

OWL

When I saw the owl ornament in the charity shop in Musselburgh, it reminded me of the one in my back garden.

Over thirty years ago I lived in a village in Northamptonshire and worked in a local hospital. Alf, in charge of front hall reception, made owls and sold them to staff at knock-down prices. I think he produced them using a rubberised mould and could churn them out in huge numbers if required. All the same, they were good-looking creatures; statuettes, the stone-grey colour of Greek statues but less than a foot high.

I bought one and took it home. When my daughter, Nicky, came home from school, she loved it on sight.

We decided it must have a name. There were many alternatives but in the end he became known as Wol. In A A Milne's 'Winnie the Pooh', one of Christopher Robin's friends in the Hundred Acre Wood is Owl. He's considered very wise because he was the only toy who could read and write. Outside his front door he proudly displayed a notice saying W-O-L, 'WOL'.

We found a very good position for him in the back garden and he was much admired.

Some years later, we moved to West Wales. Nicky by then had gone to university. When the removal van left my husband and I folded down the back seats of the car for all the last-minute items. We also packed essentials such as kettle, mugs, tea, two tabby cats named Ivy and Mistletoe, a tortoise called Billie Jean King and Wol.

Again, we found the owl a prime position in the garden. He survived blistering sun, wind and rain, snow and frost without any of his features eroding. His eyes, ears, feathers and claws were still distinct.

We lived there for over twenty-five years until three years ago I moved to Market Street in Musselburgh. I was lucky enough to find a ground floor flat with a small garden at the back just a few minutes' walk from my daughter and family. Of course, Wol came too. The garden is rather flat with no obvious perch for the owl so he stands on a decorative garden pot turned upside down.

One day, I realized that Wol had gone and I had no idea how long he'd been missing. My grandson, Scott, had been playing outside so I had a look around the garden but with no success.

I felt incredibly sad. It seemed silly to have such feelings for an inanimate object that only cost a pound years and years ago but, even so, I did feel quite upset. When Nicky called by, she also made a search but couldn't find him.

My grandson was the main suspect and the next time he visited, he gave me a shame-faced smile and produced Wol from deep behind a garden bench.

So Wol sits in his usual position.

I looked again at the cute owl in the charity shop but thought, no, I don't need another owl. I've got Wol.