

## MAY FREDA AND ANGUS EPISODE 1

The crunching on the gravel alerted both of them.

'That will be Pete then,' said May drying her hands on the kitchen towel and peering out the window.

Sure enough, there was the slamming of a vehicle door followed by a knocking on the kitchen door.

'Your carriage awaits you Aunty May.' Pete smiled at his aunt as he held his hand out to guide her down the kitchen steps.

'Oh Pete she really is beautiful.' May exclaimed as she stared at the gleaming camper van sitting in her drive.

Angus was down the steps before her and after walking around the van, on reaching the front passenger side he raised his leg and christened the shining wheel.

May and Pete burst out laughing. 'I will take that as a seal of approval from Angus.' Said Pete.

May bent down and ruffled the top of Angus's black head. 'That's lucky because we are going to spend many happy hours travelling around in this, our new holiday home.'

Pete slid open the door and folded down the extra step for Angus and showed May the finishing touches that he and his friend Jim had completed in the last two weeks since May's visit to his lockup garage. It was the electronics that had caused the last set of problems but now the GPS worked perfectly along with the built in wi-fi and the shower was waterproof at last.

It had been nearly five years since May had first seen the camper van in Amsterdam. She had been on holiday with her friend Jean when they had come across an old square filled with battered and much stickered camper vans inhabited by assorted hippies. It was an exchange centre of sorts for travellers starting or finishing their travels around Europe or beyond. May and her friend didn't think many of the vehicles would be able to leave the square let alone Holland. They had just turned to leave when she heard someone call her name. It was Mike Taylor, one of her students from Penicuik High School, the last in a long line of Taylors to pass through her hands. She had always had a soft spot for Mike, or maybe it was just that he was the last of the bunch, and now here he was inviting her and Jean into his van for a cup of tea, or something stronger.

Mike had travelled around middle and Eastern Europe with assorted travelling companions and was now returning home, much to his Mother's relief with the latest girlfriend who seemed to be in the middle stages of pregnancy. Mike proudly gave them the conducted tour, pointing out the improvised shower and toilet in the corner and the many cupboard spaces in the compact vehicle. Both May and Jean were impressed at how spacious it seemed and Mike explained at length the virtues of the long wheeled based camper van.

No bigger than the school mini buses I have driven over the years with dozens of kids in the back and piles of sports kit or bulging back packs May thought.

When Mike confessed that he was having no luck with finding a buyer even although the engine was sound, the right-hand drive was discouraging prospective buyers, May's imagination took flight.

Retirement was looming and while she had plans to cruise to exotic shores out of term time, there were many parts of the British Isle she was unfamiliar with despite being a geography teacher for nearly forty years.

'If you can drive the van back home I may be interested in buying it from you.' She heard herself say. 'I'll get my nephew Pete Macleod to have a look at it and hopefully we can agree a price.'

After handing over fifty Euros as a sort of deposit and to help with the cost of driving the van back to Scotland they shook hands on the deal and that was the start of the many payments to get the camper van to the current immaculate state it was today.

They were happily flipping open cupboard doors when they were interrupted.

'Cooee, any one at home, standby to repel boarders.' Assorted voices rang out and various heads appeared in the doorway.

'I should have warned you that Mum and Dad said they would pop round, and I hate to say it but probably half the neighbours as well.' Pete said.

'Well this looks very cosy, I must say May. I can just see you and Angus zipping round the countryside in this. Come on then, let's open the bubbly and christen this lovely camper van.' So saying Shona, May's sister pulled from her copious shopping bag a bottle of ASDA's finest cava and a tube of plastic tumblers.

And sure enough Shona and Bill were the first in a steady stream of visitors including Mike Taylor with his wife, son and new baby. Very fertile these Taylors. May's kitchen and garden chairs were set around the drive and front garden while bowls of crisps, peanuts and hula hoops and bottles of wine and beer were in continual circulation through the kitchen for replenishing then back around the garden and into the van.

Several hours later just as May and Shona were clearing up and tidying away mugs and bowls Shona turned to May and asked what she was going to call the van. 'You have to give the van a name,' she insisted.

'Freda,' boomed Bill as he entered the kitchen with the last of the kitchen chairs. 'Reminds me of Freda Mackay from my school days, all shiny on the outside and full of lots of hidden surprises when you get to know her better.'

So that was it, the van would be called Freda.

Later that evening as May returned from taking Angus for his last reluctant walk around the block they stopped and stood in front of Freda.

'We are going to have such adventures,' May whispered, 'and they start tomorrow.'

She patted the van and turned up the kitchen steps, tired but already looking forward to what the next day would bring.