

## Happy Days

Every summer the family went off for a holiday in our very small caravan. There were four of us and Mother and Father. We squeezed in. We had no modern conveniences in the van. There were no caravan parks with showers and toilets.

My first memory of the caravan was a holiday in Shankill, Wicklow, where the Caravan Club was holding their annual rally. We parked in the hotel grounds.

One Sunday morning my sister and I were walking over a field where there was a donkey tethered. The donkey saw us, broke free and chased us across the grass. I twisted my ankle on a tussock of grass and screamed so loudly that the hotel owner came to tell us off. When he saw the state I was in it was decided I needed to see a doctor. Because it was war time and petrol was scarce I had to travel to the doctor on the cross bar of Father's bike.

There was a group of scouts on site. When their Skipper took the older scouts to Dublin with him to watch car racing at Phoenix Park he left Father in charge. There was a thunderstorm that night. When the Camp ended and it was time to go home there was a campfire party at which we saw the Skipper presenting the scouts with their badges.

The next summer we went to Wexford, to a place called Killmuckridge. This was quite isolated, with scattered small farms and a two-mile long beach. We got milk from the farm owned by Mary White. Then there was Bridgie's farm which was quite run down. She looked after her uncle who was bedridden. She used to bake wheaten bread which she gave to us to bring home. Mother fed it to the dogs.

One day as I walked along the road I met Bridgie flying straight towards me on her bike. When she had nearly knocked me down she told me she'd just come from a wake – I could smell the whiskey on her breath. She was tight.

My father was very keen on shooting. He used to shoot duck which he would leave to hang for a few days in an old cottage where the dogs slept.

Mary White's husband kept bees on their farm. One day when we went there the bees were swarming. They flew up in a cloud and came after me, stinging my head. Mary gave my sister and me two ducks. She said she had won them at a fete, but they would not lay. We took them home and named them Dilly and Dally. They waddled happily around the garden and after a while started to lay eggs. Mother gave the eggs to the gardener.

I was away at school in England and when I came back Dilly and Dally were gone. The story was that the fox had got them but my sister said they were given to the gardener for his Sunday dinner.