

## **A Tale of a Lion, a Poodle, a Magnet and a Tadpole**

by Tammy the Tadpole

Once upon a time there was a somewhat unusual family. Its members loved each other, although their love wasn't shown through ordinary measures and most often went unspoken. Instead, displays of love came in ways that the one giving understood, although the others did not.

There was a lion named Leo. A male so tough on the exterior it was a rare honor to witness him letting his mane down and soft interior be exposed. Only then could one see his truly gentle heart. Most times, you could spy him stealthily prowling the jungle in search of his prey. When he'd finally spear it, he'd carefully bundle it in beautiful wrapping for his wife ... a stunning poodle named Priscilla. Oh how he loved her, although his nighttime growls, roars and sinking deep into his household throne would send a different message to his brood.

While Leo hunted, his beloved poodle would clean his den, promenade about town, play dog games with her friends, join in the canine gossip and primp her poodle do.

Together, Leo and Priscilla had a rather extraordinary son. He was Mike the Magnet, with the power to attract even polar opposites from far and wide. The neighboring cubs and pups were drawn to him. He was shiny and beautiful. Everyone everywhere admired and was drawn to him.

Two years later, Leo and Priscilla gave birth to a somewhat extraordinary but misshapen tadpole, by Priscilla's accounts. Tammy the Tadpole worked hard to keep up, to be as magnetic as her older brother. She did pretty well, but try as she might, she was no magnet.

Life for the lion, the poodle, the magnet and the tadpole was pretty good ... in the beginning. The lion would roar, the poodle would preen, the magnet would attract and the tadpole would frolic in the waters. At first, the magnet didn't like the tadpole much. After all, she could swim much sooner, much better and much faster than him. He would sink when immersed in water. He'd try to sink her too, but that just made her swim harder. But Tammy the Tadpole didn't have something Mike did, and that was the uncanny ability to attract.

Together, this strange little family had its rituals. Each morning, Mike the Magnet and Tammy the Tadpole would get up, put on the clothes Priscilla had purchased or made for them, and head to their respective daily tasks at Elements or Tadpole school. Once they left, Priscilla would usually fall back onto her poodle pillow for her beauty rest.

When Leo came home from his day's work in the dangerous jungle, where would-be prey seemed far too few, he'd growl and scare everyone away, sit atop his throne with a Perfect Potion in his glass and roar whenever the kids came near. Priscilla would carefully prepare Leo's nighttime meal- -always with a big portion of carnivorous delights as its centerpiece as to not elicit grumbles from The King--and serve the family.

This was the life the strange little family led, day after day and year after year. Although they couldn't really touch one another affectionately-- each was made so differently--they each knew this is where they belonged. Except for times when the lion's roars would shake the domain, everyone felt safe.

Tammy the Tadpole continued to work hard to develop the magnetism of her magnetic brother. In junior high, she was elected to the pompon squad ... as features editor of her school newspaper ... for an elite choir ... and as the first female tadpole ever elected Student Council President in the hatchery. That was a really big deal since this breeding ground was the biggest in the kingdom, with over 2000

subjects. But little tadpole's motivation wasn't pure. Her uncle had been president ... her cousin had been president ... and Mike the Magnet had been president. It was her responsibility, or so she thought, to continue the family tradition. And so she did. Although Leo and Priscilla didn't come to hear her campaign speech, Tammy's election clearly made them proud. That made Tammy happy.

Even though Tammy hated her role as Student Council president, things were good. Tammy was dating the star shooter on the Tadpole team. She was popular. She was making her parents proud. And then a few of her male tadpole friends did something incomprehensible, at least to Tammy, who only recently learned what the word "shark" meant (much later than her friends, suggesting her naiveté).

Just as her frog legs were beginning to emerge, at a party three tads took her behind a tuft of cattails where none of the others could see. They poked at her, prodded her, put their slimy frog toes against her in places she'd never before been touched. She resisted and cried, but no other tadpole or frog came to her rescue. Her protests eventually made the tadpole-boys leave. And when they did leave, they left Tammy forever changed.

The next day, Tammy called one of the teachers at Tadpole School and told her what had happened. Mrs. Farmer didn't believe Tammy's story. Tammy told her friends. They didn't believe her either. So Tammy turned her thoughts inward. *It must be my fault. It must be my fault. It IS my fault. I'm awful. I must have asked for it.*

Day by day, Tammy's accomplishments faded into distant memories. She felt increasingly alone--she *chose* to be alone. She lost interest in most everything, except for storytelling, which she did plenty of in her journal. She shoved what had happened to her into the deepest recesses of her mind ... after all, if no one believed her, it must not have happened. Tammy swam slowly into a swamp ... desolate, dark and dangerous.

Eventually, Tammy did forget what the tadpole-boys, little men, had done to her. But in the process, she learned to hate herself. She'd scrape her scaly flesh against the most jagged rocks she could find. She'd abuse herself until bodily fluids would ooze from her skin. And then she'd use the stringiest algae to sew her skin back together. Her body ached. Her head ached. Most of all, her heart ached. She started to fantasize about her death: *They'll be sorry when I'm dead. They'll realize then that they love me.*

And then it came; the headache of all headaches. Leo and Priscilla took Tammy the Tadpole to the fish doctors, where oodles of tests were done. The verdict: *Remove all sharp rocks and all potentially venomous beings from her corner of the world; she's suicidal. Get her to Dr. Froman the Frog or one of his team. Now!*

Leo took Tammy once or twice a week to see Jerry the Just, an oddly wonderful creature of the habitat, yet to be appropriately named by anthropologists. Jerry would listen. He'd ask questions. He wouldn't judge. But as much as Jerry seemed to care, Leo would take Tammy to her appointments and pick her up--never mentioning where they were going or where she had been. Priscilla couldn't talk about it either. It's as if it wasn't happening at all. And with her parents' instruction that no one should ever know about Tammy's seeing Jerry, Tammy learned what shame was: It was her.

Over nearly four years, Jerry the Just helped Tammy see that she wasn't relegated to swimming with the scum of the waters. She was meant for more than that. She was more.

Feeling better, Tammy left the den, the cavern, the cattails, and Jerry the Just, and headed for a distant place that would teach her how to swim with the Big Fish. Still, a gaping hole existed within her. Practically desperate, she'd look under every pebble, clam shell and even under fish excrement at the water's depth, for love. At night she'd carouse the wetlands, drinking in whatever libation she could find.

And then the Fisherman, the all-knowing almighty Fisherman, caught her on his well-readied hook. She was cruising right toward her regular watering hole late one night when he snagged her and pulled her in a different direction. She unexpectedly found herself in a sacred place where she sat, reflected on her life, and sobbed. Suddenly the Fisherman spoke in a deep and comforting voice: *It's okay ... Start over.* The weight of what felt like the world fell off her shoulders. At once, she knew she was forgiven, but that a responsibility was attached. She swam home. And for the first time in nearly eight years, her life had been profoundly changed (for the better) and she felt an unfamiliar inner peace.

The Fisherman gave Tammy the freedom, forgiveness and love she had been searching for. No more need to seek love; she already had it. No need to be something she wasn't born to be; The Fisherman thought she was already perfect. No need to be sad; The Fisherman would fill her with joy. After years of searching in wrong and even dangerous places, all it took was being caught by The Fisherman for Tammy the Tadpole to realize she was Tammy the Terrific.

Not long after, Tammy met The Good-Boy Tadpole, who was destined to be her mate. But Tammy was finally so happy with who she was, she didn't realize that The Good-Boy Tadpole had been sent to her by The Fisherman. It was only when Good-Boy swam far away that Tammy realized she loved him. And so she swam after him. And 30 years later, Tammy and The Good-Boy Tadpole still swim side by side.

Together Tammy and Good-Boy had two amazing tadpole-kids who grew up to be strong, godly swimmers. One started his own business photographing young tadpoles. The other is out fishing for The Fisherman.

In the meantime, the Lion died. But before he did, he apologized to Tammy for how hard he was on her. She easily forgave him: This was, after all, the same Lion who wrote her every day after she swam away from home, finally proving his love to her and belief in her. The Poodle lives on, and Tammy still struggles to understand the motives behind her mother's actions. She loves her, of course, but the words "I love you" are rarely spoken between them. Tammy still feels she's still being judged for her odd little body, by her accomplishments, for what she is, and for what she is not.

But Tammy is strong. She trusts The Fisherman completely. And with The Fisherman as her confidante and best friend, she knows she will live happily ever after ... into eternity.