



Otto: The Autobiography of a Teddy Bear

By Tomi Ungerer

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This is an autobiographical tale of a teddy bear named Otto. Otto is a German-born teddy bear. His first memories are of being stitched together and being given to David, a Jewish boy living in Germany before WWII. David and his best-friend Oskar always play with Otto, using him for pranks, games and even teaching him to type on a typewriter. Life is a lot of fun for the Otto. However, one day, David starts to wear a yellow star on his jacket. He and his parents are soon carted away by men in leather coats and uniforms. David decides to give his dear teddy bear to Oskar. Many lonely days pass for Oskar and Otto. But even gloomier days soon arrive when Oskar's father is drafted into the army and the bombings start. One day, a sudden explosion sends Otto flying through the air and into the middle of a raging battle-field. The teddy bear is spotted by a soldier, but the moment the soldier picks Otto up, they are both shot through the chest. Otto and the soldier, an American G.I., are taken away to a hospital. In hospital, the soldier keeps Otto by his side. When he recovers, he pins a medal on Otto's chest, saying that Otto saved his life, taking the brunt of the bullet. The story makes papers and Otto becomes a mascot of the soldier's regiment. The teddy bear is then taken to America and is given to a sweet girl called Jasmin, the soldier's daughter. But Otto's new home and happiness is once again brutally ended when he is snatched away by mean and violent street urchins, who hit and trample on him and throw him into a bin. Otto is then picked up by an antiques dealer and taken to his shop. Years and years go by, until one rainy evening, when a bulky man stops and carefully examines the shop window. The man recognizes the bear instantly buys him. It is Oskar, Otto's old friend. The story of Oskar, a German tourist and survivor of the war finding his teddy bear in America soon makes the papers. And the day after Otto's picture appears in the paper, Oskar's telephone rings: it is his old friend David. And so, the three friends finally reunite, sharing the sorrows and pains of war and living a peaceful and happy life together. Otto now keeps himself busy, typing the story of his life on David's typewriter. Children will become attached to this loving, innocent protagonist, and will naturally be interested in his life story. Tomi Ungerer deals with one of the darkest chapters of history and pulls off the challenge admirably. This tale will prompt reflection and important questions without causing undue fear.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Gr 1-4-A teddy bear recounts his creation in Germany before World War II, his arrival as a birthday present for a young Jewish boy, and his time with David and David's friend, Oskar. When authorities force David to wear a yellow star and transport him and others away, Otto stays behind with Oskar. An African-American G.I. finds the bear after a bomb blast, a bullet hits them both, and because the bear absorbs the brunt of the blast, he saves the soldier's life. Otto becomes the playmate of the soldier's daughter until he is mauled by street boys, lands in a garbage pail, and eventually in an antique shop. From there the story takes an even more surprising and satisfying twist as Otto is reunited with his childhood friends. Ungerer's large watercolors become dark and shadow-filled as the Jews are taken away, people hide in bomb shelters, and bombs explode in the city. In a particularly realistic spread, one soldier lies slumped over a tank in the distance while, in the foreground, readers see a prostrate soldier clutching his bleeding chest, another one trapped under rubble, and a bodiless outstretched arm. While the book touches on some difficult subjects, the story is told from the point of view of the bear, which makes discussion a bit easier for younger children. Otto appears scarred and battle-worn on the cover but is a survivor nonetheless, and his telling is matter-of-fact and unsentimental. A poignant and uplifting story.-Marianne Saccardi, formerly at Norwalk Community College, CT (c) Copyright 2010. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

From Booklist

Starred Review With the effortless touch of a true master, Ungerer takes the coziest symbol of childhood—the teddy bear—and transforms it into a battered but proud emblem of the perseverance of innocents. Receiving its first English publication (it was published in French in 1999), the book begins with Otto looking ragged on a shelf: "I knew I was old when I found myself on display in the window of an antique store." Then it's back to 1930s Germany and the agony of birth: a workshop sewer attaching Otto's button eyes. Soon Otto is gifted to David, and the two spend many a happy day pulling pranks with David's pal, Oskar. But that yellow star David wears—with pride, you can tell by the line of his back—foreshadows decades of turmoil: Otto passed off to Oskar when David is trucked away; Otto used by a soldier to stem a bloody wound; Otto's subsequent fame, abduction, and garbage-can salvation. It's potent material. And the battlefield spread is scary—dead soldiers, an arm poking from the rubble. Ungerer plays it straight with his watercolors, rarely accentuating, but never pulling back, either. Even the ending, in which Otto's original owner finds him, is subdued, with Otto finally taking his place at a typewriter, writing this story, and stating, with characteristic nonchalance, "Here it is." Grades 1-3. --Daniel Kraus

Review

"The first broad release of a title originally published regionally and overseas in 1999, this simply told, deeply affecting tale follows a teddy's passage from hand to hand through war and other troubles. First given to David, a German child who passes it to his close friend Oskar when he and his Jewish family are taken away, the bear is picked from a pile of bomb rubble by an African-American GI. In the States it becomes a girl's prized companion until snatched by neighborhood ruffians and cast into the trash. Rescued, it then spends many years in the window of an antiques store until a passerby?none other than a now-elderly Oskar?recognizes a distinctive ink stain on its head and rushes in to buy it. This sparks a newspaper story, which leads to a stunning phone call and the joyful reunion of bear, Oskar and David. Subtle changes of facial expression in Ungerer's watercolor art give the bear?stained, battered and with a clumsily repaired bullet hole?plenty of character, and there's nary a trace of sentimentality in the matter-of-fact narrative. (Picture book. 6-8)"?Kirkus Review

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kyle Guthrie:

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Jose German:

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