

## Episode 9 – The Wee Vet

I was privileged to grow up in the Highlands of Scotland, immersed in purple heather, craggy grey granite and bright yellow broom. My love for the countryside grew from visiting hundreds of ancient farms tucked away in the “back of beyond”. My father was the county vet for Aberdeenshire and I was his “assistant”, running behind him clutching onto his weathered brown veterinary kit bag, listening intently to conversations with farmers.

“So, Mr. Drummond, how long has your cow had mastitis?” my father would ask casually, standing at ease in his tweed jacket and tackety boots.

“Och, weel, she’s been richt poorly for goin’ on twa weeks, but ye ken, ah plastered on that mustard and molasses magic mastitis paste guaranteed tae fix a’ they teat problems. Ah dinna ken why it didnae work ....” the farmer’s voice would trail away, his eyes downcast and brow furrowed. Invariably he would scratch his head just to show how completely flummoxed he was that all his efforts had been in vain.

“All right then, Mr. Drummond, let’s take a look at her, shall we? And let me have a look at your magic paste as well.” The magic paste would disappear into the brown kit bag, with reassuring words that it needed to be “examined closely”, which indeed it was, accompanied by uproarious laughter at the “magical” ingredients right off the kitchen table!

The most exciting times were calf deliveries and I learned very quickly that if the farmer wanted “vitinary help” to birth a calf, a big adventure awaited.

“How long has she been like this?” my father would ask, whipping off his shirt and delving his arms into a bucket of freezing soapy water.

“Weel noo, she’s bin aff her feet since yesterrrrday morn, but ah didnae want tae bother ye.....” came the apologetic reply.

I never attended a difficult calf birth that my father couldn’t put right. The sweat would pour down his face and unholy yells split the air as his arm was ground to a pulp between massive pelvic bones, but then there would be the moment when little hooves would appear and the slippery calf popped out, ready for his mother’s raspy tongue.

Those were the good days, and I loved every minute. We would be invited into the farmhouse afterwards for a slap up feast of warm, buttered scones and milky, sweet tea set before a crackling fire. I shone with pride when the farmers named me “The Wee Vet” and looked out for me when we arrived at the farm.

“Did ye bring the “Wee Vet” wi’ ye? Aye, aye, there ye are noo. That’s gude!” they would say in satisfaction.

It's not surprising then, that when I was twelve, I informed my father that I wanted to be a vet just like him and my grandfather. There was no hesitation in his harsh reply, "That's nae a job for a girrrrul!" He had pronounced judgement, and the case was closed.

Thankfully, today the world has changed and "girrrruls" can be anything they choose! When a young lass tells me she would like to be a vet's assistant, I ask "Why not be the veterinarian?" and encourage her to seek the finest in herself. So too, women farmers were unheard of when I was young, they were "ben the hoose" making the tea and scones. But our world now calls out to women to take up farming, who care about the land, the environment, the food we eat, the need to develop and protect local resources and the future we borrow from children yet to come.

There's never been a better time to encourage the Wee Vets, the Wee Farmers and all the young dreamers we chance to meet who believe in a world of great possibilities! Enthusiastic encouragement is the elixir of life!

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