

Ernie

meets the one eye panda



BY SUSAN BRANDT

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These people and their wiliness to believe in magic still exists in the world have contributed in some way in making these books possible.

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The warm sunshine on Ernie's skin woke her.

At first she wasn't sure where she was. It was comfortable, but nothing seemed like the normal. "Oh! Yes!" She giggled, "I'm elsewhere. I have started my adventures! Oh!" She patted herself on the head with her trunk. Giggling inside. Her tummy did a jiggle.



When she got up heard a spring with its tinkling water and went to it. She washed up. Got a good drink and then Ernie had sat down on a large rock, beside green sticks. She wasn't sure what they were. Time for a donut. She looked up and down the umbrella shaft and there it was. She finally found it. A donut with chocolate frosting topped by strawberry frosting and lots of sprinkles.



"Mom always makes these just for me," Ernie thought.

She carefully pulled it so it divided into two but did not mess up the sprinkles or any of the other donuts. Ernie liked to pick each sprinkle off and eat them one at a time. She did not always like sprinkles. Today she was just in the mood for the little colorful additions to her donuts.

The voice in the tall grass had once said all thing in life have a purpose. She didn't totally understand everything Zaphier, the turtle at the edge of the watering hole, said at times but sooner or later they would make since. As she ate and thought about a little bit of everything, the green sticks across from her began to move.

It startled her. She jumped off her rock to look and see. They were parting. Out came this fuzzy, rather cute, black and white creature.



She had heard tales of such creatures, but did not remember any of them saying anything about the "bear" being one eyed.

"Good morning. Are you having breakfast? It's that time of day," said the happy soul.

"Yes," said Ernie.

"I'll grab some bamboo and we can have breakfast together and talk about happy things," said the panda.

Ernie shook her brain. Almost too much to think about this early in the Why not. "Yes. Sure. I'm Ernie. An girl African elephant and you are?"

"They just call me Panda. I'm a panda bear. I'm a boy. What are you eating. It looks funny. Any good?" said the bear as she broke off a bamboo shaft and started chewing on it.

"It's a donut. Would like one?" offered Ernie.

"I don't mean to be rude. I thought panda bears had two eyes. You have only one. By the way, what is that are you eating?" rattled Ernie as they walked around the grassy spot looking for a place to sit.



"Can I have a part of a donut .. to see what it tastes like? If you don't mind I can just take that little bit over there without any thing on it." said Panda.

"Sure!" Ernie set picked up the piece and set it at Panda's feet .

"Most Pandas do have two eyes, Ernie. When I was born I only had one. It's supposed to be there. Sometimes things happen and we don't know why. They just do. The other one just wasn't there. I have three brothers and a sister and they all have two eyes. My mom says it just shows the world that I'm an extra special soul."

Ernie's heart swelled and he smiled so big. She met someone extra special on her first day out. "Oh, wow! Super dupper!"

Panda just kept talking as he was chewing. "Bamboo is what I am eating on. Humans eat it sometimes."

"Really?" said Ernie

"In school they taught us, it is the fastest growing land plant in the world. It can grow up to 100 feet (30 meters) tall. The only thing that grows quicker is giant sea kelp in the ocean. It is native to tropical, sub-tropical, and temperate climates and is while most common in Asia and South America - though it also grows in parts of Australia, in the southern United States and here in Africa.

"It is a giant grass! Not a tree. Bamboo grows hard woody culms instead.

"It's yummy. Humans use it for trays, chop sticks, furniture, mats and I don't remember what else." Panda stopped to take a breathe. Ernie thought this bear was a walking encyclopedia.



"Excuse me," Ernie asked, "you go to school?"

"Yes! It took be a while to learn to sit at the right angle so I could see what needed to be seen. Mom says, I have a touch of a photographic memory. It just means I remember things I see. I'm at the top of my class," once gain the Panda just spouted off information about everything.

Ernie scratched her head. She had learned so much this morning. And she had barely gone 77 steps from where she landed. "WOW!"

She thought about what Stretch, the giraffe, had said about adventures starting right where you stand. "Yep! WOW!"

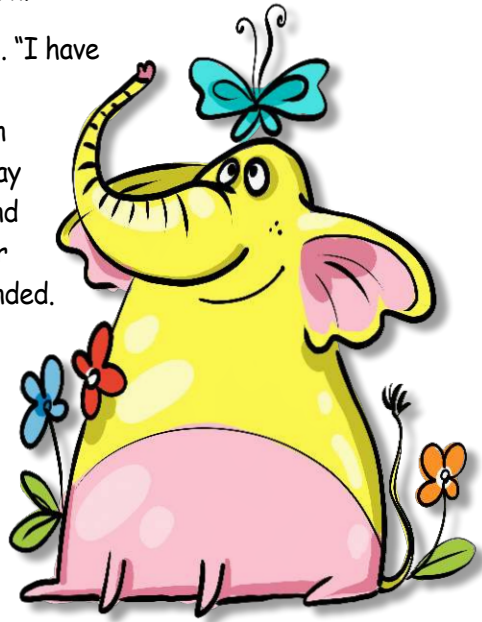
Ernie was thinking about everything Panda had said as she started to get her second donut. She wasn't as picky this time. As she reached for it, Panda asked for whole one this time, asking Ernie, "Those are tasty. Do you eat anything else?"

Ernie smiled. Handing Panda a donut just like hers, "I'm supposed to eat lots of other things." She blushed. Her face, ears and trunk all turning a bright pink, "I just have a weakness for donuts."

"I can understand why," said Panda. As she took a nibble of donut and then a bit of bamboo.

The two sat quietly beside the stream enjoying the warmth of the morning sun and their donuts. It was Panda who finally broke the silence. "You said you were out to discover adventures and learn things, what did you have in mind? Or what did you want to learn?"

"Hmmm, Ernie scratched her head. "I have never had anyone asked me those questions before, or at least not in that way. Her trunk wiggled its way around her head as she thought and then it scratched her head. As her trunk left her head a butterfly landed.



"There so much out there to be discovered or learned. I learned a lot about bamboo. Before now I knew nothing about it at all."

Panda could understand that. He had thoughts about discovering the world, but never flying about. He just went researched books to learn.

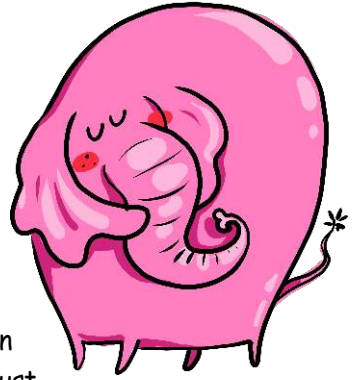
In a kid fashion, "you want to have an adventure together .. for today?" Panda said.

"Sure!" blurted Ernie. "Any ideas? You know the area? Can I ask one more question?"

Panda had a good idea about Ernie's question. She was asked the same questions from most people.

"Sure, make it three, if you want? "

"You have one eye instead of two, does it ever keep you from doing anything? Do others tease you? Do you ever feel bad because of it?" Ernie turned into a bright pink elephant from the glow of her blush.



"Ernie, you're cool. Lots of kids just whisper behind my back. I appreciate you asking. I can do pretty much anything any one else does. I just have to make changes. Mom says I **Panda-ize** how I do it. You know adjust how it is done so it works for me," He giggled



"I used to feel bad about not being like everyone else. Then one day, I realized none of us are exactly alike. My differences are more visible. I figure I just get out in front of everyone. People can see who I'm different and won't try to figure out how I'm different from others."

Ernie sat back and smiled really big. "Panda, I hope we can be friends forever. I like what you are saying."

"Sure thing, but let's do something today. Together," replied Panda.

The two finally decided they would travel down the pathway to see some of the ancient castles and ruins in the area.

Along the way it was the one eyed bear who spotted it first. Ernie was delighted, the two saw the Lucky Bamboo. It is a small to medium in size compared to some and is a slower growing type of bamboo.



Ernie was so excited in all the things he had learned and the day wasn't over yet. The two bounced back-and-forth side-to-side as they down the trail to the beautiful green valley. There were was a



castle and then there was several ruins. They did not travel all the way to the bottom of the valley. They stopped about half way down and each ate a hole donut and laughed at how the butterflies flew about.

"Ernie, I think it is time we head back up the road. It takes twice as long to walk up as sit does coming down," Panda said as he stood up.

"Ernie, is this an adventure?" asked Panda.

"Yes, my friend. We are discovering many things, and wasn't the butterflies dancing so wonder," the girl elephant replied.

"Ernie, I had fun with you today. However, I'm leaving the flying to you and I'll take the feet-on-the-ground adventures. Donuts are good but my Mom is a really good cook and I'd miss her cooking," said Panda, patting his stomach.

Ernie nodded in agreement as the two head off, reaching the top of the trail not long before dust. Panda waddled home and Ernie settled in the soft grass where she had been the night before.

"Tomorrow, we will see where the winds take us. What kind of adventure is next?" thought Ernie as she glossed her eyes.

Her last thought of the say was what Panda had told her. *Nobody is bigger. Nobody is smaller. No one is the same. We are simply unique. You are you and I am me.*



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