

GRANDAD'S OVERCOAT POCKETS

September 1953

The scene is the back garden of Grandad John's house. It is a long garden and contains flower beds, shrubs, fruit bushes and an allotment area, plus a green house, garden shed and what looks like a rabbit hutch. At the bottom of the garden is a gate, leading on to open fields. John is an active 70 year old who loves his garden and enjoys it when any grandchildren come to visit him.

Today, his grandson William, aged 7, has arrived and has come into the garden to have a chat with his Grandad.

William says, "Hello, Grandad," and gives him a hug.

Grandad replies "Hello, William, how nice to see you. Have you come to see what I am up to?"

William smiles, "Yes," and looks around. "You've got a big garden, Grandad, it must take a lot of looking after."

"Yes," says Grandad, "I do spend quite a lot of time here, but I enjoy it. And," he smiles, "it takes me out of Grandma's way!"

Looking again at Grandad, William says, "That's a very big coat that you're wearing. What are all those pockets for?"

"Well," Grandad, goes on, "I keep all sorts of things that might be useful when I'm outside. I'll show you some of them." Grandad then proceeds to pull out from his top pockets some bits of string, a stubby pencil, some pieces of paper, his pipe, some tobacco and a box of matches.

"What are the matches for?" asks William.

"Two things," replies Grandad. "First of all to light the baccy in my pipe, and when I have a bonfire, I do need the matches to start the fire."

Then, feeling in his middle pockets, he continues, "I've got my garden gloves, some half-opened packets of seeds left over from when I planted them in the Spring, and because they are tightly fastened up I will be able to use them next year, as well. Oh, and in the other pocket I've got some toffees if I want to have a chew. Would you like one?"

"Ooh, yes please," says William.

Grandad gives William one of the toffees, saying, "If you'd been here last year I couldn't have given you one because they only came off the ration in February!"

Looking again at Grandad's oilskin coat, William observes, "There's two pockets to go, right at the bottom."

Grandad takes out a thermos flask from the left hand pocket, saying, "This is a warm drink of tea to keep me going if I'm down here for a very long time."

"Grandad..." exclaims William. "There's something wriggling in your right hand pocket!"

"Yes," replies Grandad, and pulling on one of his garden gloves he carefully brings out a snarling little animal, saying "This is Freddie, my ferret!"

"A ferret?" What's that for!"

"Well, Grandma and I like a rabbit stew now and then, and Freddie here helps me to get one. We go out through the gate there into the fields and I set Freddie off to do a bit of chasing..."

"Ugh!" shouts William, "Sorry, Grandad, I don't like the ugly look of that ferret and I don't want to hear any more!"

And with that, William turns and runs back into the house.

John wanders over to the hutch, saying, "Well, Freddie, I thought you might have had a new friend today, but that's not to be, so it's back into your own house you'll have to go."

September 2025

The scene is the same: it is the back garden of the third generation - Grandad William - still with its flower beds, shrubs, fruit bushes and allotment area, green house and garden shed but no rabbit hutch. There is no longer a gate at the bottom of the garden, for where there were fields there is now a large residential estate. William is now in his 70s. He loves his garden and enjoys his grandchildren's visits.

Today, his grandson Thomas, aged 7, has arrived and has come into the garden to have a chat with his Grandad.

"Hello, Grandad," shouts Thomas, as he runs down the garden path.

"Hello, Thomas," replies William, "how nice to see you after all this time."

"Grandad, that's a very old coat that you're wearing. Where did you get it from?"

"Yes it is quite old, but it is made of very strong material called oilskin that lasts

for ages. In fact it was originally worn by my own Grandad, many, many years ago.”

“Cor, and it’s got so many pockets!”

“They all come in useful, Thomas.”

“Can I see what’s in them?” asks Thomas, curiously.

“Of course. Here we are. In my top pockets I keep my mobile phone, some plastic ties for plants to keep them upright when they are growing in the ground, some labels and a pen for the seeds I plant, so that I’ll know what’s been planted where.”

“That’s quite a lot. What about your middle pockets?”

“First of all, here’s some Polo mints. Would you like one?”

“Yes, please, I love peppermints. What else?”

“A notebook, a book of puzzles and pen for when I want a rest.”

Thomas smiles, “Are you clever with puzzles, then?”

“Sometimes I can do them quite quickly, but there are other times when I do get stuck.”

Thomas laughs and then asks, “How about your bottom two pockets?”

Grandad gives a little smile and pulls out his gardening gloves and then a whisky flask from the left hand pocket, saying, “Don’t tell Grandma, but sometimes if it’s very cold when I’m out here I find that a little swig of this helps to keep me warm,”

“Oh, Grandad!” exclaims Thomas. “That just leaves one more pocket, and, oh, look, there’s something wriggling in your right hand pocket,”

Grandad puts his hand into his pocket and brings out a docile little animal. “Yes, I found this little feller just before you arrived. This is a baby hedgehog, it’s called a hoglet, but he has wandered a bit too far. His Mummy is in next door’s garden and he has come through the gap in the fence that I have always kept open. So, now you are here would you like to push him back through the fence so that he can rejoin his mummy and brothers and sisters?”

Thomas replies enthusiastically “Yes, please! Can I stroke him?”

“If you are gentle, his prickles are not very spiky yet.”

As they walked to the gap in the fence, William, reflected how, some 70 years previously, as a young boy, he had been scared with what his Grandad had then brought out of that same pocket....

„, „and,” he mused, “I never did taste any of my Grandma’s rabbit stew!”

Grandad’s Overcoat Pockets

Now, here’s a little anecdote
About my Grandad’s overcoat;
In the garden he spends hours and hours
Looking after the veg and flowers,
Its pockets hold so many a thing:
Like garden gloves and some bits of string,
Secateurs, a knife, and nails and screws
And last Spring’s seeds (which he will never use!)
His beloved pipe is there, of course,
And sugar lumps for his neighbour’s horse,
There’s a flask that has something in it -
Known as Scottish highland spirit!
Deep down there are what he calls his treats,
All well wrapped up, chewy mint sweets;
In one of his pockets something moves
(Of which not everyone approves)
It is his ferret, known as Freddy,
Which he wants to be at the ready,
For when in the fields it is set off to roam
To catch a rabbit for a tasty stew at home.

Peter Smith

