

## 23 The bear essentials

Billy's Grandpa is a great story teller. There's nothing he likes better than to have a captive audience whom he can regale with long stories about the things that he has done and what it was like when he was a lad. But I have to say that there was no more willing a captive than Billy. Billy loves his Grandpa, and he loves to listen to his stories, even though he has heard many of them several times.

There were many exciting stories. Like the time when Grandpa had single-handedly saved his friend Paddy after he had sunk up to his neck in quicksand when they were in the army together in Egypt. Or the time when Grandpa had stopped a cruise liner from sinking by keeping his finger in a hole in the side for two whole weeks. There were also frightening stories. Like the one about the killer lobster. (Well, maybe the less said about that one the better). Then there were heroic stories. Like the one about how Grandpa swam across the English Channel when he was younger. Or the story about how Driptown had won the annual cricket match against Liverpuddle in 1952, all because Grandpa had hit six sixes in the last over!

There were also some funny stories. Like the time when Grandpa went swimming in the sea at Blackpond and a big wave managed to pull his swimming trunks off! Or the time when Grandpa had nearly accidentally sold Grandma to a man in a Moroccan street market while they were on holiday. (Well, he always said it was accidental anyway!)

Billy would often say: "Cor Grandpa, you've done lots of things. I bet that no matter what happened you'd know what to do, wouldn't you!"

"Oh well ..err ... I don't know about that Billy," Grandpa would say. "But I'd certainly do my best."

Billy's favourite story was the one in which Grandpa and his friend Paddy had been camping deep in a thick Bavarian forest. One night they had both been woken by a rustling sound, and then a scraping and snorting sound. Just outside their tent was a giant grizzly bear.

"It was about eight foot high," Grandpa would always say. "It had teeth like iron railings and claws as sharp as razor blades, and it was trying to get into our tent!"

"What did you do, Grandpa?" Billy would always ask, as he bit his nails.

"We didn't know what to do!" said Grandpa. "Paddy and I had a think and we remembered that bears like honey. So we found a pot of honey we'd brought with us. We made a sort of catapult thing with a big rubber band we had. We took the top off the honey and loaded it into the catapult and waited. When the bear was near, I quickly whipped open the tent and Paddy fired the honey pot at the bear. He got covered in honey from head to toe and rushed off in a bit of a tizzy. And do you know, it took that bear so long to lick all that honey off his fur, that he never bothered us again."

"Wow! Wow!" Billy would always say. "How big was the bear again Grandpa?"

Billy remembered all of Grandpa's stories. In fact, sometimes he had to put Grandpa right when he told them.

"Lucky you've got me," he would say, "or you'd forget your own stories!"

"Oh yes, you're very lucky!" Gran would often mutter under her breath.

Now, a couple of years ago Billy had joined the Cubs and last summer he was old enough to go up to the Scout group. Billy was really looking forward to this because the Scouts went camping. Having heard all about Grandpa's adventures when he was young, he was looking forward to this very much. Finally the time came. At the end of one meeting the scout leader said: "We're arranging a camping trip to Wildside Wood during the holidays. Ask your parents and, if you want to go, sign the list."

Mum agreed and Billy signed the list. His friend Mickey was going as well.

Billy thought hard and remembered as many of Grandpa's stories as possible. Then he found a shoe box and wrote: 'For emmergincees ownlee' on the lid. In it he put a large white handkerchief, for surrendering to the Indians and an over ripe banana, just in case there were any of those killer lobsters about. He also put in a few pins and a straw, for making a poisoned dart firing thing and a long piece of string, for laying trip wires in case of stampeding elephants. Finally, of course, he added a pot of honey and the strongest, longest rubber band that he could find. Just in case there were any not so friendly bears around.

The day came. Billy packed his shoebox deep at the bottom of his rucksack. They all clambered into the mini-bus, and they were off.

Wildside Wood lived up to its name. The trees were so thick that it was almost dark, even during the day. And the undergrowth was so thick that you could hardly walk! The scout leader found a clearing and they pitched their tents. With a lot of puffing and panting, and several collapses, Billy and Mickey eventually got their tent up as well. Then, after sausages and beans for supper, they all settled down to sleep.

Billy and Mickey talked for a while and then drifted off to sleep. Suddenly though Billy woke up again. He thought he heard something. He listened very carefully and, yes, there it was again. It was a sort of rustling sound. He stayed very still. The rustling came again, very close to their tent. Then he heard a sort of scraping sound and, what he was sure was a snorting sound. Billy shook Mickey.

"Mickey! Mickey!" he whispered. "There's ... there's ... there's a bear outside!"

Suddenly the rustling sound happened again. Mickey went very pale.

"Wha, wha, what shall we do!" he whispered desperately.

Billy thought hard. "Now what would Grandpa do if he had the same problem?" he asked himself, and then Billy remembered!

"Don't worry," he said. "I know just what to do."

Suddenly, Billy felt very brave, very brave indeed. It was as if he could hear Grandpa telling him the story all over again. He did everything just as Grandpa had always said. He opened the shoe box and took out the rubber band and the honey. They looped the rubber band around their rucksacks and stretched it across the tent. Billy carefully took off the top of the honey jar and Mickey held it ready and they listened. Suddenly they heard the rustling sound again. This time it was right outside the tent door. Quick as a flash, Billy pulled down the zip, "Now!" he shouted, and Mickey let the jar of honey go. It flew off into the darkness. There was a big thud and an "aaaaaaahhhhhhhh!" sound.

"Got it! Got it!" whispered Billy excitedly. "Well done Mickey, that old bear won't be bothering us again!" And they went back to bed and slept the rest of the night.

The next day the scout leader didn't seem to be feeling very well. Billy didn't know why, but they had a good day anyway and later in the afternoon they packed up their things and jumped into the mini-bus to go home.

Mum came to meet them. "Did you have a good time?" she asked.

"Oh yes, great," said Billy. "I saved us from a bear in the middle of the night."

"Oh yes," said Mum, in her normal 'come off it Billy' sort of voice.

Just then the scout leader walked past.

"Oh dear," said Mum, "whatever happened to Mr. Packer? How did he get that big black eye and that bump on his head?"

Billy looked at Mr Packer, "Oh dear... I..... I ... I don't know," he said. "Err ... maybe he met the bear as well?"

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