

Oh Gran!

by

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Chapter 1 News Time

“Has anyone else got any news?” asked Mrs Crowley.

It was Friday afternoon, which was end-of-the-week news time at school. Teresa Barry had just told everyone how she’d passed her first Tae Kwondo exam the night before. She now had a yellow-tip belt. (Frank Feeney, sitting in the back row, decided he had better stop teasing her in the yard.)

“Surely someone has more news?” persisted Mrs Crowley.

No one put a hand up.

Mrs Crowley’s eye fell on Emily.

“Emily, have you got some news?”

Emily had, but she didn’t feel much like sharing it.

“Not really, Mrs Crowley,” muttered Emily, wishing her teacher had picked on someone else.

Mrs Crowley refused to be put off.

“There must be something you can tell us about, Emily. Now, come up here and share your news.”

Emily knew when she was beaten. She shuffled to the front of the classroom and turned to face the others.

“My news is that Gran is coming to look after me this weekend because Mum and Dad won a holiday in a competition so they’re going away.”

Emily shot back to her seat, her cheeks burning.

“Why, thank you, Emily,” smiled Mrs Crowley. “That’s nice news. I’m sure you’ll have a great time with your granny!”

Emily and her friends weren’t so sure. They talked about grannies at break time.

“Gosh, poor you,” said Mary Roberts. “Whenever my granny comes she makes us turn the telly down so low that we can’t hear it!”

“Yes, and my granny’s always telling me to wash my hands and brush my hair and stuff,” groaned Dermot Halloran.

“Has your granny stayed before?” asked Niamh Desmond.

“Not for ages and ages,” Emily answered. “You see, after Granddad died a few years ago, Gran went to live with my Auntie Hilary in Australia. Then just after Christmas she decided to come back to Ireland. We were going to go up to Galway to see her, but I got chickenpox so we I couldn’t. But now she’s coming down to look after me. She said she would pick me up from school today.!”

Her friends pulled sympathetic faces. Grannies weren’t considered cool.

Chapter 2 Gran Arrives

Emily was quite nervous when the bell rang at the end of school. To be honest, she couldn't exactly remember what Gran looked like! It must be more than three years since she'd seen her. Mum kept sending photos of Emily to Gran, but Gran never sent back any of herself.

"So how am I supposed to recognise her, then?" grumbled Emily.

She had a vague image in her head of someone small, smiley and rather wrinkly. But that was all.

She dawdled out of school, wanting to be one of the last out so that her friends wouldn't see her with her granny. Plus it would be easier to work out who Gran was if the other parents and relatives had already gone home with their children. But Emily's friends were curious about her granny. They dawdled out too so they could see what she looked like.

Glaring at them for being so nosy, Emily led a gaggle of her friends to the school gate. She looked across the road to where the remaining mums and dads were waiting. She recognised all of them except for a motorcyclist wearing a black leather jacket. So where on earth was Gran? Emily was dismayed. Mum and Dad would be at the airport by now. Gran was meant to be here to pick her up.

Emily looked at all the faces again. Had she missed Gran somewhere? Unless, no, surely not! Emily watched in amazement as the motorcyclist pulled off a tiger-striped helmet and revealed the smiling face of an elderly lady. It was Gran!

Emily's mouth dropped open in astonishment.

"Where's your gran then?" hissed Niamh.

"I can't see a walking stick anywhere!" joked Dermot, not very nicely.

"Yes, where is she?" asked Mary.

"There! She's there!" croaked Emily, pointing to her leather-clad Gran.

Her friends fell silent in horror.

Oh Gran! thought Emily. I will never live this down.

Chapter 3 Biker Gran

Just then Gran caught sight of Emily.

"Yoo-hoo! Emily love!" she shouted at the top of her voice, waving madly.

"Yoo-hoo!" a couple of kids behind Emily mimicked, giggling. Emily went bright red and hurried across the road before Gran could embarrass her again.

Gran came up to her and gave her an enormous hug. Emily hugged her back. It was nice to see Gran again, after so long. Gran's leather jacket creaked as they hugged.

"You're creaking an awful lot, Gran!" observed Emily.

"Well, most people my age do," shrugged Gran.

"No, not you, I meant your coat," Emily explained quickly. "It smells nice too."

"Glad you like it. Now, come on, young lady. Let's go home for tea. I'm starving."

Gran trotted up the road to where a huge, gleaming motorbike was standing. A few children had gathered round for a closer look.

"Hey, that's a great bike!" said one boy.

"Yeah, cool stripes!" piped up a girl.

"Um, where will I go, Gran?" asked Emily, anxiously, looking at the bike.

"Behind me, of course," said Gran. "I've got a spare crash helmet for you. Just make sure that you hold on tight."

Emily wasn't sure she liked the idea of clinging onto Gran and zooming along. She'd seen people riding pillion on motorbikes and it looked really scary.

"I'm not sure Mum would let me," she said doubtfully.

"Of course she would," Gran reassured her. "But we could walk home if you'd prefer."

The children were still crowding round the bike. Here was Emily's chance to impress them! She shook her head firmly.

"No way. I'd love to have a ride on your bike!" she decided.

"Good for you!" smiled Gran. "Let's go!"

Gran unlocked the big box at the back of the bike and fished out a bright blue helmet. She put it on Emily's head. Emily staggered with the sudden weight of it.

"Golly! It's heavy!" she protested in a muffled voice from inside it. When she spoke, her breath clouded up the visor. For a moment Emily nearly panicked. She felt as though she had an elephant on her head and she couldn't see! Just then, Gran pulled up the visor letting in a rush of fresh air and restoring Emily's sight.

"Phew! that's better!" Emily sighed. "I feel like a spacewoman with this helmet on," she added, giggling.

"You look a bit like one too," agreed Gran. "Now, you sit up here and I'll hop on in front of you. I'll have to push your visor down again."

At least this time it didn't fog up. Gran helped Emily up onto the large padded seat behind her saddle. Then she climbed on in front of Emily, pushed the bike forward off its stand and turned the key in the ignition. The engine purred into life, making the bike vibrate a little bit. Emily held on tightly to Gran.

“OK, off we go!” called Gran.

She rolled the bike onto the road, revved the engine and kicked the starter pedal. The bike smoothly accelerated away.

“Eek!” squeaked Emily. It felt like they were going about a million miles an hour! She closed her eyes and hung on for dear life! Then she remembered that her friends were watching her. She didn’t want them to think she was a scaredy-cat, so she opened her eyes again. Houses and people were flashing past. It was brilliant!

“Oh Gran! This is really cool!” Emily yelled above the noise of the engine.

“Isn’t it!” shouted back Gran. “Let’s go for a spin before we go home, shall we?”

“Yes, please!” cried Emily. The engine roared as Gran accelerated again.

Chapter 4 Speeding

“Faster!” urged Emily a few moments later. They were now hurtling along the by-pass. Gran revved the engine.

“Even faster!”

Gran sped up even more. Both of them were so busy enjoying the thrill of the speed that they didn’t see the police car parked just off the road, keeping an eye on the traffic. But the policeman saw them!

It was a couple of minutes before Gran became aware of the police car behind her. Suddenly the blue light on its roof lit up.

“Uh oh! Trouble!” she shouted to Emily. “The police want to have a word.”

“Oh Gran!” cried Emily in alarm. Now they were bound to go to prison.

Gran pulled over and the police car stopped behind them. The officer got out.

“Good afternoon, sir. Please remove your helmet,” he said walking up to Gran.

Gran climbed off the bike and pulled her helmet off. The man’s jaw dropped when he saw it was an elderly lady underneath the helmet!

“Well, madam,” he said sternly, recovering himself quickly. “I’d like to remind you of the speed limit on this road. You were exceeding it by 10 kilometres per hour.”

“Oh gracious! I am sorry!” gasped Gran.

“It’s my fault, actually,” piped up Emily. “I asked Gran to go faster.”

“Did you now?” asked the policeman, bending down to stare severely into Emily’s face. “Aiding and abetting, that is. Very serious.”

“Oh Gran!” squeaked Emily in dismay.

Definitely prison.

The policeman’s face softened.

“Don’t ever do it again, young lady,” he warned with a wink. •

“I won’t, I promise!” whispered Emily.

“And the same goes for you, madam,” he went on, turning to Gran. “No more speeding, you hear? I’ll let you off with a caution this time, but next time - trouble.”

Gran nodded, weak with relief.

“On your way then. Safe journey,” said the policeman.

Gran and Emily drove off as quickly as they legally could.

“Oh Gran, that was scary!” shouted Emily, as they zoomed towards home. •

“It certainly was!” Gran yelled back. “I need a nice strong cup of tea to recover!”

Chapter 5 No Tea

But Gran was out of luck. Mum only drank herb teas these days and Dad only ever drank coffee so there were no proper teabags to be found.

“Goodness me!” grumbled Gran looking through the teabags. “Camomile and eucalyptus, rosehip and blackberry, sage and onion — they must taste awful!”

“I don’t think sage and onion is a type of tea, is it?” queried Emily.

“No, dear,” admitted Gran, smiling. “I made that one up! But it wouldn’t surprise me if your mum tried to drink it one day. So no cup of tea for me. Oh well, let’s have a nice snack instead.”

“There’s plenty of food,” said Emily.

“Mum went shopping yesterday.” She didn’t add that it had been at the local health food co-op.

“Oh good,” said Gran, pulling the fridge door open and peering inside.

There was silence for a moment or two as Gran lifted up a few items for inspection.

“Tofu? Falafel? What on earth are they? Low-fat salad dressing, radishes, turnip, carrots, coleslaw, cottage cheese! Where’s all the proper food?” she demanded.

Emily opened her mouth to reply that this was proper food and very tasty too, but Gran slammed the fridge door shut and marched crossly over to the food cupboard. She didn’t have much luck there either.

“Brown bread, sugar-free muesli, wholemeal spaghetti, tinned prunes, long-life skimmed milk! Is this what you live on?” she asked Emily, aghast.

Emily nodded.

“You poor, poor child,” tutted Gran, shaking her head. “Come on, we need to find some fat and carbohydrates. I’m taking you to the fish and chip shop for a real meal for a change!”

Gran grabbed Emily’s hand and practically dragged her outside to the motorbike.

“By the way, where is the nearest chip shop? I’ve forgotten,” she asked, pulling her helmet on.

Now, there was one in the next village but Emily decided to forget about that one. The chips were always soggy there.

“I think we’ll have to go to Burger Kingdom in town, Gran,” she suggested craftily. “It shouldn’t take long to get there on the bike.”

“Burger Kingdom it is then,” announced Gran. She liked the sound of that. “Does it do thick milkshakes and muffins too?”

Emily nodded.

“Excellent,” said Gran. “That’s where we’ll eat from now on then.”

“Every meal?” asked Emily.

“If it does breakfasts too, then yes, every meal!” declared Gran.

“Oh Gran!” sighed Emily. “That will be totally cool!”

Chapter 6 Lost on the Trail

Next morning found Gran and Emily tucking into egg, bacon and sausage burgers at Burger Kingdom. Gran had three paper cups of tea in front of her.

“What are we going to do today?” asked Emily, wiping ketchup off her chin with her paper serviette.

“I thought we’d go for a walk somewhere,” replied Gran, emptying a fifth sachet of sugar into her cups of tea.

“I looked at some of the maps last night. I thought we could drive out to the Derrybally mountains. There are lots of walks there.”

“Sounds fun!” smiled Emily. “But what will we do for lunch? I could make us some tahini and tofu sandwiches.”

Gran pulled a face. “No offence dear, but I think I’ll stick to food that I can spell! I suggest we just stock up on muffins from this place and some cartons of milk. That should get us through till teatime when we can come back here.”

“Oh Gran!” Emily giggled. “Mum would have a fit!”

So Gran went back to the counter and bought two chocolate muffins and two blueberry muffins for their lunch. She got four cartons of milk too. Stocked up with goodies, they whizzed home and changed into suitable walking gear. Emily was a lot quicker than Gran, so she dashed to the kitchen to make a few healthy sandwiches for them both to go with the muffins. Gran’s diet definitely needed improving, thought Emily to herself. She must be very short of vitamins living as she did on junk food.

Just then Emily thought of the very thing for Gran. There was a big packet of pumpkin seeds in the cupboard. Mum practically lived on those and no one could accuse Emily’s mum of being unhealthy. Emily shoved those into her rucksack too.

Gran appeared at last so they put their helmets on and headed for the mountains. It was quite a long drive and Emily was glad when they arrived as she was beginning to feel cold and stiff. Gran unloaded their rucksacks from her luggage box and replaced them with the two helmets. Then they set off on one of the mountain trails.

“Goodness!” exclaimed Gran after they’d been walking for about ten minutes. “That breakfast wasn’t very filling. I’m peckish already. Can you get me a muffin please, Em?”

“Tell you what Gran,” said Emily, seizing her chance. “Let’s save the muffins for later. How about some nice pumpkin seeds to keep you going. They’re very good for you.”

Gran pulled a face. “Pumpkin seeds? Good for you? They don’t sound it!”

But when she saw Emily’s earnest expression, she smiled. “Oh, go on then, you health freak,” she teased. “Just like your mum! Come on, I’ll try those bird seeds of yours.”

Emily beamed and handed the packet over. Gran paled slightly when she saw the size of the bag but she bravely said nothing and took the seeds. She began nibbling.

As they walked along, Gran chatted away about Australia and all the things she had seen and done there. To Emily’s amazement she seemed to be able to talk and eat at the same time. Emily especially liked listening to Gran talking about all the strange animals she’d seen, such as wombats, kangaroos, koala bears, duck-billed platypuses and kookaburra birds.

They were chatting so much that they forgot to concentrate on following the marked trail. They walked on and on in no particular direction until suddenly the path just stopped at the top of a deep gully.

“Goodness!” exclaimed Gran in surprise. “I don’t remember seeing this on the map.”

She scabbled in her rucksack and pulled out the map. She pored over the sheet for several minutes, then she looked up at Emily with a worried expression on her face.

“I’m afraid we’re lost, Em,” she said.

Emily looked around at the desolate scenery. The mountains loomed huge and menacing behind them. She glanced up at the grey sky which had gradually become more threatening without them noticing. She didn’t like the idea of being lost at all.

“Oh Gran!” she sighed. “What will we do?”

Chapter 7 Gran Finds the Way

“We’ll have a muffin, that’s what we’ll do,” decided Gran. “In fact, we may as well have all of them.”

So they sat and ate in silence. A pair of sheep eyed them warily but, deciding they were harmless, carried on grazing.

“Come on! Let’s simply retrace our steps!” Gran suddenly announced, standing up. The sheep, startled by this sudden movement, trotted quickly away.

They found what looked like the path they had come along and began to follow it down, but it soon petered out by a little stream. Then they went back to their picnic spot and tried another path, but it led them round the corner and then gave up too.

“Hmm,” said Gran, thoughtfully. “I’ll have to try a trick my Aborigine friend taught me in Australia.”

“What’s that then, Gran?” asked Emily, intrigued in spite of being pretty scared at being lost.

“You’ll see,” smiled Gran, getting down on all fours. Emily gasped as Gran calmly laid her ear against the boggy ground.

“Oh, Gran,” she giggled. “You do look silly! What if someone sees you?”

“Well, if someone sees me, we can ask them the way back to the car park!” smiled Gran.

Gran’s words reminded Emily that they were out in the middle of nowhere with only sheep for company.

“What are you listening for, Gran?”

“Shh!” replied Gran.

Emily shushed. She fidgeted from foot to foot while she waited for Gran to do whatever it was she was doing. At last Gran got up, a bit stiffly.

“That way!” she said decisively.

Emily shrugged her shoulders. That way was probably as good as any. Gran strode along confidently. Emily hurried after her, conscious of the darkening skies and the chilly bite in the air. She hoped this was the way home.

Suddenly Gran stopped.

“What is it? Are we lost again?” gasped Emily.

“Just need to check the route,” Gran informed her and squatted down again to press her ear to the ground. Emily hovered anxiously. Gran slowly stood up.

“Are we OK?” demanded Emily.

“We’re OK,” nodded Gran. “We’d just begun to go slightly off course. This way!”

Once again Gran marched off, with Emily close behind. Emily wasn’t sure but she thought she recognised a few features. Hadn’t they seen a big rock like that one, shaped like a lion’s head, at the start? And that clump of seven spindly trees on the top of the hill looked familiar, didn’t it?

They rounded the crest of another hill, and Emily sighed with relief. There, glinting in the dim light of the afternoon, was Gran’s bike!

“Oh, Gran!” she cried, giving her grandma a big hug. “You got us back! You’re brilliant. I thought we were lost for ever! But how did you do it? What did you hear when you listened to the ground?”

Gran looked guilty.

“Actually, Em dear, I couldn’t hear a thing!” she confessed. “I’ve never been able to, not even in Australia when my friend was trying to teach me to listen to the earth’s vibrations. But I thought it was worth a try. And as it happens, while I was trying to listen today, I caught sight of some pumpkin seeds!”

“What do you mean?” asked Emily.

“I mean,” Gran went on, “I could see your pumpkin seeds, the ones you gave me that I, um, didn’t eat!”

Emily’s mouth dropped open.

“You see, Em, I’m afraid I thought those pumpkin seeds of yours tasted disgusting! I’m sorry, my love. But I didn’t like to disappoint you when you were trying so hard to make me eat something that’s good for me. So I pretended to eat them as we went along and dropped them on the ground instead. I got us home by following the trail I’d left! Luckily the birds hadn’t found the seeds and eaten them. Or perhaps they’re like me, and prefer muffins!”

Gran grinned as she said that. Emily didn’t know whether to be cross or grateful to Gran for throwing all those pumpkin seeds away. She was also a bit miffed at being tricked by Gran over the ear-to-the-ground business. She’d really thought Gran had ‘listened’ their way back home. Then she saw the funny side, and started to chuckle.

“Oh, Gran, you really fooled me,” she admitted.

“Yes, I did, didn’t I!” agreed Gran, and they both laughed. “OK, who fancies a burger?”

Chapter 8 Swimming Pool Surprise

It was Sunday morning and time for breakfast.

“Come on, Em, I’m starving,” called Gran.

Emily was getting dressed. They were about to set off for Burger Kingdom. Then Gran thought of something. "Is there a swimming pool in town?"

"Yes, it's a brand new one. It's huge and it's even got a diving pool. Can we go?"

"Sure, why not?" Gran smiled at Emily's enthusiasm. "Go and grab your swimming things, love, and I'll fetch mine. We'll have a quick splash before breakfast."

"Yippee!" shouted Emily.

When they got to the pool they found a notice pinned to the door: Pool closed for diving competition, 9.15 to 11.00am. Entrants to register at reception desk before 9.00am.

Emily was really disappointed.

"Diving competition, eh? Registration closes in ..." Gran looked at her watch. "Streuth! In two minutes' time. We've got to run, Em."

Gran grabbed Emily's arm and hurried her inside.

"But Gran, I don't know how to dive properly," protested Emily, thinking Gran wanted to enter her in the competition.

"No, but I do," panted Gran, jogging up to the registration desk. The man there was starting to tidy up his things and was almost ready to go.

"Hold it right there!" called Gran. "One more entrant for the competition here!"

The man sat back down again. "Oh good!" he exclaimed. "And what's your name, young lady?" he asked, looking at Emily.

"She's not entering," snapped Gran. "I am!"

"Um, are you sure?" asked the man anxiously. "Our other entrants are, well, all quite young."

"Is there an upper age limit?" demanded Gran, fixing him with a steely stare.

"No, of course not," he admitted, looking uncomfortable.

"Good. Now, here's my entry fee. Please enter me. My name's Edith Bouts."

The man dutifully noted the name with Gran breathing down his neck.

"There we are!" he smiled wanly. "Please be at the pool by 9.15. I'm afraid you've missed the warm-up session."

"I didn't know you could dive, Gran!" exclaimed Emily.

"There's a lot about your old grandma that you don't know," chuckled Gran. "Now, where do I get changed, Em?"

"Over here, Gran." Emily led her into the ladies' changing area. Gran popped into a cubicle. It was a good job Emily saw her going in, because otherwise she would never have recognised the person who came out, not in a million years! This person was wearing a vibrant emerald Aquablade swimsuit that

came down to her knees, a matching cap and fluorescent green goggles. And for someone who lived on chips, chips and more chips, Gran was in remarkably good shape.

“Oh Gran, you look amazing!” gasped Emily. “Just like an Olympic medallist.”

“Thank you,” blushed Gran. “That’s the biggest compliment you could ever pay me. Right then, let’s get diving!”

The competition began a few minutes later. One by one the divers climbed to the top board and dived gracefully into the deep pool below. They were all very good and everyone clapped like mad. Then suddenly it was Gran’s turn.

“Now a late entry, Edith Bouts,” called the announcer.

Gran stood on the top board and waved to the crowd with a flourish. Then she walked confidently to the end and turned round ready to do a backwards dive. No one had done a backwards dive yet. Emily sat and held her breath. She hardly dared look as Gran tensed her body and then flung herself backwards into the air. She did at least two somersaults and a sort of twizzly thing before disappearing into the smooth surface of the diving pool, hardly making a splash.

The spectators around Emily erupted into a frenzy of cheers. Gran climbed out of the pool looking very pleased with herself.

“That was terrific, Gran!” said Emily as Gran came over with her towel.

“I was slightly off vertical when I hit the water,” sighed Gran. “I’m a bit rusty.”

Emily looked at her in admiration. “Oh Gran, you were fantastic and mega and brill and incredible and ... and ...”

She was lost for words!

“Thank you, Em,” smiled Gran. “I hope the judges agree.”

They did. She was the winner by a clear five points. There was thunderous applause as she went up to receive the trophy followed by a great gasp as she peeled off her cap and goggles and everyone realised that she was an elderly lady!

“Oh Gran,” chuckled Emily. “You’re a real winner!”

Chapter 9 News Time Again

It was Monday morning and start-of-the-week news time. Frank Feeney was telling a rather boring story about what had happened to him over the weekend. Emily wasn’t listening.

“Thank you, Frank,” said Mrs Crowley. “Now, Emily! How did you get on with your granny? Come and tell us!”

Emily stood up in front of her class.

“On Friday we went for a motorbike ride and Gran got stopped for speeding. Then on Saturday we got lost going for a walk but Gran got us back by listening to the ground like Aborigines do!” (Emily decided not to mention the pumpkin seeds.) “On Sunday Gran won a diving championship. And we ate every meal at Burger Kingdom.”

Emily looked at her friends in triumph. They were all staring back at her with a mixture of total amazement and envy. Even Mrs Crowley looked astonished.

Oh Gran! thought Emily proudly. It’s brilliant having the coolest Gran around.

A note from the author

I hope you enjoyed this story and it made you smile!

I've always loved writing. I wrote my first stories when I was about 7, all about Apple and Carrot! English was my favourite subject at school and I went on to study it at Oxford University. I did a postgrad degree in Publishing Studies and Stirling University and then began working as a desk editor. I took a few years out to be an accountant, but when we moved to Ireland from England in 1992, I set myself up as a freelance editor and indexer, and I've been doing that ever since. I'm married to Chris, have three children - Benjamin, Caitlin and Ruadhri - and since 2006 we've all lived in France on a 75 acre farm. We run a gite and carp and farm llamas, and also [edit ebooks](#).

My first books were published in 1996. I have around 30 to my name now and I'm moving into adult fiction and non-fiction, as well as carrying on writing for children and young adults.

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