

# A Real Teddy Bear.



by Jan Kelly

Did you shop the A&P last Halloween? Each year the staff dons festive costumes for the holiday. The costumes are hilarious and in great spirit. One in particular would make you smile, and make you think. David Jensen, cashier, wore a full-sized teddy bear suit, complete with stuffed head and mittens, a rainbow tie and a large AIDS symbol, in rainbow colors on the white belly. The picture was stunning. "Must have cost you a fortune," customers asked. "They're all recyclable materials," he replied. David's outfit won first prize.

The teddy bear story doesn't begin nor stop there. When I visited David I found myself surrounded by teddy bears. We spoke as he sewed a tie and tie tack onto a teddy made completely from silk ties—how elegant!

David Jensen has lived in Provincetown for 5 years and for three-and-a-half of those years, he has created teddy bears entirely from recyclable materials. He likes old fabrics. Teddies can come from tapestry, wool, tweed, silk ties, rainbow cloth, leather, sweaters and even an old wool skirt which I donated.

Teddy bears bring joy to everybody and David sees it on the faces of people every day. His lifelong collected still includes his first bear: a Cubbi Gund from his first Christmas, 1949. Both have lost a little hair, but both still look great. Besides his first teddy bear, David has 367 others, including his A&P costume. His collection has been inventoried in two books—of teddy bear motif, of course. The impressive collection takes up most of David's bedroom and his living room: teddy bears everywhere, including a six-foot golden bear that David took on as a challenge made entirely from curtains... "just to see if I could do it." There are statuettes, paintings, a framed postage stamp of the 1902 original, decoupage, furniture, pillows and a table covered with works in progress—all teddy bears.

Since the original Teddy Bear was designed as a tribute to Teddy Roosevelt, the bear has steadily increased in awareness as a symbol of childhood and of love entrenched in Americana.

David explained that people can cherish and love their personal teddy bear without regret. People of any age have a "friend" in a teddy bear, one to whom they can talk without fear of betrayal. David likes to give his "friends" to other people and they seem to repeat the process. All come with the label: "Made with tender loving care-Cape Cod Cubs-Dave, Provincetown, Mass."

"I have such a good feeling out here, so much joy. That's why the teddy bears have developed and continue to grow. This year I am in five prominent stores: Family Jewels, Home Again, Recycle Shop, Cheap Thrills and The Teddy Bear Store. I'm so pleased." The Rainbow Teddy Bear and The Complete Wizard of Oz Cast Bears really sell well. "Remembrance Bears"

are highly personal.

David began making Remembrance Bears from personal belongings such as leather jackets and coats for friends of AIDS victims. A leather jacket is specific and a very personal article of clothing, so David would design a bear from the material for the persons left behind. Thus recycled, each serves as a more effective memorial than a coat hanging in a closet. Today, the call for Remembrance Bears has grown to include just about anyone who has lost a friend, a lover or a mate. He has just made an angel bear for a young widow in town from her husband's sweater. The halo was mounted a bit askew. "Perfect," she said.

Last year David donated six teddy bears to "Toys For Tots," the VFW's Christmas drive. The children reacted joyfully. From a person of any age a smile provides his greatest reward. Where there was sadness, David sows joy.

In the next two weeks, David must create 166 teddy bears in four sizes, ready to go. "At my new location I am happier and more creative than I have ever been in life. This is not hard work, this is fun."

When David comes home from the A & P, he can sew for 3 to 6 hours. After a 28-year hiatus, David has returned to painting. His apartment is an art gallery, mostly filled with nautical themes.

Teddy bears, you see, do not account for all of David's life. Born in Santa Fe, NM, David went to California after his time in the Navy, then drove cross-country to upstate New York, visited Provincetown and sped home to pack his bags. Now I guess we're stuck with him. In five years, he returned to Santa Fe only once.

David's community development has been notable, stronger and swifter than most newcomers. Jim Jeffers invited him to join the VFW for one year. Through Jim's friendship, David became a life member and was recently installed as a 3-year trustee. A disabled veteran, He served in the Navy during the Vietnam War.

He recently made a remembrance bear for Betty from Jim's favorite clothing. I understand the bear rides around with Betty in her car. David has also been accepted into the Knights of Columbus and has been preparing for his first degree. He continues to work at the A&P and fills the role of cantor at the 4:00 pm Masses at St. Peter's, singing alongside Lenny Grandchamp. A varied, complicated and gifted man, David sees life in discarded objects and finds a home for everything. He is surrounded by revived objects. If you have a favorite idea or wish to adopt a bear, David Jensen can make your dream come true. Should you like a Remembrance Bear for a deceased loved one, David can create one for. Whatever David Jensen does, joy results.

In addition to the bears in the local shops, check out David's "Porch Sale" during the Blessing of the Fleet Weekend.

