

Reach for the Sky: Forgotten toys remembered

Where is that toy you used to play with? **Max Ryan** takes his family back in time to rediscover the old and forgotten toys from their childhood.

Recently I had my young cousins over to visit. To keep them occupied I emptied a box of my old toys onto the floor. They played with them for about 20 minutes before returning to their iPad screens. I, needless to say, was left with the clean-

up job. Action figures, replica guns and toy cars; my bedroom floor looked like some kind of bizarre battlefield. Whilst I was putting the toys back in their box I was reminded of the scene from Toy Story 3 where Andy's Toys are played with by children for

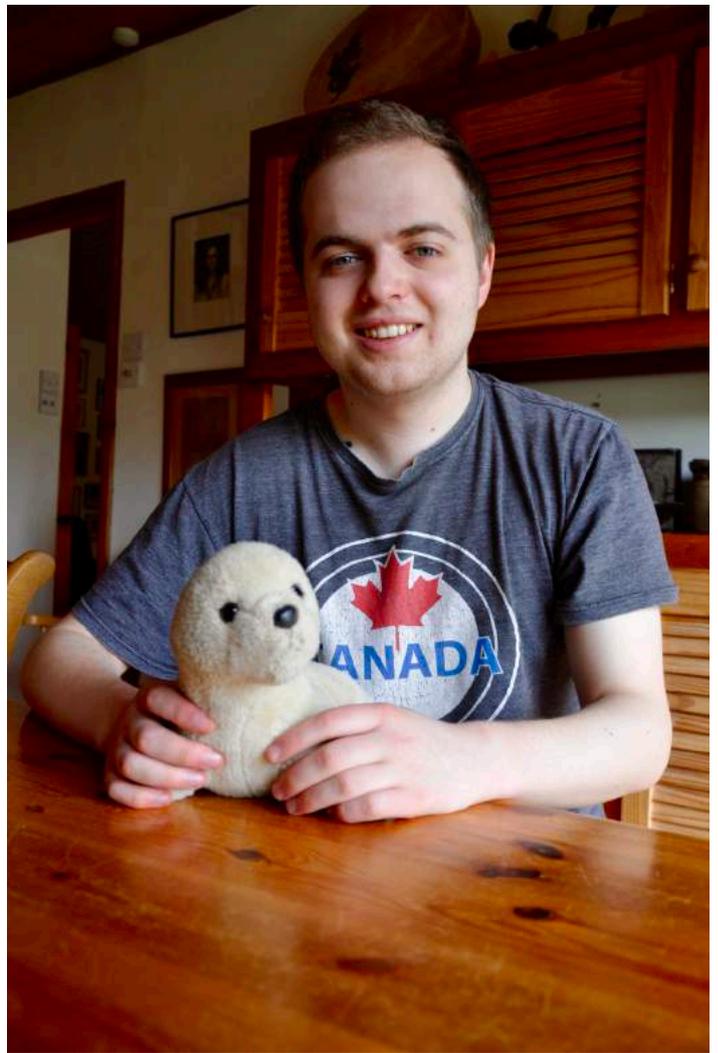
the first time in years. Battered and bruised, they realise that even toys get too old to be played with. Later I asked my family to dig out their favourite childhood toy starting with my mother, Dorothy, who told me the story of her soft toy, 'Donkey'.



Dorothy and her 'Donkey'

My older sister Trisha had a soft donkey pyjama case which she lost one day. Actually I think it was 'tidied' away in the attic by our mother. This particular Christmas morning we were opening our presents, and Trisha got a replacement orange donkey and I got a blue one. I looked away for a second and when I looked back my donkey had been replaced by the orange one. Trisha denied this but I knew her favourite colour was blue. Anyway, I took him to bed for my entire childhood but decades later day, My eldest son Jack looked at him and said, 'He isn't a donkey at all, he's a rabbit!'

We had this tradition in our house growing up that on my brother's birthday I would get a small gift and he would get something small on my birthday as well. I think it was to avoid any jealousy between us. Anyway, on my brother's birthday one year my parents got me this soft toy seal. I remember my dad telling me that he picked this one over all of the other 'identical' seals because he had expression in his eyes. I imaginatively named him Seal and spent a number of years squeezing him tightly as I slept until it became 'uncool' to do so. Every day after I came home from school, my mum would have made my bed. She would tuck Seal under the covers in such a way that only his face would be visible, peeping out at me. It was always a lovely welcome home. Even though his whiskers have been worn away, his expression has never changed.



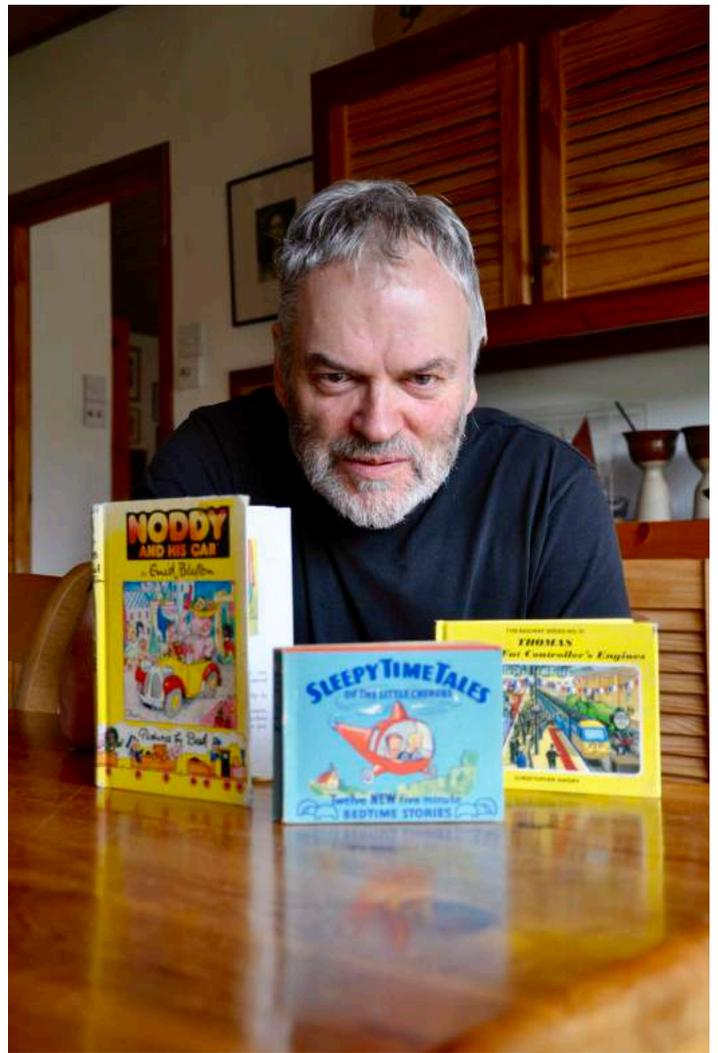
Myself and seal



This is a model Warhammer Mumakil, a kind of giant elephant from the Lord of the Rings universe. I was mad into painting Warhammer models for about a year or two, it was all I ever did in my spare time. I absolutely loved the Lord of the Rings books and films and I was inspired by the Mumakil so being able to get a model, paint it and build it from scratch was a great experience. I also painted entire Moria Goblin and Urakai armies. I always went for the bad guys for some reason. But this has to be my favourite, because what fan of the films doesn't remember the moment the Mumakil appear for the first time? I remember it anyway. I spent all of Christmas day 2005 painting this.

Left: Jack and his model Mumakil

When I was about three, the house we lived in was so small that I slept in what was known as the blue bed, a small bed in my parents' room. And Sleepy Time Tales of the Little Cherubs were the first books I can recall having. When I was about four and a half I graduated to Noddy and his Car, by Enid Blyton. When I hit five and was no longer sleeping in the blue bed I moved onto Thomas the Tank Engine. But reading Sleepy Time Tales was one of my best early memories.



Right: Jonathan and his books

I vividly remember this piggy bank from childhood. My dad convinced me that it was a magic pig, and somehow managed to sneak gummy bears into it when I wasn't looking. I would then get to open the piggy bank and discover the sweets inside.



Lucie and her magic pig

I think my dad tried to tie the magic in with me getting my homework done or doing chores or something. I distinctly remember that the gummy bears never came for free and would only appear after I had done whatever my good deed was for the day. But what an incentive, and I totally believed in the pig's magic. I kind of still do.