

A Portion of
"BEING GOOD TO BEARS"

From "Being Good to Bears" by Enos A. Mills

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On the slope of Long's Peak one June morning I came upon two tiny grizzly bear cubs. Each was about the size of a cottontail rabbit — a lively little ball of fur, dark gray, almost black, in color.

Knowing that their mother had recently been killed, I thought I would capture them and bring them up properly. But they did not want to be brought up properly! We had a lively chase, dodging among the bowlders and trees. Cornering them at last among the fallen logs, I grabbed one. He did the same to me. His teeth were as sharp as needles and almost as sharp were his lively claws. It was some time before I could tear myself loose. He kept a mouthful of my trousers. At last I deposited the fighting little fellow in the bottom of the sack. The other cub scratched and chewed me up and tore my clothes; but I forced it also into the sack. Two grizzly bears in the same sack! any one should have known better!

I started to conduct them personally to my cabin, two miles away. In descending a steep moraine with the sack over my shoulder I slipped and shook the sack more than any sack should be shaken that contained two bears. Of course, they started to fight. One bit through the sack and bit the wrong bear. I finally reached my cabin with a long pole over my shoulder. Tied to the south end of the pole was a sack full of grizzly bears.

I shook the cubs out of the sack in front of a basin of milk and thrust their faces deeply into it. Not having eaten for three days, they were "as hungry as

bears” and needed no explanation concerning the milk. They had eager, cunning little faces, and were pets before sundown. In twenty-four hours Jenny knew that her name was Jenny, and Johnny that his was Johnny. After a few days they followed me about with fondness and loyalty.

These bears responded to kind treatment and were of cheerful disposition. I made it a point never to annoy or tease them. The grizzly bear is an exceedingly sensitive animal, and annoyances or cruelty make him cross. Once in addressing an audience concerning wild life I made the statement that bears would be good to us if we were good to them. A small boy instantly asked, “What do you do to be good to bears?” The health and the temper of bears, as well as of people, are easily ruined by improper food.

Young bear cubs are the most wide-awake and observing little people that I know of. Never have I seen a horse or dog who understood as readily or learned as rapidly as these two bears. One day I offered Johnny a saucer of milk. He was impatient to get it. Reaching up, he succeeded in spilling it, but he licked the saucer with satisfaction. On the second try he spilled only part of the milk. On the third trial he clasped the saucer deftly in his two fore paws, lifted it upwards, turned his head back and poured the milk into his mouth.

When Johnny and Jenny were growing up, it seemed as if nothing unusual escaped them. A bright button, a flash of a ring, a white handkerchief, or an unusual movement or sound instantly caught their attention. They concentrated on each new object and endeavored to find out what it was. Having satisfied their curiosity or obtained full information about it, the next instant they were ready to concentrate on something else. But they remembered on second appearance anything which had especially interested them at any time. They learned through careful observation.

For a time they were not chained and had the freedom of the yard. Never have I seen two young animals more intense, more playful, or more energetic. They played alone, they mauled each other by the hour, and occasionally they

scrapped. Sometimes we ran foot-races. From a scratch upon the ground, at the word "go," we would race down hill about one hundred and fifty yards. They were eager for these races and always ready to line up with me. They were so speedy that in every race they merrily turned around at least twice to see if I was coming, and in those days I was not slow.

Johnny and Jenny enjoyed playing with people, with any one who did not annoy them. Among the strangers who came was a man who made friends at once and had a good romp. When he left them and went to lunch, Johnny and Jenny followed and lay down near the door where he had disappeared. As he came out, they rose up and started another romp.

To attract my attention or to ask for something to eat, Johnny or Jenny would stand on hind legs and hold out fore paws like an orator. If I came around the corner of the house a quarter of a mile away, they instantly stood on tiptoe and gesticulated with enthusiasm. They were the life of my home, and occasionally almost the death of it.

It was almost impossible to get these cubs filled up. They ate everything,—scraps from the table, rhubarb, dandelions, bitter sage, and bark,—but they were especially fond of apples. If I approached with meat and honey upon a plate but with apples or turnips in my pockets, they would ignore the plate and, clinching me, thrust their noses into my pockets to find the promised treat.

One August evening I brought in a cluster of wild raspberries for Johnny and Jenny. While still more than a hundred feet from the cabin, both bears leaped to their feet, scented the air, and came racing to meet me with more than their ordinary enthusiasm. No child of frontier parents could have shown more interested in a candy package on the father's return from the city than did Johnny and Jenny in those berries.

A number of people were waiting in my cabin to see me. The little bears and I crowded in. I handed Jenny a berry-laden spray, and then one to Johnny,

alternating until they were equally divided. Standing erect, each held the cluster under the left forearm by pressing it against the chest. When browsing in a raspberry-patch bears commonly bite off the tops of the canes together with the leaves and the berries. Johnny and Jenny ate more daintily. One berry was plucked off at a time with two front claws and dropped into the mouth. As one berry followed another, the lips were smacked, and the face and every movement made expressed immense satisfaction at the taste.

Every one crowded close to watch the performance. In the jostling one of the berry-laden canes fell to the floor. Both little bears grabbed for it at the same instant. They butted heads, lost their temper, and began to fight over it. I grabbed them by the collars and shook them.

“Why, Johnny and Jenny,” I said, “why do you do this? And such awful manners when we have company! What shall I do with you?”

They instantly stopped quarreling and even forgot the berries. For several seconds the little bears were embarrassed beyond all measure. They simply stared at the floor. Then suddenly each appeared to have the same idea. Standing erect, facing each other, they put fore paws on each other’s shoulders, and went “Ungh, ah, oooo.” Plainly they were very sorry that they had misbehaved.

The manner in which these cubs received the berries, the fact that the first time they saw mushrooms they scented them at some distance and raced for them, also that on other occasions they went out of their way to get a plant ordinarily liked by the grizzly, led me to think that they inherited a taste for a number of things that grizzlies commonly eat.

One day we were out walking, when we came upon an army of ants. Without the least hesitation Johnny and Jenny followed along the line, licking them up. Upon reaching the stone behind which the ants were disappearing, Johnny thrust one fore claw under it and flung it aside. I was astonished at his strength.

I tried not to teach Johnny or Jenny any trick, but encouraged them to develop any original stunt or individuality of their own. One day Jenny was attracted by a big green fly that alighted on Johnny. She struck at it; the fly relighted and she struck again. With a little effort I succeeded in getting the bears to shoo flies off each other, and sometimes they were both busy at the same time. It made a comical show, especially when one was lazily lying down and the other was shooing with eagerness and solemnity.

Another activity I encouraged was the bear's habit of holding the other around the neck with one fore paw and rubbing or scratching the back of the bear's head with his other paw. In a short time both bears, while facing each other, would go through the performance at the same time.

Like other children Johnny and Jenny were fond of water and spend much time rolling and wading in the brook by their shed. This was a play they enjoyed. I showed interest in having them roll and splash in the liveliest manner possible.

Johnny seemed unusually interested in what I was doing one day and imitated in succession a number of my performances. I had dropped a penny on the floor, and then, stooping over, touched it with the end of one finger and moved it rapidly about. He rose on his hind feet, held up one claw, then, stooping, put this upon the penny and moved it rapidly about. Blowing the yolk out of an egg, I held up the empty shell before him, and then proceeded to move it rapidly about with the point of one finger. After licking the shell Johnny imitated my every act without crushing the shell.

While Jenny was asleep on the grass, I placed a large umbrella over her. When she opened her eyes, she at once commenced a quiet though frightened study of the strange thing. She closed one eye, turned her head to one side, and looked up into it; then, turning her head, closed the other eye for a look. A sudden puff of wind gave life to the umbrella and this in turn to Jenny. She made a desperate dash to escape the mysterious monster. The wind whirled the umbrella before her and she landed in it. Wrecking the umbrella, she fled in

terror, bellowing with every jump. It took more than an hour to explain matters and assure Jenny that I had not been playing any tricks.

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