

## **Jimmy's Birthday Party Gone Wrong**

By Geraldine Conway

Jimmy was really excited! Very soon, he was going to be ten years old, the age when all young mice were allowed to have their first official birthday party and have all their friends and family there. It would be even more exciting as it was just before Grandad Dan's 90th birthday. Guests were coming from as far away as the USA and New Zealand and it looked like they would be here in time for his bash.

Jimmy lived in a town in County Carlow with his older brother, Jack, and his parents, Anne and Paul. They had recently moved into a new shed in the side garden of a big house beside the golf club. The shed was fab and they had made a lovely home there. It was dry, warm and clean with lots of space and places to explore. But they had to be careful, as the owners of the house did not like mice. ( Imagine humans being afraid of small little mice! ) The mice had easy access to the house, as the human kids often left the doors open. It was a strange house, with the bedrooms downstairs and living area upstairs, but this would be to their advantage as they found forgotten treats in the rooms – chocolate and popcorn – yum yum.

Jimmy's mum, Anne, was the youngest of her family and had seven brothers and sisters: Maria, Helen, Donal, Larry, Noel, John and Geraldine. Maria and Helen were fun but sometimes Jimmy wished they were not so generous with their big sloppy kisses. Geraldine was funny as she had poor sight and often mixed them up. She also missed steps, sometimes, or even walked into things. Once, when they were playing with their football outside, a neighbour passed by and Geraldine told them to be careful not to hit the gentleman. But the 'gentleman' was Mrs Brown who hurried away.

Donal was a big hit with them as he was President of the NMSA, the National Mice Soccer Association. He would get him and Jack tickets - with their Dad - to attend the big matches up in the city when the national team was playing. Jimmy loved soccer and going to these matches. Jimmy also loved the leftovers they got from the big burgers that were served there. He had recently joined his local team, Mouseville United, and dreamed one day of playing for their favourite team; the greatest team in the Premier League!

His favourite player was Pedro Santiago, the fastest mouse in all Mexico and the season's highest scorer. But there was no one to match Grandad Dan and his adventures and tales of places he had been!

Jimmy loved to hear of the time Grandad Dan spent up in Wicklow. There was a film being made on location there and he got to visit the set. It was an action movie, starring Action Mouse, and Grandad Dan got into his dressing room. He put on a parachute belonging to the big star and made his way up to the top of the gigantic multistorey building they had built on the set. With a holler, he jumped off and sailed all the way to the ground. Although he got in trouble with the Director and the Producer, a cameraman took him aside and told him the camera had been on the whole time. He gave him a copy of his jump which he treasures to this day.

Grandad Dan had promised to gather up all the young ones at the birthday party and tell them of his adventures through the woods where he had come across - and fought - giant hairy mollies. Jimmy could not wait.

Like all neighbourhoods, Jimmy's had its enemies – usually in the form of cats. Here, there were two in particular: the local boss, a black and white cat known as The Gringo and his brother, TC or Top Cat. Top Cat lived in the city but spent many hours with The Gringo, sitting around, dining on the fish and

chips they swiped from the local chipper. They would talk and talk and talk forever. The Gringo was the local Chief Fire Officer and nobody dared to get him riled up. After a siesta, they would patrol the area and God help the mice they met. Although they generally liked to scare them off rather than get rid of them. Jimmy loved to explore with Jack but they were very careful to avoid the cats.

As the day of his birthday got closer, Jimmy got more and more excited. He and Jack started decorating the shed for the party and Mum got the ingredients together to bake him his favourite chocolate cheesecake.

Finally, the day arrived and Jimmy was up at the crack of dawn. His mum had left him out a new top and his first pair of long trousers - a pair of combats like Jack's. He could not wait to get washed and dressed. There were hugs and kisses from Mum and Dad but not from Jack, of course. Cool, boy-mice did not go for that kind of thing. He got his birthday presents from them and what a sight! Brand new soccer ball, some goalposts, boots and a jersey signed by the national team. Donal had helped them out with these and even had new boots for Jack.

Soon, some friends and guests started to arrive and - in no time at all - the shed was getting packed and noisy. They had balloons and party-poppers and lots of good things to eat. Granddad Dan and all his other aunts and uncles and cousins had arrived. As usual, Geraldine mixed them up and gave Jimmy's present and card to Jack – no surprise there.

Before eating the cake and all the food, they played games like Mousetrap and one they loved, Cat and Mouse. Then they decided to play a game of Blind Man's Buff and persuaded

Geraldine to join in. They put a blindfold on her but, as usual, using all her other senses, she soon discovered all their hiding places. Then the music started and the disco began. Jimmy was having a great time but someone forgot to close the shed door and the music drifted out.

The Gringo and Top Cat were on one of their patrols and, suspicious of all the activity they had noticed around the shed over the last few days, they decided to investigate. They could not believe their eyes or ears as they approached the shed. They had to take action. After all, the Chief and his co-officer from the big city could not be seen to let the mice have a field day. They crawled to the shed on their bellies and used their paws to open the door fully. Then they pounced.

Inside, everyone and everything went flying. As the cats tore around the shed, the mice flew in all directions to make their escape. Luckily, being great kids, Jimmy and Jack brought Geraldine to safety with them, following their leader Grandad Dan. He had wanted to stay and fight the cats but they persuaded him to leave that for another day.

Jimmy was heartbroken and even a promise to make a fuss of him at Grandad Dan's 90th birthday party did not lift his spirits. Everything had gone wrong. **JIMMY'S BIRTHDAY PARTY WAS RUINED!**

Some days later, Jimmy ventured with Jack to explore the neighbourhood. They travelled towards the river but froze when they heard the noise of a cat. They scuppered into a hedge and sat very still. When the sound came again, they discovered this was not The Gringo or Top Cat but a much smaller and younger cat. In fact, it was kittens mewling. Very carefully, they

came out from under the hedge and tip-toed towards the sound. Near the bank of the river, they saw two kittens stuck on the bough of a tree which was above the water's edge. The river was flowing rapidly under it. They recognised these kittens. They were The Gringo's grandkittens, Emmie and Erin. Jimmy knew Emmie and Erin were much younger than he was and very frightened as he knew that all cats had a fear of water. Although they were nervous, Jimmy and Jack were two great mice and - despite all that had happened previously - they decided to help the kittens.

They could not rescue them themselves but they came up with a plan and set off, as fast as they could, towards the chipper. As usual, The Gringo and Top Cat were outside and Jimmy and Jack approached carefully. They reckoned that the cats had just eaten and would be full and slow to get to their feet. They scampered around in front of them to get their attention and, sure enough, The Gringo and Top Cat looked at them in amazement not believing their nerve and got up to give chase.

Jimmy and Jack ran for their lives, taking the path back to the spot by the river where Emmie and Erin were in trouble. The Gringo and Top Cat were gaining ground but, thanks to their soccer training, the mice managed to keep ahead of them. When they reached the tree, they dived into the hedge just as the cats came round the corner. The Gringo and Top Cat stopped in their tracks. They were not happy. In fact, they were very angry at having their afternoon siesta disturbed. They began to close in on the mice when, suddenly, they stopped and their ears pricked up.

They had heard the kittens! All thoughts of the mice were forgotten as they searched for - and found - the stranded

kittens. Using his experience as Chief Fire Officer, The Gringo got Emmie and Erin safely back on solid ground. Even though they should not have wandered off, The Gringo hugged and kissed them and he and Top Cat brought them back home.

Jimmy and Jack headed home too and relayed their story to everyone there. Grandad Dan was very proud of them and told them that their adventure had surpassed any he had lived through. Everyone told them they were heroes for putting the safety of Emmie and Erin before their own - even though it meant taking on The Gringo and Top Cat.

Some days later, there was a big surprise waiting for Jimmy when he got up. Outside the shed, an area had been cleared and set up with a football pitch and many other games. There was also lots of food and drink and even some cards and presents for both him and Jack. At first, he was afraid to approach the area, fearing it may be a trap. But, it was not a trap. It was a huge thank you gift from The Gringo, Top Cat and the other cats for them being brave enough to put themselves at risk to help Emmie and Erin. Not only were the cats letting them have a second party but they were protecting the area for the day in case of any interruptions from cats from other places.

Jimmy and Jack and all the other mice relaxed and had the best party ever. It went on until dark, ending with the cutting of a replacement chocolate cheesecake. Okay, it was not as good as his mum's but it was still delicious. Later, a tired but happy Jimmy went to bed thinking that his 10th birthday and first official party was one he would remember forever.

## **Aoife**

*By Geraldine Conway*

27th April, 1983, a day that will stay with me forever.

“Oh God, where is he?”

Sitting uncomfortably behind the driver's seat, I scanned the area around the bus-stop but there was no sign of my brother. He promised to travel into the city centre with me as I had to get the telephone and electricity bills paid before the baby came.

“What will I do - stay or go?”

Before I could decide, the bus pulled away from the stop making the decision for me.

“Where are the pains coming from and will they ever stop?” I asked myself.

On arriving in town, I made my way to the ESB office and then the AIB bank. I was now in great pain and feeling confused. I went into the phone-box at the top of O'Connell Street and dialled the number of my sister's office and began to cry. One of the girls answered the phone and remarked on how long it had been since I had called to them there. As she chatted away, all I could think of was how soon she would put me through to Helen.

“Is everything alright? Is it the baby?” she asked as her voice, full of concern, came on the line. “Are you getting pains? How far apart are they?”

On hearing her voice, I began to sob, “What do you mean about how far apart, they just won’t stop.”

“Where are you?”

“I’m in town, O’Connell Street, near The Ambassador cinema,” I replied.

“Stay right there and I will get to you as quickly as possible.”

I moved from the phone-box and stood in front of the Royal Dublin hotel to wait.

“Look at the size of her,” a voice from a gang of youths coming up the street towards me called. “It should be easy to grab her bag.”

I turned and fled into the hotel lobby and stayed there for some time. The pains were growing stronger all the time. When I ventured back outside, I stood nervously waiting until my sister came and put her arm on mine, telling me she had called me a number of times as she had approached.

“Come with me, the hospital is just around the corner and I need to get you there quickly. But, don’t worry, everything will be fine.”

Within minutes, we had arrived at the Rotunda Maternity Hospital, a place I had come to know well over the previous 9 months while attending pre-natal classes and check-up visits.

The nurse took my name and other details and located my chart. She asked me if I had had a show and how long it had been since my waters had broken. When I told her that neither had occurred, she suggested it may be a false alarm.

“What do you mean? What’s happening? Why are you not doing anything?” I asked.

Finally, they brought me to a side ward, put me in a hospital gown and up onto a trolley. A nurse then placed a cone-like instrument on my stomach and got, and then lost, the baby’s heartbeat a number of times. She then covered me with gel and ran an ultrasound across my bump, laughing when the machine tuned into a local pirate radio station.

A doctor was finally called in who, on examining me, was shocked to discover that I was 5cm dilated. She broke my waters and put me on a drip telling me it was to speed the labour up. They put me onto my side, as was normal practice, but the pains were coming hard and fast and it was unbearable.

I turned onto my back telling them that I had attended all my classes and the choice was mine and I was staying in this position. A foetal heart-monitor was then brought in and a nurse placed the sensors inside onto my baby’s head.

“Please do something,” I wept. “ A section, anything, something is very wrong. Please!” I screamed as another contraction came.

After some time, the doctor turned to face me, gently saying, “There is no point in putting you through all that for no reason.”

Stepping back, she removed the sensors from my baby's head.  
One of the nurses quietly wheeled the ultrasound machine  
away from my trolley.

THE SILENCE THAT FILLED THE ROOM SAID  
EVERYTHING...