

Bear Hospital - A Tail of Two Bears

Written by Dot Bird

Thursday, 09 January 2014 14:21 - Last Updated Tuesday, 18 February 2014 09:39



It's been a busy time here at my house; there are many bears that require restoring and tender loving care — here are two more for you to see and share their lovely stories!

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Farnell Bear



BEFORE

This delightful little bear was made by JK Farnell and is one of the later designs from the 1950s-'60s. He would have had an Alpha Farnell label attached to his chest seam, but this had worn away years ago. He is made from quality gold mohair and, as you can see, had a few little

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problems and needed some help. The owner's brother, Adam, contacted me— apparently he stole Teddy from his sister when they were children! Although Teddy was eventually returned to his rightful owner a few years later, Adam had always felt bad that he had done such a thing to his sister and decided that he would enquire about having Teddy restored as a Christmas present for her, to try and make up for his naughty behavior years ago.

When Teddy arrived, I took him out of the box and examined him carefully. He is a sturdy little fellow, only 12 inches tall but full of character. He was dusty and dirty, so I began by giving him a gentle surface clean, then left him overnight to air dry.

The following day I attended to a worn area on his tummy where the squeaker had been pressed many times; it didn't work anymore, which is pretty normal for these old squeakers — they were never really intended to last for as long as the bears have! I opened the final hand-sewn seam on his body, removed a little stuffing and the old squeaker, then lined and darned the worn tummy area. When this was completed, I put back the original stuffing and a new squeaker, at Adam's request, then closed the body seam.

His little paw and foot pads were very worn, so a little more stuffing was added where necessary at the end of one arm, then the pads were re-covered with fine wool felt. Last came replacing his eyes — I selected a lovely pair of amber glass ones. Once they were fitted, they seemed to bring his little face to life. He sat very well for his "after" photograph — I'm pretty sure there was a little smile and twinkle in those eyes!



AFTER

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Large Early Steiff



BEFORE

This large Steiff bear called Mischka was in a sorry state when he arrived. He dates from around 1915 and is 28 inches tall. Earlier in the year, his owner had sent images of the damage, but of course, you can never be certain what a bear is really like until you hold one “in the fur.” I felt so sorry for him when I lifted him out of the carefully packed box and removed the baby blanket that was wrapped around him — he had certainly had a few adventures! I didn’t know at that point that he had a story to tell — more about that later!

I gave Mischka a careful examination, then emailed his owner, Angelika, with my recommendations. She was happy to go ahead, so I began work on him by removing the torn replacement covers from his paw and foot pads to reveal the remains of the original felt. One of Mischka’s paws had been torn off at the wrist, and the other arm was torn nearly in half. Apparently this had happened when the family had moved house — the removal men weren’t very careful with Mischka and this resulted in the damage to his arms. Angelika decided that as he was coming to me for the arm repairs, he might as well have the rest of the restoration done at the same time to help secure him for the future. She told me that he is a very important member of their family and deserved to be helped!

Once I had removed the old covers from the pads, I opened the seams at the side of the right arm and loose paw. I folded back the mohair as far as possible on both pieces, then inserted a fabric liner under the mohair. After sewing the mohair to the liner, I drew the arm and paw together, then secured the join with more sewing. I carried out the same sort of repair to the left arm, lining it up as well as possible to bring it back into shape.

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Now that the arms were back together, I decided that, because of the size and weight of the arms, the joins at the wrists would need more security in case they were moved a lot by the family. So I dyed some pieces of mohair to match Mischka's color and carefully sewed them into place around both wrists. They blended in nicely — you had to look very closely to see them, and they worked really well.

Now that the wrists were secure, I re-covered his paw and foot pads with wool felt to match the original color, leaving the remains of the originals underneath. He had a few small splits and tears in his limbs and body fabric, so I repaired these and secured the old repairs around his ankles. I often find that the wrists and ankles are a weak area on the large early Steiff bears — their large paws and feet have to be supported by narrow wrists and ankles!

The last part of his restoration was to attend to the wear on his muzzle. I used some bald vintage fabric to patch the large hole on the top and secured the smaller splits at the sides with careful stitching and darning. His nose stitching was re-sewn over the existing felt liner, following the holes from the original stitching, and lastly his mouth was re-sewn, giving him his beautiful gentle expression that is found so often on these large Steiff bears.

And his story? Well, Mischka originally belonged to Angelika's very close friend who had passed away at the grand old age of 97. Mischka is a very special bear, because his original owner was a Russian lady who escaped in the 1920s after the earlier Russian revolution — and she managed to smuggle her jewelry out inside his tummy! Mischka was the only thing she had left from her comfortable upbringing in Moscow and St. Petersburg, and thus was a very treasured friend, indeed!

I was pleased to be able to restore him, and I hope the family will enjoy him for many more years to come. He sits in their drawing room on his special silk chair and listens to piano music and singing, which I'm sure he enjoys!

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