

THE COTTAGE AT BANTRY BAY

by
Hilda van Stockum

Sure and aren't ye going to enjoy this wee visit to the auld country. It's charmed and happy ye'll be to be meeting the O'Sullivan family. But watch out, ye'll be after speaking this way by the end of the book!

Author Hilda van Stockum invites us into the lives of a poor, but happy and loving, family in Ireland. The O'Sullivans live in a small cottage at Bantry Bay where father works hard at farming and mother works hard at making a home for their four children. Michael is the oldest and helps his father when he is not at school. Briged, the only girl, helps mother with the house and watching after the twins, Liam and Francie. They need a lot of watching! Liam is strong and healthy but a gentle, shy boy, while Francie is frail with the added handicap of a clubfoot, but a spirit that is as bold as a lion.

You will meet the family in *The Cottage of Bantry Bay*. When father sprains his ankle, Michael and Briged must take their donkey across the mountain to sell because they need the money so badly. As a result of this exciting trip, the family acquires an unruly pet from the gypsies. Many a time mother and father are ready to banish the small dog because of the mischief he gets into, but the children always plead for their beloved Bran.

While playing one day, Michael, Briged, and Bran discover a hidden cave and decide to explore it. Bran makes an even more important discovery which eventually leads to a great blessing for the O'Sullivan family. This sets the stage for the next story in the series, *Francie on the Run*.

The O'Sullivans finally have enough money to send Francie to Dublin for the operation that will allow him to run and play like the other children. Francie bravely endures the trials of surgery and recovery, but finds being away from his family much harder to bear. The family cannot afford to visit him and the separation lengthens to months. Finally, Francie has had enough. He decides he is well enough to go home and simply walks out of the hospital, intending to find his way home.

The trip is not quite so simple as he supposed and he has many adventures which include spending the night in a castle and visiting an island. After all of this, he finds that his homecoming is a little different than he thought it would be.

Mrs. Van Stockum paints a lovely picture of family life. She based these stories on an actual family she knew. Your family might enjoy reading these books aloud. 'Tis an Irish accent ye'll soon be a spouting!

Choose from the following activities:

1. Study the country of Ireland. Find out about its geography, traditions, people, etc.
2. Did you enjoy the way the people in the book spoke? Try writing a story or a dialogue with someone who talks the way an Irish person might talk.

3. The Irish certainly have a colorful way of speaking. As mother says, "It's a poor hen that can't scratch for itself." While father says, "It's not the big stones that build the castles!" As you read these books note these quaint sayings. Can you make up some of your own?
4. Obviously the characters in these books are of the Catholic religion. Find out what Catholics believe and how they worship.
5. The conflict between the English and the Irish is age old. Even today there is great tension. Research the history of their disputes.
6. Find out who Francis of Assisi was.
7. Many stories in Europe have gypsies. They are usually presented as a people to avoid. Find out who gypsies are and how they came to be portrayed as such.
8. Draw a map of Ireland and trace the journey Francie made from Dublin.
9. Francie had a club foot. Do you know what that is? Find out what the treatment for a club foot is today.
10. Have you ever visited a children's ward in a hospital? Find out if your local hospital has a children's ward and see if you can visit. What kinds of things could you take to help entertain the children?
11. Ask your librarian to help you find a book of Irish poetry.
12. There is a third book in this series called Pegeen. If your library doesn't have a copy, request one through the Inter-library loan system.