

Girls Who Grew Up to Change the World



Margarete Steiff

(1847-1909)



Margarete was a perfectly healthy child for the first eighteen months of her life. Then, tragedy struck. She came down with an illness that paralyzed her legs and left her almost entirely unable to move her right arm.



Despite her illness, Margarete started school early, never missed a day, and excelled in her lessons. Every day her siblings would wheel her to the schoolhouse in a cart and a neighbour would carry her up the stairs to the classroom



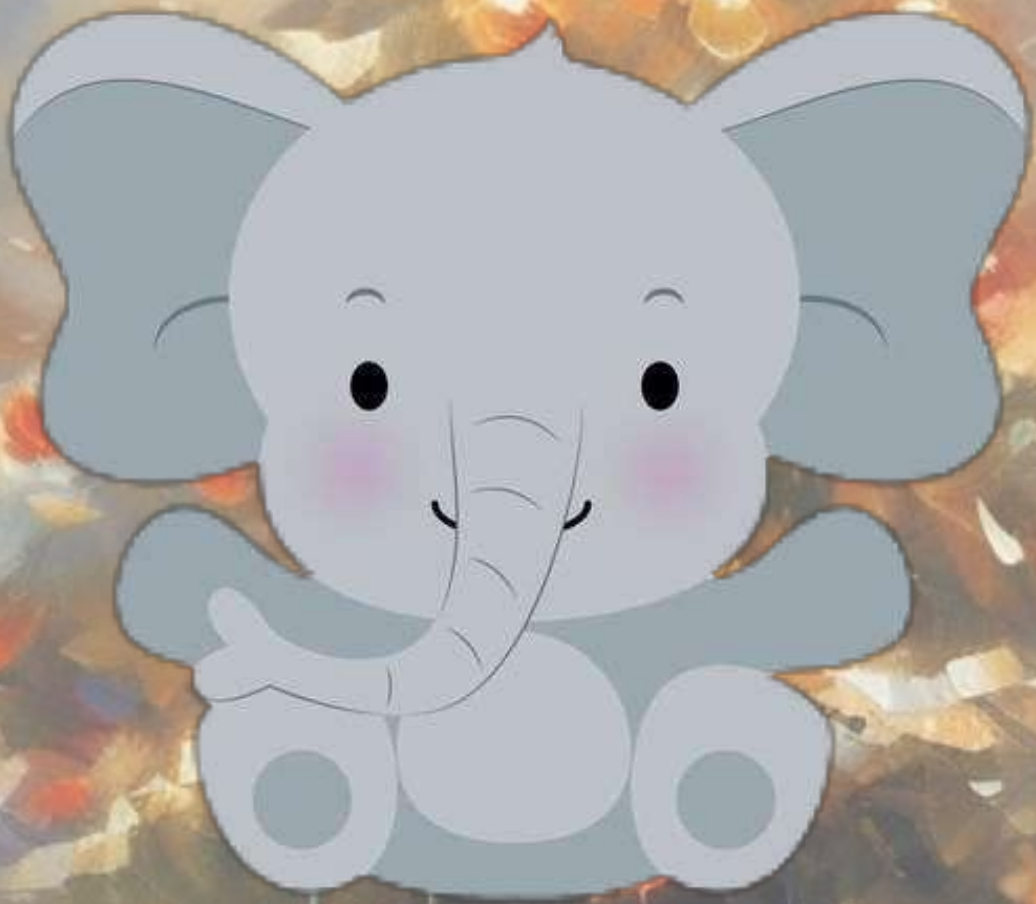
One day, Margarete told her family she was going to become a seamstress. Everyone thought she'd fail but Margarete paid them no attention.



By seventeen, she was using a sewing machine and had a small business making clothes out of felt.



At Christmas, Margarete used some of the felt to make elephants that were given out to children. They were cherished by everyone who received one.



Most toys at the time were made from hard things that couldn't be cuddled and Margarete's soft animals were a much more comforting alternative. Margarete could see that kids wanted her creations, so she continued making them even after the first elephants were gone.



On the back of her clothing catalogue, she wrote: 'Children's toys in felt, safe and unbreakable. Elephants with colourful saddles.' Steiff toy was born.



Margarete's brother, Fritz, encouraged her to grow the business. He arranged for a new building to house the business, including an apartment with easy disabled access where Margarete could live comfortably and independently.



She began making donkey's, all out of cuddly felt.



Then her brother hit on the idea of creating a bear. Steiff made some of the very first teddy bears in existence. You could tell they were genuine Steiffs by the button tags sewn into their ears.



By 1907, almost a million were being made every year. Steiff toys remain some of the most collectible, desirable, and loved toys around today. Their company motto is still: 'Only the best is good enough for our children.'





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