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**A Classic Toy For The Ages**

**By Robert Benson**

Throughout the years the toy market has seen many toys come and go but few have the staying power and the unique history of the Teddy Bear. Let's explore this unique story of this classic toy and a piece of American heritage.

It was November 1902 and our president at the time, Theodore Roosevelt went on a hunting excursion to Mississippi. The trip was business and pleasure: He was there to try to settle a boundary dispute between Mississippi and Louisiana and a hunting excursion for the president, who loved the sport.

But on that particular day, the hunt did not go as planned as President Roosevelt could not find a suitable target to his liking. However, his staff, in an effort to accommodate him, somehow managed to capture a Louisiana black bear cub for him to shoot and tied it to a tree. The thought of shooting a baby bear tied to a tree did not seem sporting to the accomplished outdoorsman and he refused, instead sparing the life of the black bear cub and setting it free.

Mr. Clifford Berryman, a famous political cartoonist for the Washington Star at the time, drew a cartoon titled, "Drawing The Line In Mississippi", depicting the President letting the bear live, and using the story as a metaphor as for how the president dealt with the boundary dispute.

The cartoon also showed the President with his rifle and his back turned on the cute, cowering, baby bear. This gave Brooklyn toy store owner, Morris Michtom the inspiration for a display for his shop.

He placed a copy of the newspaper cartoon next to a hand-sewn stuffed bear his wife made in the window of his store. To his surprise, he was inundated with customers eager to buy his stuffed bear!

Michtom quickly requested and received President Theodore Roosevelt's permission to use his name for the stuffed bears that he and his wife were now selling. Thus the "teddy bear" was born, and soon Michtom was producing the bears by the thousands. With the profits from the sales of the teddy bears Michtom went on to form the Ideal Toy Company.

## A Classic Toy For The Ages

Teddy bears continue to be best friends to children of all ages all over the world. Their mass appeal will never go out of style and they are a true classic to, albeit, with a little presidential help.

Robert Benson operates

<http://www.ezshoppinghere.com>

a website devoted to helping shoppers find

unique gift ideas in unique places. Look for more articles about classic toys on the website and shop at over 400 stores and specialty shops.

### **A Classic Toy, By Accident**

#### **By Robert Benson**

With the popularity of Internet shopping, classic toys that were hard to find, have now started to find a whole new audience. These classics, which sold very well after they were introduced, never seem to go out of style and can still bring a smile to any child's face.

Let's step into the past and take a look into the history of one of these classic toys.

In 1943, a Naval engineer accidentally knocked some springs off of a shelf while he was working on a meter designed to monitor horsepower on battleships. He marveled at the way they "walked" instead of falling and the odd movement of these springs gave Richard James an idea and an instant toy was born. That toy: The Slinky.

Richard James then spent the next two years testing and refining the best steel gauge and coil to utilize for his new toy. His wife, Betty appropriately found the perfect name for this new toy— a Slinky; which is the Swedish word meaning traespiral or sleek.

The couple borrowed five hundred dollars and James designed a machine to coil eighty feet of wire into a two-inch spiral and manufacture their new toy. Sales were slow at first, but soared after the Slinky was demonstrated at Gimbel's Department Store in Philadelphia for the Christmas season in 1945. The first 400 sold within the ninety-minute demonstration and a new fad had begun.

Around 1960, Richard James suffered what some called a mid-life crisis and left his wife, their six children and joined a Bolivian religious cult. He also deserted the Slinky toy he worked so hard to produce and left the company in debt and ruin. Betty James took over as CEO of James Industries and introduced other toys for the "Slinky line-up" including: Slinky pets, crazy eyes Slinky (glasses with Slinky-extended fake eyeballs), neon Slinky, and also replaced the original black-blue Swedish steel with American steel. Additionally she moved the company headquarters from Philadelphia to Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania and began an aggressive advertising campaign, complete with the now famous Slinky jingle:

## A Classic Toy For The Ages

"What walks down stairs, alone in pairs, And makes a Slinky sound? A spring, a spring, a marvelous thing, Everyone knows it's Slinky... It's Slinky, it's Slinky, for fun it's a wonderful toy It's Slinky, it's Slinky, it's fun for a girl or a boy"

However, the Slinky is not just an entertaining toy for children. It is used in schools in physics classes to demonstrate wave properties, forces, and energy states. The Slinky still continues to sell (250 million have been sold to date) and are still manufactured in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania using the original equipment designed by Richard James.

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