

Peggy the Penguin

Sally the scientist was showing pictures of one of her trips to Antarctica, to Darling Debbie her granddaughter.

“Grandma, can you please tell me about the funny birds that can’t fly, but can swim in icy water?” Darling Debbie prodded for another story before bedtime.

The picture showed Granny, when she was much younger, taking notes on a very cold day in a very cold place, while looking at the penguins she had gone there to check on.

“Alright,” said Grandma Sally.

“When you are all snug in your warm bed, I’ll tell you a story about an imaginary little penguin chick called Peggie.

“You will get a bit of an idea what it is like for a penguin family, living in a far away cold land called Antarctica.”

Darling Debbie curled up in bed and listened as she closed her eyes, imagining everything as the story was told.

Peggie was a little Penguin chick, who had recently popped out of her egg. She had been kept so warm and snug, even though it was icy cold where her family lived.

Peggie looked up to see her very big father towering over her. It felt warm being near him. She knew she had always been cared for.

Papa penguin looked down with a smile at his little fluffy baby. He was glad that he had been there day after day, keeping the egg warm for the long time it took until his little chick was ready to come out.

Now here she was! His patience was rewarded. They were a family now—papa and mama and chick.

Although she didn't see her mama yet, her mama was coming home just then with a surprise.

"Where is my mama?" the chick wondered, and looked around. There were so many other penguins nearby huddled together for warmth, and she wondered if her mama knew that she had hatched.

Papa was patient, and did his job of guarding and keeping the egg warm. But there was something he couldn't do right then: provide food for his little one.

Papa penguin was sure his little chick was getting quite hungry. In fact, he was rather hungry too.

When Peggie was still in her eggshell, her Papa was so careful to keep the little egg warm that he didn't leave it even for a moment.

He had not gone off to the sea to find food, because his little Peggie needed him to be there always with her to keep her warm.

Papa explained this to little Peggie, that they just had to wait a short while and Mama would return with just what they needed—food she had gathered from the sea. Papa knew that Mama would be there right on time.

Mama had worked hard swimming and fishing, while Papa had guarded their little egg.

She caught fish and swam in very icy water. She would scoot along the ice, or waddle over the edge of an iceberg and then leap down into the freezing water.

When she caught the sea food, she had a specially designed body that would safely keep whatever she swallowed that was meant to be shared with her baby chick. It was like putting it away in storage for later.

Without seeing or hearing her family, that were somewhere huddled in the large group of many other penguins, Mama penguin knew just when to go back to her family, and right where to find them.

“There’s Mama!” Papa penguin exclaimed.

Peggie looked around to see a lovely penguin waddling over to them.

Papa penguin said,

“I am amazed to see how you knew just the right time to be here, right when our little chick has hatched. How you found us in this big crowd was very clever!”

Mama responded,

“I know you are depending on me, and it’s important to me that I arrive right on time. You must be so hungry. Here, I’ve got lots of food stored up for you.”

Mama then shared with her little chick the food she brought home. Then it was Papa's turn to get to swim and go fishing, at last.

Before he left, Papa penguin said to Peggie, "When you are a bit bigger, then you can come learn to swim, too. It will be lots of fun!"

Mama penguin added,

"And I'll teach you how to be a good mother to your little chick, when you are grown up, and how it is important to be there at the right time to provide what your family needs, even if you are having fun doing something else—like swimming."

Peggie had seen her parents do what was most important to do, to have a happy family. She chatted with her mama about what she had noticed.

Peggie said,

"I think good parents care well for the little ones, even if it means not getting what the parents want right away.

"They are patient and do their job, and don't give up even if it's not always exciting.

"And even if they are gone from home sometimes, they are always thinking about their family and doing something that helps them.

"They don't stay away too long, but try to come back home at the right time."

Mama penguin said,

“We need to be punctual—that means we arrive somewhere, or do something at the time expected; at the time we promised to be there or do it.

“When you are a bit older you’ll get to play with friends your own age and be watched by someone else for a while, and I’ll go swimming to get some food. But I’ll always come back again on time to be with you and give you food.”

Mama penguin then asked Peggie,

“And what about a little penguin chick? What can you do that helps our family to be happy?”

Peggie thought for a moment. She knew that besides pecking out of her shell, she hadn’t done any other work. But then she realised,

“I just stay close to Papa and you, so I won’t get lost or too cold.”

Mama penguin smiled, “Yes, very good! I’m so glad you do.”

Peggie snuggled up warmly to her mama. She needed to now be patient until she was bigger before she could venture to the sea and learn to swim find seafood on her own. But now she felt rather drowsy, and curled up for a nice nap.

When the story ended, Darling Debbie said, “Thank you, Grandma, for that nice story!”

“Your welcome,” Grandma Sally replied, and gave her granddaughter a goodnight hug.

“Tomorrow I’ll tell you some interesting things I learned about penguins.”

