

and I out from time to time. I think Vin was Spanish or something. I was scared of him. I was scared of most men actually and am still uncomfortable in their presence largely. I think this was because Doc was not a particularly 'come hither' sort of person, I had no uncles, cousins, brothers or any male persons round me, so I never got used to men. Monny was still around during my riding days, and we went to a few gymkhanas together. Eventually they went to live in Douglas on the Isle of Man. I saw Monny a few times when I lived in London. She was somehow involved with people who owned a private zoo and trained animals for film work. When they left, they left us Sue and their Budgerigar. Sue was a miniature sheepdog and the cutest little thing you ever did see. The budgie was Pete and talked, boy did he talk.

I learned to ride on Smokey. Smokey was a very beautiful Arab horse - grey obviously - high-spirited and did not suffer fools kindly. My mother was a great believer in the philosophy that said that when you were thrown from a horse, you got right back on again! Round and round the field we would go with me learning to ride, and Smokey chucking me off at the same corner every, but every, time round until I acquired the ability to stick on, and we came to a sort of understanding. We looked after him for a while for someone else - great loss when he went home. Then Marjorie, Bridget's mother, won a Dartmoor pony. His name was Gypsy. Shetland and Dartmoor ponies were supposed, because they were small, to be good ponies for children to learn on but they were not, being generally wild and bad tempered. I can't remember anyone really riding Gypsy, or what happened to him in the end. Then there was Vicky. He belonged to one of the farmers, and I could borrow him. I rode Vicky for many years.

During the war cigarettes became hard to come by at times and my mother was a 40-a-day addict. One of my jobs was to take to horse, do the rounds of all the surrounding village inns, collecting cigarettes for her.

I wonder if the amount of freedom children had in those days and the safety with which they could roam around is a thing of the past. Once I had done my jobs around the house, which included pumping water by hand into the tank at the house - it took about 20 minutes - filling the lamps with paraffin, trimming the wicks as necessary and cleaning the glass chimneys among others, I was free to saddle up any horse I had use of at the time and roam around any of the villages I cared to go to. I had special stopping places around the lanes where I would enjoy a particular view, and the horses got to know where they were and stop there automatically. Then there were always nuts to pick. Hazel nuts are one of the nicest nuts and grow wild in the lanes, in Devon certainly, probably all over England; they grow up high so being on horseback gives one a particular advantage. Down at Wonwell beach in the woods was a super place to roam. As I think of that place I remember the smell of wild Garlic as the horses' hooves bruised the plants. Full of Rhododendrons those woods, quite a picture at the right time of year; then of course a blue picture when the Bluebells were in season. I can recollect collecting arms full of those with Dina.

Bigbury-on-sea was a favourite one of the villages to ride to. It was the largest and most commercialised of the seaside holiday spots. It had ice cream, and a small amusement arcade with slot machines with little balls dropping into places, if you were lucky - and I always was - the little balls would drop into the right places and you would come out with considerably more money than you went in with. I actually just about relied on this for my teas and ice creams.

Just off Bigbury-on-sea there was a tidal island called Borough Island. It housed little more than a large hotel, and a small inn. Once, way back when I was still about five or so, a group of adults went to this island and to the large hotel. I can remember the owner taking an interested group, mostly children, on a tour of the island and showing us all the hiding places in coves and caves where a local pirate, Bill Crocker, used to stash his goods. He was quite famous in those parts. Smuggling goods in, past the customs and excise guys, was still quite fresh in folks'