1968 isn’t a century ago, but it is a lifetime ago for many people. It’s hard to believe that that year, which is often hailed as the dawning of the “Age of Aquarius,” the ushering in of peace and love, hippies and protesters, was also the year that welcomed the arrival of Corduroy, the bear.

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{besps_c}0|1.jpg|Viking Press published “Corduroy” in 1968. Don Freeman’s book had undergone many rejections, but he persevered.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|2.jpg|Lisa wants to buy Corduroy, but her pragmatic mom points out his missing overall button.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|3.jpg|Trying to find his missing button, Corduroy wanders through the department store. He ends up trying to steal a button from a mattress display.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|4.jpg|Lisa raids her piggy bank and has enough money to purchase the appealing, though not entirely perfect, teddy bear.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|5.jpg|All’s well that ends well . . . Lisa and Corduroy have forged a lifelong friendship.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|6.jpg|In 1978, 10 years after the initial success, Freeman published the sequel “A Pocket for Corduroy.”|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|7.jpg|Corduroy has been made in many different forms and formats. Here is a bookmark from Applause.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|8.jpg|Yottoy has several versions of Corduroy. Here is the “My First Corduroy” edition.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|9.jpg|A small 9-inch bean-bag version of Corduroy is one of the Russ Berrie offerings. They’ve made several varieties.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|91.jpg|Russ Berrie has fashioned many salutes to the determined bear. This one talks and reads the story to its precious human friend.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|92.jpg|Steiff rendered the resilient hero in its famous button-in-the-ear manner.|{/besps_c}
{besps_c}0|93.jpg|Christmas and the New Year are a time for remembering the simple pleasures and the simple joys, while making resolutions to do better in the next year.|{/besps_c}

1968 isn’t a century ago, but it is a lifetime ago for many people. It’s hard to believe that that year, which is often hailed as the dawning of the “Age of Aquarius,” the ushering in of peace and love, hippies and protesters, was also the year that welcomed the arrival of Corduroy, the bear.

Written by New York illustrator Don Freeman, and assisted by his wife, Lydia, the book “Corduroy” tells the tale of a teddy bear who comes alive at night, when he is locked up in a big, fancy department store.

According to the picture book, a young girl named Lisa spots him on a toy shelf and she desperately wants to buy him. She pleads to do so—but her mom tells her that they already spent too much money that day. The practical mom also points out that a button is missing from his overalls. So, why would they want to buy a broken bear?

Like in any good children’s story, there is more to Corduroy than meets the eyes. True, his strap might be missing a bit of finishing, but he has a heart, a soul, and a deep-down need to be loved.

Knowing that he was so close to belonging to someone, Corduroy takes a stroll that night in the department store. He sees escalators, elevators, all kinds of incredible displays. He even tries to steal a button from a mattress display, since he knows that lacking a button cost him a chance to go home with Lisa.

Luckily for both the ursine hero and his determined human admirer, they are united in the end. Lisa returns for him—with her own pocket money—and purchases him. The book ends with them in a heartfelt literal bear hug. It is sweet beyond belief.

The interesting thing about “Corduroy,” and why it’s great to talk about during the Christmas season and the run-up to the New Year, is that it shows dreams can come true. Yes, Corduroy doesn’t sit idly by on the shelf. Instead, he gets up and goes on a journey to find what he thinks is lacking in his life. He takes his fate into his own paws.

Likewise, Lisa doesn’t let her mother discourage her. She knows that there was something special about that bear, and a tiny matter like a missing button doesn’t devalue him in Lisa’s eyes. She immediately realizes that Corduroy is more than the sum of his parts!

The same stick-to-itiveness holds true for the author/illustrator Don Freeman. The book was rejected by more than a dozen publishers before Viking Press agreed to take a chance on it. Freeman had read the story aloud to children over the course of writing and illustrating it, and he was convinced that it touched something within his young listening audience. He refused to be deterred.

Over the almost 45 years since its publication, “Corduroy” has been lauded and heaped with praise. This year, 2012. the “School Library Journal” deemed it one of the “Top 100 Picture Books” of all time. What an astonishing feat for a book that could have ended up in a trash bin, forgotten and forlorn!

Numerous companies have fashioned Corduroy into a soft toy: Eden, Applause, Russ Berrie, Steiff, Yottoy, among others. And he has surfaced as a paper doll—paper bear?—coloring book protagonist, sticker icon, ornament, and many other cute representations. He even starred in an animated TV special in 1984 and then in his own series for two years in 2000 and 2001.

The “Corduroy” book was not a large one—only 28 pages in its original format. However, its reach was large and widespread. The heroine of the book, Lisa, is African American, and in 1968 that was pretty “radical” for a mainstream children’s undertaking. Her race was not an issue. It was a story about the love between a toy and a child, and many critics noted how groundbreaking it was to show this affinity between a teddy bear and a black child. (You see 1968 really does seem like a lifetime ago, a century ago!)

Who knows if that friendship might have prevented many publishers from taking on the project? If so, shame on them!

“Corduroy” has gotten the last laugh, and it is a righteous one. His covert nighttime stroll through the department store—not wanting to be spotted by the security guard—could have

inspired the PIXAR artists when they created “Toy Story,” which also delves into the secret life of toys.

More than that, “Corduroy” is a fantastic way to remember how important a toy—like a bear or a doll—can be to a child. We all see how toys are evolving into more and more flashing electronics and buzzing gadgets. Perhaps this season, it would be nice to make sure there is at least one new bear or doll under the Christmas tree (or “holiday tree” if you’re in Vermont). You’ll be able to forge a lifelong bond between the newly purchased plaything and the child in your life. And that is a gift that will never be forgotten.

In the words of Don Freeman, “Simplicity is the essence of children’s-book stories, not simple-mindedness.” The book “Corduroy” and its sequel 10 years later, “A Pocket for Corduroy,” prove that.

Here’s hoping that the new year is filled with simple joys, simple truths, and simple pleasures. These are often the ones that last forever.