

Pass It On®...

'The Velveteen Rabbit' – How we Discover what Makes us Real ... is Love.

Just as Margery Williams' classic children's book helps us all through the transition of childhood into adulthood, it helped the author through difficult times.

Margery Williams was an accomplished writer and author long before she wrote "The Velveteen Rabbit." Born in London in the summer of 1881 to a wealthy and successful lawyer, she was the youngest child. She reflected on feeling separated from her siblings on account of the age gap, "To be the youngest of a family by as much as six years is almost like being an only child."

Williams' father died when she was 7, and the family moved to Philadelphia. Perhaps the trauma caused her to withdraw. She found solace in writing adventure stories and companionship with her pet mice, which she kept in her dollhouse.

Her early books attempted to capture the spirit of the day, but they were never popular. She found work writing sentimental Christmas stories for a publisher in London but always felt unfulfilled to the point of despising stories that either lacked imagination or too forcefully ignored reality.

"I wanted to do something different," she recalled, "but did not know what it should be." She hearkened back to her childhood in Europe and the frankness of the stories she grew up on.

All this time, Williams had been raising her child, Pamela, who turned out to be an art prodigy. The creativity the mother sought was manifest in her daughter. At 12 years old, Pamela had a smashing opening at a New York gallery, where she was heralded as a brilliant young talent and sold her work to the most prestigious buyers.

Williams watched as her innocent daughter was thrust into the world of adulthood too early, an accelerated grief that all parents feel when their children grow up. The fame brought a chance opportunity. The magazine Harper's Bazaar commissioned a story from Williams, with Pamela as illustrator. The story featured Pamela's forgotten stuffed bunny from her abbreviated childhood. The article was a success, and Williams went to work

expanding it into a book. It was published in 1922 and has been in print ever since.

What is most endearing about the book is its ability to accompany young readers and their parents through the voyage of growing-up emotions. Imagination is inherent in children. So is kindness and wonder and a sense of adventure. But as children grow, too often they become victims of logic, trying to become reasonable adults who feel the responsibility to rein in unrealistic expectations and dreams. In the view of Margery Williams, stifling imagination too early leads to an unhappy life.

"But who can say where dream ends and reality begins?" the Velveteen Rabbit asks.

It is a question we should let children discover for themselves. Like the rabbit's, their reality is that "love is the magic that makes a thing real."

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