

Marty Stewart, Swiss born and educated - speaking on her birthday, 28th May 1988:

I would like to tell you how my first love affair with Glen living came about and how it ultimately brought me to Glenshee. It happened at the time of the bombs during the war when I was living in Surrey. I was in my mid twenties then. My son, Chris, was barely two, my husband was overseas with the army. When the bombs came thick and fast and barrage balloons and ack ack batteries sprang up all round us, my friend Peggy suddenly remembered Scotland and an old manse in remote Glenesk. She and her husband James who was MP for East Fife had rented it on impulse while honeymooning in Scotland. It cost them £10 per annum on a long lease. They had seen it once only on a fleeting visit but it sounded like heaven to us then. Without hesitation, it was decided that Peggy and I should take our children, as well as Rosemary a niece of Peggy's, her deaf old nanny and a young kitchen maid called Betty, plus all we might need and open up the House of Mark in time for the summer holidays, when others in need of rest might join us.

James activated his contacts in Fife by phone to furnish the house with secondhand furniture and utensils. We packed all our linen, blankets, groceries, tins and foodstuffs in a

fleet of hampers and boxes. A car dealer was instructed to meet us off the sleeper in Montrose with a secondhand Morris 8 along with James' constituency car and trailer. On a very hot day in May we set off through a devastated Croydon to Kings Cross and onwards in steaming sleepers to the unknown peace of cold and clean Montrose.

A deputation from the constituency awaited us with washing facilities laid on and a wonderful breakfast of porridge, bacon and two eggs a piece, toast, butter and marmalade, a unheard of luxury. After a twenty mile drive through villages and misty hills, there was the House of Mark quite spacious and lovely, set among trees with the River Mark just below it.

There was a great courtyard with splendid outhouses on three sides and the walled kitchen garden with herbs, berries and vegetables growing. Inside there was a sunny drawing room, a big dining room, five bedrooms, two bathrooms side by side, a lovely staircase, a walk-in linen cupboard with a window and shelves large enough to use as bunks. All the rooms had great shutters on the inside of the windows. The huge attic was floored and sectioned off into a play area and three small bedrooms. No electricity, no telephone, a large range in the kitchen taking up the whole of one wall. Our secondhand dealer had left us cans of paraffin, a four burner paraffin stove and lamps of all sizes, all of which we gazed at in wonder.

Alec Robertson our laird, had made a huge fire in the range to heat the water. On the larder stone slab we found a whole salmon and a couple of rabbits, complete with skins. In each room lay a great pile of items of furniture thick with saleroom dust. In each bedroom a couple of hospital beds and cots had been assembled complete with mattresses and pillows. As soon as James departed on his trek back to Westminster, it was up with the sleeves and out with soap and hot water buckets to clean up cupboards, shelves, drawers and beds for unpacking space and eating and putting the babies to bed.

The house embraced us like an old friend, the scent of bog myrtle and the sound of curlews was everywhere. Our anxious way of life in Surrey dropped away into oblivion and slipped thankfully into a peaceful earlier time. We soon developed an exuberance and inventiveness that we never knew we had, improvisation was all. In no time we learned to skin rabbits, gut salmon, clean oil lamps and stoves, ? a kitchen range of huge proportion. We cut up fallen trees, mended stone dykes, even dealt with a crop of angry boils on young Betty's bottom. The nearest phone was at the head stalker's cottage, two miles up the Glen at Loch Lea. To get a doctor 16 miles from Eden was strictly for life and death emergencies only.

There was a total timelessness about our life at the House of Mark. For several weeks we had no time piece of any kind, no radio. We enjoyed long days of glorious weather. We rose

when the children woke, ate when we were hungry and bedtime was when everyone felt tired. Lunch and tea were taken down the river bank where we constructed a safe pool and sandpit among the rocks for the babies. I was responsible for Rosemary's education. She was about 8 years old and had many problems. I equipped myself with books and PNU correspondence material suitable for her age. Two short formal sessions a day seemed enough to cover the set courses in the subjects required. Everything else was worked in with our other activities.

Peggy was O/C Kitchen with a much simplified Mrs Beeton in one hand. She had been reared in a stately home bristling with servants and a startling upstairs and downstairs atmosphere, but she was practical, intelligent and very observant and full of spirit, willing to take on anything. I at least had childhood memories of work on Grandfather's farm and my mother's training in the kitchen. I took over the command of the kitchen range and worked out the technology of the paraffin cooking stoves and oil lamps. My chief adviser was our laird, Alec Robertson, an ancient gamekeeper of forbidding aspect who lived in the bothy beyond the courtyard, he taught me how to start the fire in the jaws of the formidable monster which heated the water, also how to manage its moods, as varied as the airts of the wind. There were levers to pull and others to shove if you wanted the oven hot for baking and things to pull up and other to fold down for heating the flat irons or the girdle. "Just gi'e it plenty coal" said he many times "and