

CHESTNUTS ROASTING

By: Shirley Galloway

It was a cold and wet Saturday in November, with a typical fine English drizzle falling intermittently from a leaden looking sky. Our new Dad, Ginger, suggested a walk in the local woods to find some chestnuts to roast. Mum said, I always had my nose in a book, a real “bookworm” she called me! However, a walk in the woods sounded appealing so I put my book down with a slightly reluctant sigh.

Fortunately by the time we were ready the drizzle had eased, so we all set forth wearing our Wellington boots commonly called ‘wellies’ by us, plus our weather proof coats. Even Mum, who was recovering from her fatigue quite well, seemed keen to get out and see more of the county of Kent, where we had moved to, so she dressed suitably for the weather conditions. Dawn, my younger sister and I, half ran half walked up the hill, waiting on the perimeter of the woods until Mum and Ginger caught up with us. We were all armed, I must say rather ‘optimistically’ with an empty potato sack each.

There was a slight mist which gave the trees and undergrowth an eerie, almost foreboding, ghostly effect; this made me feel quite excited for some unknown reason! Even the birds were quieter, not twittering as loud as usual. Dawn and I started searching the ground for chestnuts, with the drizzle spasmodically stopping and starting. Mum and Ginger, who were holding hands, took their time, meandering through the various paths but always keeping Dawn and I in sight.

As we stooped to pick the fallen chestnuts off the ground we saw startled rabbits scuttling away. Others eyed us curiously from behind a bush or a tree then they just disappeared like little brown apparitions, into the misty undergrowth, reminding me of a child’s fairy story. Sweet looking squirrels were scampering up and down the tree branches with their bushy tails going up and down, so gorgeous and cute, and cuddly. We even saw several foxes slinking away into the woods on our invasion into ‘their territory’! It was fortunate we hadn’t taken our gorgeous black and white spaniel/border collie as she would have probably given chase, being only a few months old, we could have even lost her!

Two or perhaps three hours later with each of our sacks almost half full of lovely shiny but damp brown skinned chestnuts; we decided to make our way home. Home now being the sweetest, quaintest cottage we had ever lived in, with its white washed ceilings, wide almost black timber beams running across from the front of the cottage to the back kitchen, giving the house such a wonderful atmosphere as though we had stepped back in time. We actually had, as we were told it had been built around the

middle of the fifteenth century. To enter the front door Ginger had to duck to get through the door, being over 6ft tall. Then everyone had to step down into the lounge room, Dawn and I typically preferred to jump.

Our back garden was a long, albeit narrow orchard, full of fruit trees, mainly crab apple. No chestnut trees though!

Mum and Ginger slept in the first level bedroom, Dawn and I in the attic which had wonderful sloping ceilings ending about 12 inches from the timber floor. We could both stand up in the middle but had to bend over slightly to climb into our very own double bed.

On arriving home we divested ourselves of the wet coats and wellies, impatient as usual to stoke up the fire and start roasting. Ginger and Mum sensibly used the fire-tongs. Dawn and I being typical teenagers couldn't dry ourselves quickly enough. We were eager to literally get cracking, throwing our chestnuts into the embers, losing a couple in the process to the flames. When the nuts cracked open, we used the scuttle to scrape them out of the fire, peeling them when they had cooled off sufficiently. On accumulating a good handful of roasted nuts we munched away – so yummy!

We literally gorged ourselves, full and relaxed all agreeing what a perfect day we had had as a family. It is hard to imagine actually enjoying walking through the woods on a cold day in the misty rain – a day never to be repeated – being so wonderful and I know engraved in **my** memory forever!

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