some banquet-hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!
Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Sad memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

"Oft in the Stilly Night" by Thomas Moore (1779-1852)

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I must also thank my wife Madeline for all her love and support, for which words are inadequate.

And I would like to thank my wonderful adoptive Dad, and the biological parents I never knew.

Martin S. Murphy

Melbourne, Vic.

16 March 2020

Publisher's Note

The book you are about to read came into our hands through unusual circumstances. It was left outside the offices of Ursus Publications, in a neatly wrapped package with no return address, late one night in the middle of 2019. Security camera footage showed a small, furry figure – apparently a teddy bear - dropping the package at the door and running away. A reading of the manuscript indicated that this was the bear's biography of his human owner. Since "Ursus" means bear in Latin, it is believed the bear hoped for a favorable reception from this company. After several staff members had read the book, we decided that the story of this human and his bear (or vice versa!) was worth sharing, and we have offered it to the public.

Cornelius G. Harpenflooger

Editor-in-Chief

Ursus Publications Ltd.

Chapter 1: Boy and Bear

G'Day! My name is Ferdinand B. Murphy (B for Bear, as is traditional), and I'm a teddy bear.

Now, you will be thinking that teddy bears do not generally write books, and that of course is true. When bears have achieved literary fame in the past, it has usually been because a human wrote their adventures down for them. But this time it's different; in fact, it's the other way around! I am going to be telling you the story of my human owner.

I can remember when the idea first came to us. A little while ago, Martin (my human) was going through a bad patch. He was moping around the house, very depressed — off his food, lacking motivation; you know the kind of thing. I sat quietly on the bed in my best non-judgmental teddy bear manner, hoping he would say what was wrong, and eventually, he did.

He blurted out, "You know what, Ferd? I don't even know who I am! I don't know if I'm English or Australian because I was born in London and now I live in Melbourne. I don't know what I want to do with my life. I don't know what I believe in; most of the time I don't know whether I'm a Catholic or a Protestant or an atheist! I don't know whether I want to be with people or whether I want to be alone. I *think* I like the human race but people have hurt me so much! I don't know who or what I am...."

"I'm not falling to pieces; I don't even know what the pieces are! I am not really anything! I don't know who the real me is, or even if there is a real me! People tell me to be myself but I don't know who that self is! They tell me to follow my passion but I don't know what that passion is, or if I even have one! I just don't know anything any more!"

That was when I suggested writing his life story, which I had heard humans often find therapeutic. He replied irritably that he had already tried several times to write his life story, with no success: he would usually get up to

the second or third chapter and then run out of steam. So I offered to help him with the writing. He accepted, and here we are.

Indeed, as a teddy bear, I think I am in a unique position to help in this undertaking. I have been with him for almost his entire life. He has often told me things, discussed things with me, and shared his thoughts with me, often into the small hours of the night. I have been with him through pretty much the whole thing, and been privileged, as only a well-loved bear can be, to share his most intimate thoughts and feelings.

So, let's get started!

Marilyn Monroe, the greatest sex symbol of her time, sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" to a delighted John F. Kennedy during a celebration at Madison Square Gardens, New York, on May 19th, 1962 (ten days before the President's real birthday).¹ As luck would have it, on the very same day, my human was born just on the other side of the Atlantic, in the London district of Wimbledon.

Shortly after his birth, my human was given up for adoption through a Catholic adoption agency. As was usual in those days, very little information about the child and his family was given to his adoptive parents.

My human debated with himself for years about whether to try to find his biological parents. It was only while we were working on this book that he made a last-ditch attempt to find his birth parents. He ordered a copy of his original (pre-adoption) birth certificate from the General Records Office in London.

Now, we agreed that Martin himself would talk to you about some very personal things, so here he is...

MARTIN: Oh, thank you. Allowing me back into my own book. How nice of you!

FERDINAND: Look, we agreed...

MARTIN: Okay, okay. So: the birth certificate. It's clear that my biological parents weren't married, which was (and still is) a fairly scandalous thing for Catholics, so that is why I was given up for adoption. I must say that finding out I'm illegitimate was a hard thing for me, although I had often suspected it. For a while I felt as if my whole existence was a mistake, or an accident.

FERDINAND: How did you cope with that?

MARTIN: Eventually I got over it by realizing that I have been loved and have had a good and interesting life, despite the uncertain beginning; I hope the rest of

¹ See: Wikipedia contributors, "Happy Birthday, Mr. President," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Happy_Birthday,_Mr._President&oldid=912604652 (accessed August 28, 2019).

this book will illustrate that. It might have been a “bad beginning”, to use a phrase from Lemony Snicket, but it improved later on!

FERDINAND: What else have you found out about your birth parents?

MARTIN: The birth certificate has absolutely no information about the father, so there’s nothing to go on there. But at the time I was born my mother was living at St Anne Mother and Baby Home in Leigham Court Road, Streatham, in southern London. I’m fairly sure it was one of the many such homes run by the Catholic Church in England, Ireland and elsewhere; some of them were okay, but some of them were pretty hellish, by all accounts. Incidentally, the adoption society that handled things no longer exists, so there’s not much chance of finding anything out that way.

The birth certificate also records that my mother was working as a laundry maid at a hospital in Epsom. I can’t help feeling she must have had a hard life. Anyway, I was adopted and taken in by my adoptive parents at about one year old – around the middle of 1963, I believe.

I must have been told at a very early age that I was adopted; I can’t ever remember not knowing. My adoptive Mum used to call me her “specially chosen boy.” On the one hand that made me feel special, but on the other hand... well...

FERDINAND: Yes?

MARTIN: I’ve always had a tendency to perfectionism, an almost obsessive desire to do everything perfectly or else not do it at all. I think that produces a lot of anxiety, and I wonder now if, deep down, it came from a desire to justify myself to my adoptive parents or to justify their “choice” of me. From what I have read, that is a common symptom of adoption trauma. But it took me a long time to realize that’s what it was. As you will see, I spent many years “in denial”...

FERDINAND: Which is not a river in Egypt!

MARTIN: Enough with the corny jokes already! Anyway, I don’t regret being adopted at all – my adoptive parents were fantastic, as I hope this book will show. But it is undoubtedly true that adoption leaves a very deep emotional scar, if you like, and you have to deal with it sooner or later.

FERDINAND: Indeed, I noticed that for many years you simply ignored the fact of your adoption. You wouldn’t talk about it and I think you convinced yourself it hadn’t affected you. I think it was only when we were actually working on this book that you really allowed yourself to feel that pain of adoption trauma, and we made a final attempt to find your birth parents.

MARTIN: Over fifty years later... Hey, when I procrastinate, I really procrastinate!

FERDINAND: You said it! But now (*turning back to the reader*) we come to Martin’s adoptive parents – the people to whom he and I owe so much.

Although Martin was born in London, both of his adoptive parents hailed from the Liverpool area.

Martin's adoptive Mum was born as Clare Sales, and she was one of ten siblings. Her father, Warren Sales, was a carpenter, but the family was not well off. Having enough food on the table was a problem at times, especially with that many mouths to feed. The family lived in Dinas Lane in the Huyton area of Liverpool.

Now, Dinas Lane was also home to one of Paul (now Sir Paul) McCartney's aunts — his "Auntie Gin". In fact, Paul celebrated his 21st birthday party at her house, on the 18th June 1963, but a fight involving his band mate, John Lennon, marred the occasion.²

There is also a family story that, one night during the 1960's, there was a knock on the door, and Martin's Granddad opened it to find a bunch of Beatlemaniac girls who had come to the wrong house. Much to his embarrassment, they jumped on him and hugged and kissed him, thinking he was "Paul's uncle".

MARTIN: Actually, at one stage – in my teenage years, I think - I had fantasies that John Lennon was my real father. Not Paul, for some reason.

FERDINAND: Clare (Martin's Mum) worked as a telephone operator during the war years. In 1954 she married Vincent (Vince) Murphy, who came from an Irish background as is obvious from the surname. Vince's own grandfather had migrated from Cork in Ireland to Liverpool. He was one of the many people who left Ireland because of the infamous potato famine of the 1840's, which led to a mass exodus from Ireland. John F. Kennedy's ancestors also left Ireland because of it – in fact, all four of JFK's grandparents were children of Irish immigrants³.

Vince's family was part of the well-known "Liverpool Irish" phenomenon. Because Liverpool is actually the closest English city to Ireland, many Irish people moved there, and Liverpool still has a large Irish (and Catholic) population, and the city has an annual Irish festival.

Dad's grandfather owned a pub in Liverpool...

MARTIN: An honorable occupation!

FERDINAND: And later on, Dad's family lived in Crosby, to the north of Liverpool. Perhaps because it is on the seaside, Crosby was seen as a slightly more "up-market" area than the area Mum came from, and she has told Martin that she felt some people looked down on her because of her background.

Vince qualified as a chartered surveyor and was soon looking for better jobs around the country. He got a job in Orpington, on the southeastern edge of the London sprawl, and it was there that my human joined them, after his adoption, in the middle of 1963. They named him Martin after Vince's own father.... Do you have any comments, Martin?

² Mike Wilhelm, "McCartney Turns 21 and Lennon Takes Offence", 18 June 2013, Beatles + 50 (online blog), found at <http://beatlesplus50.blogspot.com2013>(Accessed May 25, 2019).

³ See: Wikipedia contributors, "John F. Kennedy," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, (accessed September 16, 2019).

MARTIN: No, you're doing a great job so far. In fact, you're bearing up very well!

FERDINAND: Oh, so now who's cracking corny jokes?

Martin's adoptive Mum and Dad were moving around a lot at this time, and by the time the legal process of adoption was finalized they had moved again. While we were working on this book we found a notification of Martin's formal adoption hearing. This happened at the courthouse in Bromley, Kent, on the 7th March 1963, while the Murphys were living at 79, Crescent Drive, Petts Wood, Kent. That is the date on which it all became official.

Soon afterwards, they moved again to Folkestone, a town on the English Channel not far from Dover, and that is the first place my human can remember. And it was also there that I, Ferdinand, joined them.

I was bought at a teddy bear store in London during a family visit there. I'm not a Steiff or one of those "limited edition" or "collector's item" bears (to be honest I find a lot of those fellows to be very proud and standoffish) but I do come from a respectable bear factory. I was given to Martin soon after his adoption, while he was settling in, and we became friends immediately.

By the way, I was originally known just as "Teddy", or sometimes "Teddy Murphy". The name Ferdinand was given to me quite a few years later.

I used to accompany Martin to church when he was a little chap. I was supposed to help keep him quiet during Mass, but I wasn't always successful. One Sunday, the parish priest was giving the sermon, resplendent in his vestments and biretta. He asked a rhetorical question: "And we don't want that to happen, do we?" Martin responded loudly and helpfully from his mum's knee, "Nooooo!" The priest replied drily, "At least somebody's listening!"

Now, although being a teddy bear has its frustrations (no sick leave, no pension plan...), it does have its good points, and one of them is being able to sit and listen to humans tell stories. Martin's Mum once told him a story that probably sounds like an "urban legend", but she always swore that it was true and that it proves how God looked after her family.

According to the story, one of her female relations was unmarried and beginning to feel that the years were passing her by. Not wanting to remain an "old maid", she bought a small statuette of St Jude, traditionally the patron saint of lost causes and desperate situations, and started fervently praying to the saint that she would find a husband.

Months, possibly years went by, and she did not meet any suitable men. One day, in anger and disappointment, she threw the statuette out of her bedroom window. It struck the head of a man who happened to be walking past. He ended up in a hospital, requiring stitches. She visited him in the hospital; they got to know each other, and they ended up getting married. ...

MARTIN: Which seems to demonstrate that God, or maybe St Jude, has a sense of humor!

FERDINAND: In Folkestone, we lived in a street called Firs Close, which is now quite close to the British end of the Channel Tunnel, though that was still probably in the realm of fantasy when we were there.

There was a man living a few houses up from us who had only one eye. Martin's parents used to call him Nelson after the famous one-eyed naval hero, and my young human naturally assumed that was his real name. One day Martin saw him in the street and cheerfully called out, "Hello, Mr. Nelson!" He wondered why he didn't get an answer, but only an evil look from the fellow's good eye! So as you can see, it did not take young Martin long to start embarrassing himself in public.

MARTIN: Ahem...

FERDINAND: Sorry! We'll soon be finished with the embarrassing bits.

As my human became more confident with walking he sometimes used to push his pram with me inside it. One day he lost control of the pram and it went off the road, down a slope and into a stream. I fell out and got thoroughly, sopping wet.

I was taken home and had to have my stuffing taken out. Martin's mum then hung me on the clothesline by my ears so that I could dry out.

When Martin saw this, he was very worried that I was in pain. Luckily, we teddy bears have no nervous system, so we don't feel pain the way humans do. It was just the loss of dignity that worried me.

MARTIN: Dignity?

FERDINAND: Teddy bears have dignity! Just because we're stuffed, it doesn't mean that we don't have feelings!

MARTIN: Err... no, of course not. Sorry.

FERDINAND: By the way, Martin didn't say anything out loud about how worried he was – I could actually feel his worry. Teddy bears and their owners develop a telepathic link, so we can always feel our owner's emotions – especially the strong ones. That is also how we keep in touch with each other at a distance: through the Teddy Bear Telepathic Network (TBTN).

Anyway, after I dried out, I was re-stuffed and had some minor repairs done – the first of many over the years. Actually, my material body has changed completely over time – I've been repaired so much that none of me is original.

MARTIN: I meant to ask you about that. You've been completely rebuilt over the years, but it hasn't affected your annoying... er, charming personality.

FERDINAND: No. As long as it happens piece by piece us teddy bears can stand it, and our personality survives intact. Among the teddy bear community, this process is known as "regeneration".

Oh, and that reminds me: this might be a good moment to mention a certain television program about which my human is utterly fanatical — namely *Doctor Who*.

MARTIN: Yes! Best... show... ever!!!

FERDINAND: Martin first started watching the show as a small child in Folkestone and has basically remained a fan ever since. It has been a – well, a lifelong obsession with him!

The very first episode of *Doctor Who* was shown on BBC television on November 23rd, 1963, which was the day after the assassination of John F. Kennedy. So you see, Martin feels he has quite a few connections with JFK!

Martin started watching the show in 1967, when he was about five years old. He can remember an episode called “The Tomb of the Cybermen” that was shown in that year – and the Cybermen have remained his favorite monsters ever since – right?

MARTIN: Absolutely. The Daleks have got nothing on them. But we should explain about “regeneration”.

FERDINAND: Oh, yes. The Doctor (whose true name remains a mystery) is a Time Lord, a friendly alien from the planet Gallifrey, and it became part of the show’s mythology that when his body was injured or “worn out”, he could “regenerate”, suddenly acquiring a new body and personality. This allowed the BBC to recast the main part when an actor wanted to move on. Anyway, that’s why the word “regeneration” has a special meaning for Martin!

MARTIN: Now we’re up to the thirteenth Doctor – Jodie Whitaker, the first woman to play the part. I have no difficulty with a woman playing the part, but some of the more conservative fans are up in arms about it.

FERDINAND: I’ve always meant to ask you: do you feel that watching *Doctor Who* all these years, and being a fan of the show, has had any effect on you? Has it influenced you?

MARTIN: Good question. The Doctor has always been a very eccentric character – not at all afraid to stand out, in fact proud of his eccentricity - I think that it showed me that it’s okay to be yourself!

And I also wonder if I identified with the Doctor because he was a wanderer. He never settled down in one place for too long, except for the Jon Pertwee years (the third Doctor), when he spent a lot of time on Earth, supposedly because his own people had exiled him there. But in general, the Doctor would never stay in one place or get too close to anyone, get too involved with anyone – at least that’s how it was in the old days. In recent times there have been hints of romance between the Doctor and other characters on the show. But the Doctor always used to keep this emotional distance between himself and others; I hate to say it, but that might be something I felt I needed to emulate.

FERDINAND: All right. We had better get on with the story of my human’s life. Martin first went to kindergarten, then school, in Folkestone. At kindergarten he had a particular friend called Bernard; perhaps because of that, he has always liked the name Bernard and took it for his confirmation name later on.

About this time, a friend of Martin’s dad got a job in Kenya. A few months later he rang Dad and asked him if he wanted to come to Kenya himself. Clearly he and Mum were ready for a change of scenery, so... in 1968, the family moved to Kenya.

Chapter 2. Kenya

I remember feeling a bit nervous myself as we prepared to leave England for Kenya. It wasn't the journey itself that bothered me (although I don't like being scrunched up to fit in the luggage. It gives me a bad back for days afterwards!). But I was a bit worried about Martin, and how he would cope with a new home and a new country.

We went up to London by train, to Heathrow Airport. My human was very excited – I think it was the first time he had travelled by train, let alone by plane! And then we boarded an East African Airways plane for Kenya.

A bit of history might be needed here. British East Africa comprised what are now the republics of Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. At the time we went there, the new republics had already become independent from their colonial masters in London, but there was still “East African Airways”, “East African Harbors”, “East African Rail”, etc. (Ironically, in the 21st century an East African Community has been re-established with its own Legislative Assembly, and the countries are moving back towards greater unity. Martin says that is typical of human politics).

Martin did change when we moved to Kenya, and became a bit more withdrawn, although not completely. In fact, I noticed that he started to spend a lot of time in a fantasy world. He loved dinosaurs – he had a book about them, and soon familiarized himself with the names of the various dinosaur species and the eras such as Mesozoic and Cretaceous. And for a while he had an imaginary pet stegosaurus, named (rather unoriginally) Steggy.

Later on, he would imagine himself as a superhero like Superman, or the Doctor from *Doctor Who*. And sometimes he would also imagine that (like

Truman in the film made many years later) there was a huge audience watching his every move on television as “the Martin Murphy Show”.

MARTIN: Looking back on it now... seems like delusions of grandeur!

FERDINAND: Martin’s father also stimulated his imagination by telling bedtime stories, which often featured a giant and a dwarf named Hughie and Tiny —Tiny being, in fact, the giant! Vince had (and still has) the Liverpool talent for verbal humor, which I think, helped in stimulating my human’s lifelong love of words.

We lived in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital city. Martin attended a Catholic school run by the Loreto Sisters...

MARTIN: They were mostly Irish nuns, from memory. And very strict! They ran a tight ship, those ladies!

FERDINAND: ...and he had his first confession and Holy Communion at Nairobi cathedral.

MARTIN: Yes, but I wasn’t given the sacrament of confirmation until a few years later, in Australia. That was standard practice at the time. I believe that in more recent times, Catholic kids are confirmed about the same time as their first communion.

By the way, the Loreto sisters taught me how to pray the “Hail Mary”. When I came to the line, “blessed is the fruit of thy womb”, with a child’s literal mind I would imagine a bowl of magical fruit (bananas, apples etc.) and I would wonder where those “blessed fruit” are now. I thought they might have them in the Vatican...

FERDINAND: We lived on Ngong Road, a major road out of Nairobi. From time to time Kenya’s first president, Jomo Kenyatta, would come down the road in a motorcade complete with police cars and motorbike outriders, which provided some excitement. Once Martin waved to him, and was delighted when he got a presidential wave back!

While we were there, a very popular politician named Tom Mboya was assassinated, which led to widespread rioting and disorder. Martin, I’m afraid to say, found it all very exciting, and he would stay up late to watch police and military vehicles trundling down Ngong Road. He and his parents attended Mr. Mboya’s funeral (one of the first times Martin went to church without me).

At school, Martin had a particular friend named Rahul, who came from an Indian background and whose family owned a farm. Martin visited Rahul at the farm at least once, so my human certainly did not become completely withdrawn or isolated.

Incidentally, most of our British friends and neighbors at that time had African servants, who were referred to as “boys” or “girls” whatever their age. We did not have our own servants, but Martin became quite friendly with one elderly African servant called Absalom who taught him a few words of Swahili, the local language.

By today’s standards, of course, this all reflects a lot of entrenched racism, but this was just the way things were done in the British colonies and ex-colonies at the time, and nobody questioned it.

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