

In an imaginary world of magicians and sorcerers, there lived a copious number of strange characters, foes and beasts. Non more than 'Dwain' the dragon. He lived alone in his cave on the far side of the forest which separated the mountains from the local village. Dwain had never seen another creature like himself or for that matter, a human being, since he had left home, many, many years before. Dwain believed he was approximately 50 years old. One of his oldest memories was his mother taking him to the edge of the forest to show him the 'village' and its population of things called 'humans'. His mum warned...'stay away from humanity'.

He woke early one day with a rumbling tummy and decided to venture into the forest to find something fresh to eat. Maybe a large rabbit or a few rats, he wasn't that fussy, Dwain was just 'hangry'. Whilst he was out searching the forest, he came across a small baby toddler who appeared to be lost and alone. Dwain was shocked and stunned as from his point of view, it had been so long since he had seen another living beast or human, let alone a baby child. He watched the child for a while and licked his lips. He could taste the gourmet breakfast right there. The saliva and juices in Dwain's mouth started to overflow and seep through his enormous, sharpened teeth.

The sun still hadn't risen fully so the forest was still quite dark, spooky and no doubt scary for the toddler. There was a light breeze and all you could hear was the sound of the branches of the trees creaking and the leaves rustling. Dwain sits and waits and watches. He's a hunter waiting for the right moment to strike as the Toddler crawls towards the forest edge.

The toddler, who has now been clearly abandoned lets out a deafening scream and starts to bawl his eyes out. Tears are running down his little red cheeks. Dwain is startled and falls backwards and lands in a pile of leaves. He puts his taloned clawed paws over his large scaly pointed ears to dampen the toddlers' cries. The child is crying and is clearly distressed. But as soon as he sees Dwain peering at him through those beady red and orange eyes he stops crying.

The toddler can identify that the beast in front of him is a dragon. He had only seen one in his bedtime story books. He had no other knowledge of them. Dwain has lost his appetite for breakfast and is now more fascinated about this little boy but doesn't know what to do. In his heart, he knows that he cannot leave the toddler in the forest to fend for himself as the wolves will undoubtedly eat him. Dwain also fears that maybe the humans are out looking for the child, and therefore, Dwain could be in danger himself and doesn't want to be found by the humans.

Dwain ponders for a while and then does the opposite to all of his natural dragon traits and instincts. He doesn't eat the boy or leave him to look after himself. Dwain chooses to take the child back to his cave in the mountains and look after him. Dwain carefully wipes away the boys' tears with the back of his fur lined taloned clawed paws. The boy looks up and smiles appreciatively.

Dwain picks up the boy and loads him onto his back and carefully sits him between his wings. It's a nice tight fit and the boy is safe and secure for the ride through the forest back to Dwain's home. When they arrive at Dwain's cave, at the base of the mountains on the far side of the forest, Dwain rustles up some food he has left over, and they eat breakfast. It will do for now. Dwain then takes the boy just beyond the cave, a short walking distance, where there is a natural spring waterfall and stream. The boy is showered and has a fresh drink. They walk back to the cave and the boy lays down on a mattress made of branches and leaves. It is more comfortable than it sounds. Dwain places some blankets he has collected over the years over the boy, and he immediately falls to sleep. Dwain just sits, contemplates and waits for the boy to awake. Dwain thinks to himself, 'I wonder what his name is?'

Dwain looks through the boys clothing and notices on the inside label of his shorts that someone has hand stitched the initials 'FJ'. Knowing that the toddler is too young to speak, Dwain decides that the initials will stand for 'Frankie Jenkins'. From that day forwards, Dwain raised FJ like his own

little boy. Their extraordinary relationship grew and grew like a normal human father and son would. Their attachment and bond became unique. Dwain, however, was always very cautious and would on many occasions fly over the forest just to check for his own piece of mind to see if there were any humans out looking for FJ.

Days turned into weeks and weeks turned into months and months into years. Dwain now believed he was nearing his 60th birthday meaning that FJ was probably about 12 years old. They both learnt a lot from each other. FJ had learnt the ways of the wild. Even though living in a cave was not always easy, particularly in the winter, their lives always seemed to be filled with much warmth and venture. They always managed to communicate to each other, of what each other was feeling and thinking. FJ always knew on his sub-conscious mind, that one day he would need to return to human civilisation. At heart, Dwain always knew that he could not keep FJ forever. He was not of the same species so sooner, rather than later FJ would have to return back to humanity.

Dwain had watched for nearly 10 years this abandoned toddler grow into this honourable young man. Why was he abandoned? We never ever discussed this or ever found out why Dwain thought to himself. Finally, FJ gave the look with teary eyes that Dwain had probably dreaded for far too long and with a slight nod of his head, said 'It's my time to go'. Dwain knew FJ was right. This was the saddest day of both of their lives, but they both knew that their lives were now better for having each other in theirs. For the final time, FJ climbed aboard Dwain's back and nestled into his favourite place between the wings. 'Hold on tight' was Dwain's usual call as they took off and flew away from the cave and over the forest. They landed just inside the tree line so as not to be seen by any of the villagers. It was very emotional, and they hugged one last time. FJ could feel Dwain's talons digging into his ribs. It was time to say goodbye. FJ walked away and blew one final kiss with tears running down his face before he disappeared behind one of the buildings.

I guess the main moral of the story is, that despite our differences, we can all get along. Dwain was a mythical beast that scared humans who would try and hunt him down and kill him if they could catch him. Dwain on the other hand was also a hunter and would kill other animals for food and any other species that threatened him. Dwain found an abandoned toddler and against his normal instincts of 'attack, kill and devour' he chose compassion.

I've no doubt that they will not forget each other forever. In fact, they will now remember each other, longer than they knew each other. That thought alone is quite sad.



Lee Michael Unwin