It was the middle of the night when my husband Jason darted out to my truck. He had to grab the only thing that would calm our son James.

His name is Jeppie. He is about a foot tall with a chubby belly that sticks out over his tiny feet. His once white hair is slightly turning darker and darker with the dirt it collects. His nose comes to a sharp point, and his black eyes shoot right through you.

That stuffed penguin has been James' favorite toy for the past three years. It's his best friend, his partner in crime. And there was no way he was being left out in the darkness when his place was in bed next to James.

We bought Jeppie at an aquarium in Tennessee during a family vacation. He went nameless for about a month until finally James came up with the name "Jeppie" on his own.

It can be very annoying at times when we have to turn the car around because we accidentally leave him at home. We always remind ourselves to pack him for our overnight visits or week-long vacation.

But despite our aggravation at times with routing our schedule around Jeppie's location, it is kind of sweet the love that James has for a $10 stuffed animal.

Jeppie's place in always against the pillows on James' bed. He is an excellent traveler. And he has seen the majestic views of mountains and the breathtaking scope of the ocean all from the backseat window of the family car.

He always agrees with James and is usually open to any game he has in mind.

He has been transformed into a pirate. A dinosaur has taken him down in battle. Monster trucks have rolled over his tummy. He has even been thrown into a ceiling fan every now and then, but he survived to tell the tale.

He has been the only one who cold calm down a tantrum. And he is the perfect sick buddy when a cold or fever takes over a good play day.

Jeppie is James' best friend. And he has been through thick and thin with him.

James has plenty of other stuffed animals. He has a tiger named Cotter. There is a soft elephant named Ellie. Our daughter Elsie's penguin Pinky has even made an appearance or two.

But there is just something about Jeppie.

I had a favorite stuffed animal named Piglet. It really was an animal designed after Winnie the Pooh's best friend, Piglet.

Piglet has been in my life since as far back as I can remember. He isn't really filled with cotton stuffing but rather those sandy, bean-like fillings like many older dolls and animals. He had a red and white striped shirt with green pants. Two small pig ears stood straight on his head. And he had two black eyes right above his snout.

I still have Piglet to this day. Somehow he managed to keep up with me in this journey of life. However, his filling is a little looser these days. His once vibrant shirt is faded, and his green pants are starting to look more yellow. His perky ears tend to flop more against his head. One black eye fell off but a grandmother's sewing needle put it back on, even though it's not quite balanced with his other eye. And there is a huge coffee stain on his face that never washed off. He may look rough, old and tattered to some children by today's standards. But to me, he is still the way I imagined him.

His ragged appearance is the sign of a toy that was taken everywhere. He was repaired when needed. He was brought to the dinner table. He was shoved under bed sheets. He was left outside a time or two. He was loved.

James had Piglet out on his bed the other day. Being a rough boy, he was tugging kind of hard on Piglet's leg.

"No, don't do that to him," I said, picking up Piglet. "He's too old for that. Maw Maw and Paw Paw gave him to me when I was a baby."

Placing Piglet on top of James' dresser, I smiled at his crooked eye. Maybe Jeppie will remain with James into his adult years.

Leaving the room, I glanced back at Piglet. And for a second, we had an understanding.

And with that, James pulled Jeppie tighter into his chest.