

39 Uncle Ted

You may remember that Billy has an uncle. He's called Ted, and he's an explorer. He's always off to some far-flung part of the world. Now and again Billy and his Mum will get a postcard just to let them know that Uncle Ted is still alive and still exploring. Billy always keeps the postcards and day dreams about all the exciting and exotic places that Uncle Ted is exploring.

Billy likes to imagine Uncle Ted on his adventures. He could be trudging fearlessly through a scorching desert or dragging himself the last few feet to the top of a yet unclimbed mountain. Or he might be abseiling down the side of the deepest and steepest gorge in the snow covered wastes of the North Pole. But Billy's favourite day dreams are of Uncle Ted in the jungle looking straight into the face of a lion or tiger, or swimming with sharks in the sea off the coast of some remote desert Island.

"Uncle Ted could go anywhere," he thought. He wouldn't even have been surprised to get a post card from Mars! There's no doubt, of course, that Uncle Ted is one of Billy's greatest heroes and he loves to tell his friends all about his amazing uncle.

Now and again, Uncle Ted will come and stay at Billy's house for a few days. He hardly ever rings or writes to say he's coming. He just turns up on the doorstep and Mum is always more than happy to welcome him in.

"There's always a bed for you here. You know that Ted," she says.

Well, you can probably imagine how Billy feels when Uncle Ted comes to stay. Somehow, Uncle Ted manages to make everything exciting. He's always telling Billy stories about his adventures. He just makes everything, even the most boring and ordinary things, into exciting adventures.

One day, Billy had had a very bad day. It had started when he got out of bed. He knew that there was one piece of Mum's delicious chocolate cake left in the tin and he had been dreaming all about having it in his lunch box. He pulled on his clothes and bounced down stairs. But when he looked in the tin there was no cake.

"Where's the chocolate cake?" he whined.

"Oh, oh, oh! I don't think there was any left Billy," said Mum, as her cheeks started to glow a very bright red.

Somehow, Billy knew it was going to be a bad day from then on, and he was right!

It rained on the way to school. Then the swimming teacher was ill, so swimming was cancelled and Mr. Yellit made the class do maths instead! At lunchtime Billy fell over in a very squelchy patch of mud. Then, in the afternoon he realised he'd forgotten his trumpet for band practice and Mrs. Downer had been very annoyed with him.

Poor Billy, he walked home with his head hanging low and his feet dragging along the ground. It was a bad day, a very bad day, and the sooner it was over the better.

When Billy got home he shuffled in through the front door.

"Hello, Billy!" called Mum in her usual cheery voice.

"Hello, Mum," moaned Billy, with a voice that sounded like he was about to be covered in two tons of cold baked beans! But then Billy heard another voice, "Hello, young Billy boy. How are you doing, laddy. You sound a bit like I did when I got my head stuck up a gum tree in Wallywomwoomery, and had to wait three days before someone came to rescue me!"

Billy dropped his bag on the floor in amazement. It, it, it, it was Uncle Ted!

"Uncle Ted's come to stay for a few days," said Mum.

Billy didn't need to say a word. His face said everything. In an instant, his screwed up little frown turned into the biggest, brightest, most beaming smile you have ever seen.

Billy sat next to Uncle Ted and listened to him telling about some of his latest adventures. He told him all about his trip to the jungles of Borneo and how, one morning, he had woken up to find a crocodile inside his tent. He told Billy all about going to the hottest place in the world, and all about going to the coldest place in the world. He told him about all the amazing people and animals he had met on the way.

"And my latest adventure," said Uncle Ted, "is to sail across the Indian Ocean on an ironing board. I thought I might write a book about it. I'll call it 'Pressing on across the Indian Ocean.'"

"Tut, tut, tut," said Mum, "oh Ted you are..."

But Billy was enthralled. When it came to bedtime, he went to bed feeling like he'd done all the exploring himself.

The next day Uncle Ted walked to school with Billy. He talked about all the amazing things you can see around you. He talked about the insects on the ground, the birds high in the air, the trees and the smells. It was just like going on an exciting adventure, and it was only walking to school.

When Billy got into his classroom Mickey asked: "Who was that with you this morning Billy?"

"That was my Uncle Ted," said Billy proudly.

"What? Uncle Ted the explorer?" asked Mickey.

"The very one," he replied in what he thought was a suitably 'matter of fact' way.

"Cor... you're lucky!" said Mickey, and Billy knew that he was, very lucky indeed.

When Mr. Yellit overheard their conversation, he asked Billy if Uncle Ted would come and speak to the class about his adventures. The next afternoon he did. Everyone listened in total silence to every word; Billy enjoyed that day at school more than any other.

Uncle Ted just made everything so exciting. While he was around nothing seemed boring or dull. Everything seemed to be different and exciting. "This is great!" thought Billy as he went to bed that night. "It's just like living a completely new life. I hope Uncle Ted decides to stay here for ever!"

The next day was Saturday and the whole family got together. Mum and Billy and Amy, Gran and Grandpa, and Auntie Pristine and Uncle James and of course, Uncle Ted. They talked and laughed and Uncle Ted told more stories. He even did some conjuring tricks! They were all there until very late at night. It was such fun that Billy didn't want to go to bed. He never wanted the day to end. Most of all, he wanted Uncle Ted to stay forever and ever and ever.

But eventually he had to go to bed. In fact, he fell asleep on the chair and Uncle Ted carried him upstairs and popped him into his bed. Billy slept more soundly and happily than he had ever done before. He slept so soundly that he woke up very late. It was nearly mid day by the time he got up. He bounced down stairs and started to look for Uncle Ted, but he couldn't find him anywhere.

"Where's Uncle Ted?" he asked Mum.

"Oh, he had to get an early train," said Mum. "He was sorry not to say goodbye but it was such a late night last night that he didn't want to wake you up."

Billy was speechless. He nearly cried. Uncle Ted was gone, and, and, and there was no telling when he would come back again. All of a sudden the world seemed like a very grey place, and Billy's life seemed even more boring than it had done before Uncle Ted had arrived.

Well that is until Billy went to school the next day. All of a sudden, he found that people kept asking him to tell some of Uncle Ted's stories. Billy knew them all very well by now. He told them just like Uncle Ted did, even with all the little dramatic bits as well. Everyone loved them. In science that day Mr. Yellit was doing a demonstration. Suddenly, almost as if he was there, Billy heard Uncle Ted's voice saying, "Now watch carefully Billy. This is really interesting." So he fixed his eyes on the experiment and, Uncle Ted was right, it was really interesting.

As Billy walked home, he noticed some of the things that Uncle Ted had pointed out to him. There were the different types of trees, the different sounds of the birds and much more. He stopped to watch an ant carrying a crumb of bread back to its nest; as he was crouching down, it was just like Uncle Ted was there with him.

"Wow!" said Billy to himself. "The world is an exciting place!"

The next day at school, Billy and Mickey and the other boys played a very exciting game of explorers. Billy of course was Uncle Ted.
“You know Billy,” he said to himself, “it’s almost like Uncle Ted is still here.”
“Come on Ted,” shouted Peter. “Where shall we go next?”
“The Great Wall of China!” shouted Billy, as they all ran off to the other side of the playground.

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