

# WESTWOOD NEWZ

## The Real Story of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer...

A man named Robert L. May, depressed and broken hearted, stared out his drafty apartment window into the chilling December night. His 4-year-old daughter Barbara sat on his lap quietly sobbing. Bobs wife, Evelyn, was dying of cancer. Little Barbara couldn't understand why her mommy could never come home.

Barbara looked up into her dad's eyes and asked, "Why isn't Mommy just like everybody else's Mommy?" Bob's jaw tightened and his eyes welled with tears. Her question brought waves of grief, but also of anger. It had been the story of Bob's life. Life always had to be different for Bob. When he was a kid, Bob was often bullied by other boys. He was too little at the time to compete in sports. He was often called names he'd rather not remember. From childhood, Bob was different and never seemed to fit in.



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Bob, after completing college, married his loving wife Evelyn and was grateful to get a job as a copywriter at the Timothy Eaton Department Store, in Toronto, during the Great Depression. Then he was blessed with his little girl. But it was all short-lived. Evelyn's bout with cancer stripped them of all their savings and now Bob and his daughter were forced to live in a two-room apartment in the poorer area of Toronto. Evelyn died just days before Christmas in 1938.

Bob struggled to give hope to his child, for whom he couldn't even afford to buy a Christmas gift.

But if he couldn't buy a gift, he was determined to make one – a storybook!

Bob had created an animal character in his own mind and told the animal's story to little Barbara to give her comfort and hope. Again and again, Bob told the story, embellishing it more with each telling. Who was the character? What was the story all about?



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The story Bob May created was his own autobiography in fable form. The character he created was a misfit outcast like he was. The name of the character?

A little reindeer named Rudolph, with a big shiny nose.

Bob finished the book just in time to give it to his little girl on Christmas Day. But the story doesn't end there.

The general manager of the T. Eaton Store caught wind of the little storybook and offered Bob May a nominal fee to purchase the rights to print the book. They went on to print, "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" and distribute it to children visiting Santa Claus in their stores.

By 1946, Eaton's had printed and distributed more than six million copies of Rudolph. That same year, a major publisher wanted to purchase the rights from Eaton's to print an updated version of the book.

In an unprecedented gesture of kindness, the CEO of Eaton's returned all rights back to Bob May.

The book became a best seller.



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Many toy and marketing deals followed and Bob May, now remarried with a growing family, became wealthy from the story he created to comfort his grieving daughter. But the story doesn't end there either.

Bob's brother-in-law, Johnny Marks, made a song adaptation to Rudolph. Though the song was turned down by such popular vocalists as Bing Crosby and Dinah Shore, it was recorded by the singing cowboy, Gene Autry. "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" was released in 1949 and became a phenomenal success, selling more records than any other Christmas song, with the exception of "White Christmas."

The gift of love that Bob May created for his daughter so long ago kept on returning back to bless him again and again. And Bob May learned the lesson, just like his dear friend Rudolph, that being different isn't so bad. In fact, being different can be a blessing.

A true Canadian story



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*For pun lovers..... Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can make me smile...*

**A SIGN IN A SHOE REPAIR STORE IN VANCOUVER READS:**

**We will heel you**

**We will save your sole**

**We will even dye for you.**

**A SIGN ON A BLINDS AND CURTAIN TRUCK:**

**"Blind man driving."**

**Sign over a Gynecologist's Office:**

**"Dr. Jones, at your cervix."**

**In a Podiatrist's office:**

**"Time wounds all heels."**

**On a Septic Tank Truck :**

**Yesterday's Meals on Wheels**

**At an Optometrist's Office :**

**"If you don't see what you're looking for,  
You've come to the right place."**

**On a Plumber's truck :**

**"We repair what your husband fixed."**

**On another Plumber's truck :**

**"Don't sleep with a drip. Call your plumber."**

**At a Tire Shop in Milwaukee :**

**"Invite us to your next blowout."**

**On an Electrician's truck :**

**"Let us remove your shorts."**

**In a Non-smoking Area:**

**"If we see smoke, we will assume you are on fire and will take appropriate action."**

**On a Maternity Room door :**

**"Push. Push. Push."**

**At a Car Dealership :**

**"The best way to get back on your feet - miss a car payment."**

**Outside a Muffler Shop:**

**"No appointment necessary. We hear you coming.."**

**In a Veterinarian's waiting room :**

**"Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!"**

**At the Electric Company:**

**"We would be delighted if you send in your payment on time. However, if you don't, YOU will be de-lighted."**

**In a Restaurant window:**

**"Don't stand there and be hungry; come on in and get fed up."**

**In the front yard of a Funeral Home :**

**"Drive carefully. We'll wait."**

**At a Propane Filling Station:**

**"Thank Heaven for little grills."**

**In a Chicago Radiator Shop:**

**"Best place in town to take a leak."**

**And the best one for last...;**

**Sign on the back of another Septic Tank Truck:**

**"Caution - This Truck is full of Political Promises"**



## Chapter Seven

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Justin, a year or so later, was not able to get up one morning. We tried to lift him, but the only limb he had any control of was his tail. He thumped it on the floor when he saw us bending over him, but that was his only movement.

He was fourteen years old. A good age for a large dog. He had always been in very good health, and had enjoyed his life with us traveling to all kinds of new places, and above all the ranch. He followed Roy on the tractor as he traversed the fields, tirelessly, even when it was hot. He was always very well behaved, and I can't remember ever hearing him bark. Dear dog. So painful to realize that the day had finally come, when his life was ending.

I tried to restrain the tears, but they came anyway. I kissed him Goodbye, and watched sadly as Roy drove away with him, down to the vet to let him go.

He buried him on a high spot near the gully with a view all across the valley. Somehow, we got through the day. We always know these days will come, but that doesn't make it any the less hard. Get another one, people say. And a couple of days later, we did.

A notice on the local radio station of two Border collie cross puppies free to good home had us on the road to Armstrong. And we came home with one rather beidered little girl who did like sitting on my lap. Sylvie was a good name for her, too.

Sylvie proved very easy to train, which was good as she did need some confidence. We always insisted on obedience in our dogs, and collie breeds generally excelled. It was good for them too, because they always knew what was expected of them, and this gave them confidence.

So, a couple of years later, I was walking back to the cottage from the Upper Mill site while Roy went on up the 'Vauxhall' road - so called because there was the body of an old Vauxhall car in the brush beside it. He had planted alfalfa along it and was moving sprinklers several times a day.

Sylvie went with him, so when I heard something crashing through the brush up above me on the top of the cutbank that edged the 'main' road, I was ready to say "Go with Daddy."

It was not Sylvie who came flying out of the brush above me, but a very large, shaggy, brown bear.

It was practically on top of me. I froze, paralyzed by shock.

I don't know if it saw me or not. Perhaps it did, and I was just a small obstacle in its path that it did somehow avoid. It was so close that I could easily have grabbed a handful of quite long, shaggy brown hair.

Just as well I was too rigid to move, couldn't have snatched a bunch of its coat as it flew by. It might not have appreciated something grabbing its hair, least of all a human. And I have heard that brown bears are more dangerous than black.

In a flash it was by me and over the little bit of fence

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between the road and the creek, and had hurtled down the bank, over the water, and was gone downstream and out of sight.

Roy had not even seen it, nor did Sylvie, and it must have been running away from them, and the two 'roads' at this point were quite close. Anyway, we were very relieved. And also that we never saw it again.

It was probably in the 'neighborhood', but at least it did seem to have been just as afraid of us as we would have been of it had it stood up to us.

The best close encounter was several years later.

We were living in the house and I was walking back there, crossing the big alfalfa field with Sylvie. We were staying off the road that still had a tendency to be muddy, and we were heading for the gully, when from it, going the other way, came a big black Mama bear and two happy cubs.

I froze. Sylvie too. She uttered a few low growls, but quietened immediately when I whispered, "Shysh."

The mother kept glancing at us, but continued on her way. She knew we were there, but as long as we didn't move and made no sound, and were not between her and her cubs, she did not seem to worry. And they really were quite a sight. I did enjoy seeing them. It was the only time I saw a bear family. They were about forty feet away from us. Definitely close enough.

There were other encounters over time, mostly just sightings. Usually unexpected. One was a bear up in a tree behind the car port when I went out of the house one morning. That one I did make sure to avoid.

It came clambering down from the tree as soon as it saw me. I took refuge in the house, and watched it hastily head for the ravine as soon as it was on the ground. Good.

In our second year in the cottage, we had a very different packrat experience.

Roy had fixed up the little shed down behind the cottage, beside one of the huge birches that was at the foot of the old road leading to it. It accommodated two bales of hay and a big metal grain bin.

I happened to be walking by it one afternoon, and something made me stop and look inside.

There was a little feed in the bottom, and four baby packrats looked up at me with very bright shiny black eyes,

Irresistible!

There was a pile of old window screens stacked behind the chicken house. In a very short time I had constructed a roomy cage beneath the hazel trees above the creek, and just behind



the cottage.

I found a box that would accommodate them all, made a doorway in the front, and put a lot of soft, wooly stuff into it and set it right at the back of the cage.

Four little foil tart pans filled with cornflakes - we went through a lot of those. Very useful things. I set one in each corner, and wired a jar of water to the mesh below where there was a gap in the screening. Another panel covered it, and also served as an access door. A piece of heavy black plastic went over the rear part and kept it dry. I did shortly get a proper water bottle, that they soon learned to drink out of.

Four trips across the lawn with a baby in a sealer jar soon had them all in what I hoped would be a happy home.

In no time they were all busy rearranging the pans of food into a different corner, each to his liking. They never could agree.

It was very interesting, watching them. What prompted them to constantly move the dishes? No rhyme or reason that I could see. And somehow, through all this, the cornflakes did get eaten, even if mostly off the ground.

"Oh! Oh!" said Roy, coming around the corner with the mail. "Now what have you got?"

"Helter, Skelter, Scamper and Scratch," I said. Names just came out of the blue.

"Look like packrats to me."

"Indeed they are. Babies. Aren't they cute?"

"And for how long are they going to be cute little babies?"

"I have no idea. I've never seen a grown one. But we'll know," I went on, "When they are big enough to turn back into the wild."

"You think so?"

"Yes. Don't they look a lot like squirrels?"

"And how do you tell them apart?"

"Does it matter?"

Keeping them 'wild' meant we never handled them. It was hard connecting 'wild' with the Christmas decorations festooning the shed. But we did what we could. We fed them a wide variety of leaves, stems, carrots, nuts, grains, even flowers. They ate everything. And they grew.

Bagheera was fascinated by them, and they with him. It was quite a common sight to see him with his claws hooked into the cage mesh, and a packrat busily trimming his toe nails.

Sheba wouldn't go near them. A reminder of the 'monster' in the cottage? But they did not squeak - never made a sound, in fact.

Minou, feeling her age, preferred to sit in the sun on the deck, and sleep.

One afternoon, I had just walked by the cage, when a strange sound made me turn. There, spread all over it, was a huge brown

hawk. Fierce yellow eyes glar<sup>d</sup> at me. I couldn't see the packrats for feathers. These unexpected encounters always made me freeze. This bird, with wings spread right out over the cage, seemed enormous. Maybe it was not a hawk, but an eagle. And it was no more than four feet away from me.

I did manage to glare right back, And then it suddely lifted off and soared away between the trees and was gone.

The packrats were not in the least alarmed. That, I thought, was not good. But how could I teach them to hide from such predators? Would worry about that later.

Came the fall and we discussed what we should do. The cage was way too big to have inside the ho<sup>u</sup>se, and no space to put it, anyway. We had said we would release them into the wild when summer was over. And besides - they had a very distinctive odour that would not be welcome inside our home. We did move the cage regularly to give them a clean run. And that had worked quite well.

Roy said he would take the pickup and go and find a good place to take them, WHich he did. Up the creek on the Vauxhall field side, was part of the trunk of large old fallen tree. It looked like the butt end of a very big cedar. There was a roomy enough hollow underneath that would cover most of the cage. Easy access to water; lots of undergrowth around, thick tree branches overhea for cover - it looked just about perfect. At least, we hoped so.

A little lump in my throat as we loaded the cage into the back of the pickup. We also took a large bucket of food to make sure they didn't go hungry, and drove them up the Vauxhall road.

We had to do a little scraping to get the cage well under the log, but in it did go. We left the front panel slightly ajar so they could get back in again, and the food bucket well to the back. All seemed in order, and they were looking around curiously so we drove a short distance, and then stopped so we could watch them and see what they did.

In and out of the cage, climb on some of the surrounding branches, no way could we determine which was who. They were not paying any attention to the food, seeming to be more interested in some of the growing things that they took some nibbles of.

At last we left them. I did keep wondering how they were, and what they were doing. But we did not go and disturb them.

On the second day my worrying began. Had we done the right thing? Our good intention of releasing them to the wild could have been wrong. Instead, we had abandoned them to the wilderness. Just because they looked like squirrels didn't necessarily mean they lived like them. Up in trees, and in dreys for the winter. And coming out on fine days to recover nuts they had stored under the cover of fallen leaves and soft earth. I didn't think so. Then how? What did they do?

"You worry too much," Roy said when I told him of my concerns. I know I did. He was often telling me so. But I couldn't stop asking myself. What do they do?

The question was answered on the third day. They all came home.

Roy saw the first one in the woodshed. "Helter," he said, that being the first one in the little rhyme. He came to Roy, presumably looking for food. Roy dropped a handful of chicken feed on the ground. That was gratefully received. Then Skelter and Scamper emerged from under the chicken house and happily joined the party. That left Scratch.

He showed up when I went out into the porch.

I can't remember now which dog lived in the porch. Whether it was still Justin, or SYLVIE. He or she was interested in something behind the freezer. And when I spoke to him or her, out came Scratch.

I popped back into the house and grabbed a carrot and a sealer jar. Stupid notion! I realized as soon as I tempted Scratch with the carrot. A sealer jar? How on earth would I get him to go into that? And even if I did, where, then, would I put him? The carrot was then yanked out of my hand and carried happily in behind the freezer.

We fed them all winter. They all moved to what was probably a cosy place under the chicken house. The hens didn't seem to mind them being there. Although they did have to make sure they got their share of the food.

In the spring the packrats gradually disappeared. Had they gone looking for new homes and mates? We hoped so, and that they had not fallen to a roaming predator.

We never saw any coyotes near the cottage. Up on the pasture we did a couple of times. Once they invited Justin to come and 'play' with them. He was curious, even took a few tentative steps towards them. "NO!" Always obedient, he complied.

Coyotes, we had heard, coaxed dogs to come and 'play'. It was an invitation to certain death. No go, Justin. The good dog stayed.

Note: The dog at the time of the packrats must have been Sylvie. This was so many years ago, a lot of the memories are a bit hazy. I am astounded that I am remembering as many as I can - with a lot of unfilled gaps.

That I am not a typist is very evident. Please excuse the Whiteout and errors missed. Please bear with me. There are a few more stories to come. One of them is an unforgettable one for us. Stay 'tuned'.

Anthea



