

# MY ONE AND ONLY TURTLE

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I THINK IT must have been around the time I was nine years old, no maybe eight. Let's say eight years of age. All I wanted in the world was a turtle. There was a good collection of them in our local department store. Convincing my mother of my need was easier than expected and to my absolute delight she also bought a fancy plastic turtle island for him to live in. It was great.

My idea was to make the little amphibian a guest at school. Our teacher Mrs Gibson encouraged us to bring in stuff we loved and display it on a special "Show and Tell" shelf in the classroom. She had her own little pet, a guinea pig, housed nicely on the coloured counter. It was obvious to me that my one and only pet could share that place of honor too.

The turtle was given all the proper respect a group of eight year olds could muster. There was a daily rhythm attending to its' food and water. When the bell rang and we were allowed into our morning class I smartly cleaned, feed and had quality time with him. He'd crawl along the counter, careening his way around an obstacle course I'd make out of pine cones and the

brown tops of bulrushes. There were kisses and gentle pats his on his head. I'd make up songs about a little turtle that could do magic. After school Mrs. Gibson tended to her pet but I don't know what kind of guinea pig games she played.

One morning the turtle was no longer on his island. It seemed impossible for him to vanish. There was no stone close enough to the plastic walls for him to climb over.

I looked around the counter. Strangely enough the guinea pig cage was open. Peering inside I saw the furry little pig, a tiny green claw and bit of pearly shell among the cedar shavings.

Obviously someone had not properly closed the latch on the door after cleaning the enclosure. The pig ravaged my poor defenseless pet. It defiled the little turtle. Grabbed it, kicking and screaming from its' home. Tore it apart and ate it.

Ghastly to think about really, an eight year old could get quite upset. I'm upset thinking about it right now, though as a child I remembered being more fascinated than horrified. That year I had an interest in dead things. A month or two prior I carried a fish head, a trout I believe, into

class because I discovered the nerve endings at the back of severed head opened the fish's mouth. This was incredible to me but not so exciting for others. I was not allowed to keep the fish head on the "Show and Tell" table at school and my mother wouldn't let it back into the house so for a day or so, the head lived under a bush between the school and our home, until maggots discovered how extraordinary it was as well.

I quietly called Mrs Gibbons over to the counter and pointed to the pig's cage. She looked in and understood perfectly. Gently she placed the plastic turtle island behind a stack of books, out of sight and securely locked the guinea pig's door. I think she apologized. I really don't remember but she was a good teacher so I'm sure she must of. There was no fuss made. No tears.

It was a very successful school year for me. A problem would come up on the board that I couldn't solve, I'd think of my one and only turtle stare at the guinea pig cage, sigh in a weary way that only eight years can do and presto, no questions asked.