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Finding Winnie

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~~Not a Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

This pleasant picture book brings together family history, the First World War and literary history. On his way to England with his regiment for training prior to going to the front, the author's veterinary great grandfather bought an orphaned bear cub on a railway station for \$20 (as you might in Canada in the early twentieth century). Named Winnie, for Winnipeg, she became the regiment's mascot in England and was donated to London Zoo when the regiment left for France in December 1916. It was there that an older Winnie met Christopher Robin who was looking for a good name for his own stuffed bear that he carried around by one arm. In those days of relaxed zoo regulations, Christopher Robin was even allowed in Winnie's enclosure to offer some food (honey?) on a spoon, as is revealed in one of the photographs that make up the second-half of the book. The tale is told as if by the author to her own son, named Cole after his grandfather. If this is, perhaps, a little cloying, then Sophie Blackall's bold humorous illustrations offer a corrective, and, for adults and older children, the harsh reality of the impending conflict will not be far from their minds. Reassuring, then, to discover that Harry Colebourn survived; and the orphan Winnie the Bear was immortalised not only as Winnie the Pooh but in statues in London and Winnipeg, where she stands on her hind legs, forever being fed and supported by Captain Harry.

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