

At the End of the Day there was still Mending Socks to do

Mrs Dague was born in 1923 and interviewed in 2008

My sister and I went to Howgill School in our clogs. We walked everywhere in all weathers and up to the time I was five I hardly knew anything else because I never went away from home. I liked school because I was good at learning and I did pass my Eleven Plus but Kirkby Lonsdale was too far away for me to go there.

The teacher was very strict. We did reading writing and arithmetic we also did sewing and drawing. But your school years soon went and my first job, as the youngest on the farm, was as a domestic. It was my job to feed the calves and hens at our farm. We didn't make butter we sold our milk in a churn I'd take it to the bottom of Stocks Lane with our horse, called Sally, for the wagon to collect. Me father always had several horses down the years but I remember Sally best because I was able to work with her, you see she was as quiet and gentle as a lamb. I would walk beside her mostly when we were hay-timing.

My father had a mixed farm with an open fell and 81 acres. My father was a good farmer and very fond of his Rough Fell sheep. They went ont' open fell when they could. We lambed just over one hundred sheep. In those days you only had the stock your farm could carry. There was no such thing as intensive rearing

I remember one time, it was Martinmas Week and it was tupping time so the sheep were kept at the farm for about three weeks and then sent back to the fells. We were short-handed and my brother told me to take them back to the fell. I hadn't done that job before and I asked "How do I know where to leave them?" and my brother said "Well t'dog knows" and do you know those sheep put their heads down when they got to our heaf. (*A heaf is the portion of the open fell that is allocated to the farm.*) They also ran some "weathers," territorial sheep, who knew the fells, and kept the flock together.

One of my jobs was to feed the calves. I also had to teach the calves to drink milk. I'd have to put my hand in their mouths and let them suck my hand. Then I'd shove their nose in and let them suck your fingers until they got the idea of drinking. They would be taken off milk about six months and then they were onto slab cake, and linseed oil. In fact, on the whole we were pretty much nearly organic.

Then the war came. The War Agriculture Committee (The "War Ag") sort of took over and we were obliged to do whatever they told us really. We had to get a licence to kill a pig for example and there was weird and wonderful stories about people that were killing extra pigs although there were Food Inspectors checking on such things. We had to plough up more land. Grass disappeared and oats were the crop. The idea was to feed instead of grow grass. People were encouraged to give up their gardens and "Dig for Victory."

I think we had a pretty good childhood into adulthood. We didn't have all the technology and stuff they have now but we were carefree really and we had freedom up on ... how many hours did we spend on those fells? Once a year we went on a trip to Morecambe, there was a station at Lowgill and we would all get together and go on the train.

As well as sheep there were pigs on my father's farm and I was often there when they killed them. There was a man who specialised in killing pigs. He used to come to the farm and he used to hunger it, keep it from food for a day or so and then he used to come and kill it. I can't tell you much about the actual killing 'cos I was too young to watch that.

The man came back in about two days and cut it up for us then my mother and father used to salt them. The pig was put into salt flitches for ten days, hams and shoulders for three weeks, then it would be hung up washed and hung up to dry.

On one occasion two young soldiers, one from London and one from Cardiff came to the farmhouse for some reason. They had just hauled the bacon out of the salt to dry and said "What on earth is that?". So mother had to explain it was bacon. They'd never been out of the cities until they were transported into the Army and wanted the whole process explained. They were a bit squeamish about killing a pig which was ironic considering they were in the army. I don't suppose they'd ever realised what bacon looked like when their mother brought it home ready to cook. As for the black puddings!!

I used to stir the blood for the black puddings very vigorously while it was coming out and then it didn't clot. Then you boiled the barley to put it in as a base really and the blood went in. You cut the fat up and put that in and added some seasoning, some people more than others. My mother used to put a bit of marjoram in and then she mixed some herbs on a saucer and put that in. Everybody had their own bit of a recipe.

My mother was a good animal nurse. She was a good nurse but her cures could be worse than the disease I tell you. They were old fashioned remedies that didn't always taste so pleasant. We had castor oil of course but we had a tremendous thing called black molasses. It was a health food which is the unrefined substance out of the sugar cane before it was refined into black treacle. It contains a lot of good vitamins and minerals and we used to have it 'cos they said it was food for us didn't they.

There was, and still is, a difference between town and country and at the end of the day there was still all the knitting and mending of the woollen socks to do.

Interview No R149

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