How Teddy Bears Helped Me Destroy my Sister  
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I’ve only ever in my whole entire life had nightmares. Now they consist of my daughters growing in a world that devalues them. But they weren't always so real.

I'm being serious here: I've only *ever* had nightmares. Ever. Do you have any idea what that does to a person?

Let me break it down for you: while other kids laughed about their crazy dreams, I was still feeling sick inside about the child mutilation ritual I had witnessed through closed eyes.

When my husband was offended that I had never had a dream about him, I had to explain how grateful I was for that same fact—now I didn’t visualize his intestines leaking out every time I looked at him.

One of the biggest factors, though, was my use of teddy bears. I was shocked as a five-year-old little girl to find that my friend found comfort from snuggling her teddy bears, and, honestly, a little bit jealous.

My teddy bears and I didn’t share that kind of relationship. Instead of using them for comfort, I placed them purposefully as a sacrificial shield.

It was all very well planned out, actually, for a child. It developed in steps.

It started with Magic Bear—this scraggly, skinny brown bear in a yellowed old-fashioned nursing uniform my mom had given me the first time she had to leave me at night. She worked the graveyard shift, my mom, and so she left me with grandma when she went to work.

Ironic, the graveyard shift, since she was always so terrified of the dark. Even during the day she would sleep with her bedroom light glaring at full force. I guess the graveyard shift, even in the midst of your deepest fear, is a sacrifice you are willing to make as a single mom at 19 years old.

It started with Magic Bear, but it escalated quickly from there. I began accumulating as many stuffed animals as I possibly could. It didn’t matter the shape or attractiveness: even the ugliest stuffed toys would work for my purpose. Only one thing mattered to me: the more the better.

At night, the sacrificial ritual would begin.

Once seated in bed, I would take each fluffy toy, one by one, and carefully place it between me and anything dangerous: the door, the window, the wall. The stuffed duck by my shoulder, the giraffe by my thigh, the hippo by my feet, the oversized dog behind my back. I would create a barrier between me and the world.

These stuffed toys, once completely surrounding me, would work. I just knew they would. When the monster entered my room, they would take the teddy bear instead of me.

I think the worst part about all of this is that I never once felt guilty. I was sending my stuffed toys like sheep to the slaughter, and I didn’t at all feel bad about that sacrifice.

Funny, though, how things escalate. It didn’t matter how many stuffed toys I accumulated—I was never safe. I just couldn’t be safe.

My sister was the next victim. My little sister, my best friend, my comrade against the world. We shared a room then. When we arranged our beds, she wanted to be on the Pink wall. I fought her tooth and nail and pulled out the big sister card to keep my spot on that wall—and I won.

I had to lie for the next year that my favorite color was pink, and that’s why I wanted that wall. I hated pink, but the pink wall was furthest from the door. I forced my sister’s bed to be against that wall because, then, when the monster came, they would take her and not me.

It was the exact same situation as with my Magic Bear, but this time the guilt was overwhelming.

You would have thought that I would have learned from that, and I did, a little. I learned that teddy bears offer no protection, and I eventually got rid of my stuffed sacrificial barrier.

But, 9 years later when the real monster entered my room, I realized that I had not learned enough. I had not learned how to protect myself or how to stop sacrificing my sister to the demons.