

# Brownie Beginnings with Becky

"Grandma, were you one of the first to go to Brownies?" asked Becky.

Grandma laughed. "I'm not that old." She sat opposite Becky on the couch with her cup of tea. "But my grandmother was one of the first".

"Tell me what it was like then," said Becky. She tucked her legs under her, hopeful Grandma would tell a story.

Grandma sipped her tea, and placed her cup on its saucer. "Grandmother Joyce had a best friend called Muriel, who was Lieutenant Colonel Cossgrove's..."

Becky butted in, "I know him – he started Girl Guides in New Zealand, didn't he?"

"Yes. He was in the Boer War with General Sir Robert Baden Powell..."

"Didn't he start Girl Guides in England?"

"That's right. He started Boy Scouts first and Colonel Cossgrove did the same here. The Colonel's daughter Muriel wanted him to start a group for girls."

"Your grandma's best friend?"

"Yes. He listened to her and started the Girl Peace Scouts in 1908..."



Becky leaned forward with her elbows on her knees. "The same time as in England?"

"Actually, New Zealand was the first to start an all-girl group in the world." Grandma sipped her tea. "Muriel, Joyce and a group of their friends met at a school for their meetings."

"Did they have a leader?"

"Their scout mistress was Muriel's older sister, Katie. Like the boys they had an oath, a secret sign, a way of shaking hands and their own Scout Law. But unlike the boys they did not whistle – because back then it was 'unladylike'."

Becky laughed. "Not like now, eh Grandma?" She knew Grandma would be remembering the time Becky whistled to get Grandma's attention, and she told Becky it wasn't very polite.

"Indeed," said Grandma. "The Girl Scouts had to be ladylike at all times but they also learned to tie knots, signal, do first aid and do compass work."

Becky leaned back and dipped her biscuit into her hot chocolate. "We learnt how to use a compass and do first aid when we went camping. It was great fun."

"I know who to come to, if I injure myself then," said Grandma. Becky laughed. "What else did they do?"

"They went on long treks and had to show they could build a fire using only two matches. They'd cook a meal with flour, potatoes and eggs without using any utensils."



"I'd like to try that." Becky pictured her Six cooking over a campfire.

"Back then it was only for older girls. For badges they had to ride a horse or row a boat for five miles alone and had to write a long report about it".

Becky remembered the last badge she received for water safety. She was glad they had done such a lot of different fun things to get it.

"So when did Brownies start, then?"

Grandma raised her eyes in thought. "Well, it was after the First World War. At first Muriel's father called them Fairy Scouts but once they joined Girl Guides it changed to Brownies."

"I like Brownies better."

"I do too. Do you know where that name came from?" asked Grandma.

"Yes, our leader read the story. Some kids looked into a pond to see a Brownie and they had to say the magic words: Twist me and turn me and show me the elf. I looked in the water and there saw – myself."

"You have a good memory."

"Yep, and that reminds me, we need to be at Brownies by six o'clock so we better leave now. Since it's Grandparents' Night tonight perhaps you can tell everyone what you've told me..."

