

The Truth Behind a Beloved Story Is Like a 'Love Letter to Family'

Winnie the Pooh is a beloved children's character that has brought joy to millions of families worldwide, but the first family that "discovered" him was not always quite so cheerful. The teddy bear's fascinating origin is detailed in the new motion picture *Goodbye Christopher Robin* (Fox Searchlight) currently in limited release around the country.

The film profiles writer A. A. Milne (portrayed by Domhnall Gleeson of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *The Revenant*), a veteran of World War I, as he grapples with PTSD and depression during his marriage to Daphne (Margot Robbie of *Suicide Squad* and *The Legend of Tarzan*) and the early years of his son, Christopher Robin, also referred to as "Billy Moon" (Will Tilston). Kelly McDonald (*Brave*, *No Country For Old Men*) appears as Christopher's nanny.

Director Simon Curtis (*My Week With Marilyn*) was drawn into the script, written by Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Simon Vaughan, by its emphasis on family

"It touched on so many issues that are really close to my heart," he said. "It's about being a parent and having children and then having to let them go. It's about England between the wars, which was such a momentous time. It's also about the act of creation, about the writing of one of the most beloved stories ever written."

While the pain caused by the war continues to torment him, Milne is continually pulled from that prison by the warmth and sunshine coming from his son, Christopher.

"What I've heard said to families who are going through

tragedies is, 'Let the children show you the way through it'," Curtis said. "I think there is something in that. Milne was a father in his class in his time. They didn't necessarily spend a lot of time playing with their kids but as you see in the film, he's forced to play with his son and discovers a real joy in it. That's his way of coming through what we now know to be PTSD, the trauma of World War I. Billy (Christopher) certainly helps him through."

Tilston, who plays Christopher, is a newcomer to the big screen, having only acted in his school plays before. In his first audition at 9 years old, he landed the role, beating out thousands of other children.

"Yes, there was a lot of kids," Tilston said. "It was really fun, though. I'm not very competitive but I tried my best."

Tilston as Christopher brings the energy and happiness into the Milne family, which in turn brings a joy to the country of England after the horrors of war. The childhood characters of Winnie the Pooh, Eeyore and even Christopher Robin were a welcome diversion on a small and large scale.

"I hadn't realized that Winnie the Pooh became so famous so quickly, because after the First World War, readers just needed the comfort of an innocent story. A.A. Milne had had this traumatic time away and was recovering playing with his son when they created the books," Curtis said.

The film features a strong pro-family message, one that is hard to ignore, the director believes.

"I think it's a love letter to family," he said. "If anything, there's a message in it, which is 'Pay attention to your family. Pay attention to your children while they're around.' As the nanny says to Christopher Robin in the film, 'You never know what happens next'."