



Local News

# Montreal Diary: For the love of teddy bears

*Teddy bear aficionado Catherine Comtois runs a network of make-your-own-bear workshops all over Montreal.*

Danielle Murray • Special to the Montreal Gazette  
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Catherine Comtois and son Joshua stuff teddy bears at their home in St-Lambert, south of Montreal, Tuesday December 23, 2014. PHOTO BY VINCENZO D'ALTO /Montreal Gazette

## **Catherine Comtois is with a group of youngsters making teddy bears. She's surrounded by shrieks of laughter, bags of stuffing and looks of intense concentration. Building bears is important work.**

It's been 10 years since Comtois's daughter lost her special soft toy rabbit and the catalyst that got her started.



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“Brianna wanted that rabbit back so badly, but I just couldn't find one. So I found a supplier who would make one but I had to order a minimum of 500. What would I do with 499 white stuffed rabbits?” recalls Comtois, 38.

“I decided to open a Make Your Own Teddy Bear Party business, and I now operate workshops all over Montreal. I bring all the equipment and people choose what they want to do when I get there. I also bring lots of clothes for the teddies so there is plenty of choice.”

Comtois says that the bulk of her workshops are for children's birthday parties (most popular age group is from age 3 to 9 years) and held on weekends, she also does adult corporate events and has even been to a few retirement homes where grandparents work with their grandkids.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“The number of participants is usually anywhere from 10 to 100 people. But our maximum number of bears at one time was 5,000!”

But no matter how many participants, she says all parties are a very busy occasion and “the excitement is contagious.”

As an arctophile, or teddy bear aficionado, Comtois loves her work. And while she has a thing for all teddies, she has a particular favourite.

“My parents bought Mrs. Beasley for me when I was young and she was always by my side. I played with her all the time. I remember dragging her by her arm, talking to her and asking her for advice. We would have tea parties and play under the dining room table or in my bunk bed under the sheets.”

Nowadays, Mrs. Beasley lives on Comtois' bedside table. But when Comtois and her family go away, Mrs. Beasley goes, too.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

“Once, we went to many different cities in a short span. Every day, I took her picture in different outfits with the different cities in the background.”

In 1953, Dr. Donald Winnicott introduced the term “transitional object” to describe objects used by children to provide security in the absence of the mother. Such transitional objects tend to be cuddly and gender neutral. Like teddy bears.

For a while, youngsters with too strong a need for such non-social objects were thought to be overly insecure, perhaps unbalanced or the product of bad parenting.

But today, transitional objects are widely accepted as therapeutic, says Emily Blake, clinical director of Blake Psychology in Montreal and the West Island.

“As infants, it is a way of comforting ourselves when we are alone, helping us transition from being with the parent to being without.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

So that’s when we are little. Why the need for soft toys in adulthood?

“With time and familiarity and the production of feel-good emotions, an attachment to the object grows.

*And if something creates pleasurable feelings, it makes sense that some of us want to hold on to that.”*

And if something creates pleasurable feelings, it makes sense that some of us want to hold on to that, says Blake.

Comtois concurs. “Teddy bears remind us of a very special time in our lives. I think it would be great if we could all keep a little bit of our child alive in our adult selves.”

So for those of us who hang on to our teddies, it’s ok.

In 2012, Psychology professor Stuart Brody at the University of West Scotland found no link between adult ownership of teddy bears and personality disorders. Or immaturity. As per the title of his paper in the *Journal of Adult Development*, “Sometimes a bear is just a bear.”

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

In the meantime, Comtois is helping a little boy stuff his bear. He tells her the white stuffing reminds him of Santa’s beard. When he is done, Comtois seals up the bear and returns him to his new keeper. The boy grins from ear to ear.

Christmas is just around the corner and it is Comtois’s busiest time of the year. But she doesn’t mind one bit.

“I really love what I do. I especially enjoy being with little kids, they always makes me smile. I know I am bringing happiness and wonder into their precious innocent minds and they, in return, are doing the same for me.”

For more information about Comtois’s workshops, go to [www.birthdaypartiesforkids.ca](http://www.birthdaypartiesforkids.ca)





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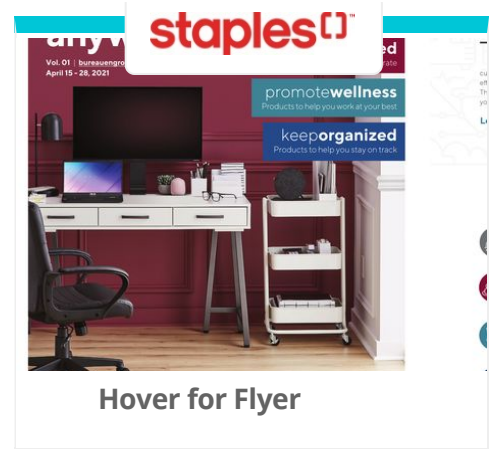
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