



## Straight to the Heart:

### The story behind *One True Bear* and how violent young boys can mature into compassionate heroes

by Ted Dewan

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*One True Bear* is on Youtube ("One True Bear")

**KEY WORDS:** picture books, boy violence, heroes, developing empathy in boys

The story of *One True Bear* haunted me for years, and then it took three years to actually complete. An early 3-page pictureless draft of the text for *One True Bear* was lying on my desk. One day, our cleaning lady picked it up and read it. Minutes later, she was in tears as she laid it back on the desk. At first, she felt uncomfortable admitting she had peeped at the story, but eventually, she told what happened. Others who read the story had the same strong reaction.



**TED DEWAN** is an Oxford-based American-born author/illustrator with nearly 20 years of experience in the media. He can contribute his perspective on issues ranging from childhood

consumerism and imagination, re-examining parent-toddler relationships, road justice, and is a strongly outspoken critic of 'elth-n-safety' culture's intrusion into children's freedoms. His most recent book, *One True Bear*, covers the issues of boy violence and the roots of heroism. He also appears as an expert on the work of Dr Seuss.

#### BOOKS AND AWARDS

- Creator of the *Crispin the Pig* picture book series (a satire on childhood consumerism)
- Creator of cult *Bing Bunny* series for toddlers (currently in development for television)
- Blue Peter and Mother Goose Award winner
- Shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Award
- Collaborator with renowned US child psychologist Dr Michael Thompson, author of *Raising Cain*.
- Illustrator, *QI Book of Animal Ignorance*
- Freelance illustrator in nearly all British newspapers

#### PUBLIC ART/ROAD JUSTICE

Controversial public installation artist, work includes:

*Cyclemas Tree*: a Christmas tree made of old bicycles

*Luminox*: an enormous fire installation featuring a 70-foot fiery bamboo pendulum tower in Oxford centre in 2007

*The Roadwitch Trial*: series of cheeky road-justice campaigns  
Ted Dewan's head was offered to a museum in Oxford for shrinking after death for a permanent 'artist's residency'.

#### TV, RADIO, OTHER MEDIA APPEARANCES

*Front Row* (BBC R4), *South Today* (BBC TV), regular guest host for *Bill Heine Show* (Radio Oxford), *In Tune* (BBC R3) 5 *O'Clock Show with Richard Hammond* (C5), *BBC News Online*.  
Featured in *Harpers*, *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*.  
Presents illustrated talks at conferences around the world.

#### ABOUT THE BOOK *ONE TRUE BEAR*

*One True Bear* follows doughty Darcy Brewster, the Bear Force's newest cub teddy bear. He volunteers for a mission where other teddies failed. The mission is to become "One True Bear" for Damian, a difficult boy. The accolade is the highest, most esteemed achievement in the Bear Force. But Damian presents a challenge unlike anyone the Bear Force has dealt with before. Does Darcy have the strength of heart and the right stuffing, or could he share the fate of his predecessors and end up destroyed? Can he still be useful for Damian when he grows up to be a rescue worker?

#### The *Too Dangerous Book for Boys*

Publishers who saw the manuscript loved the story, but it worried them. It was gritty stuff; boy-violence, sacrifice, the threat of trauma, heroism, courage--not the usual stuff of a bedtime picture book. So they turned it down. But one publisher decided to take on *One True Bear*. I was told the parents amongst the editors and acquisitions team at Orchard Books all just happened to have boys. Editor Kate Burns and Designer Tim Rose ensured *One True Bear* retained its power and grittiness throughout development.

#### Never too young for a heartbreak

I've always been drawn to plucky and heartrending stories. Albert Lamorisse 1956 film *Le Ballon Rouge*, the story of an ill-fated balloon that befriends a boy, was screened at my nursery school three years in a row. It broke my heart every time. Around the age of nine, I was spellbound by the irony and bittersweet sacrifice that characterised Oscar Wilde's stories for children, specifically *The Nightingale and the Rose* and *The Happy Prince*, and Hans Andersen's *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*. These stories were at once muscular and sweet, gritty and tender, speaking of elemental truths in a simple, powerful way, with no emotional holds barred for their young audiences. And rightfully so; the exquisite heartbreak is what makes these kinds of stories compelling. They're the kinds of stories I hope to tell to a generation of kids who are the most cossetted kids in history.

#### 8-year-old boy's drawings 'too alarming to publish'

Damian's drawings within the story needed to be real kid drawings to be credible. They were essential clues to Damian's character. Dozens of kids from England and America contributed drawings for the book. I was interested in the out-of-school drawings boys do for themselves; the ones that disturb parents and alarm teachers--the material parents DON'T put up on the fridge. So the kids sent me flamboyant scenes of disasters, war, car crashes, fires, torture, and worse. Some drawings never made it to publication; they were just too nasty to appear in a picture book, even though they were created by ordinary kids the same age as Damian. So far as I know, this is the first time kid's drawings like this have appeared in a picture book.

#### Are 'virtues' cool again?

We seem to be entering an age where 'virtue' is cool again. I hope Darcy Brewster's virtues make an impression on this upcoming generation, and that the story of *One True Bear* goes straight to the heart.