

My Family and Other Animals

Gerald Durrell

In 1935, 10-year-old Gerald, his older brothers and sister and their mother moved to live on the Greek island of Corfu, together with their dog Roger. The book My Family and Other Animals is a partly autobiographical account of their adventures and was first published in 1956.

For some time, Mother had greatly envied us our swimming, both in the daytime and at night, but, as she pointed out when we suggested she join us, she was far too old for that sort of thing. Eventually, however, under constant pressure from us, Mother paid a visit into town and returned to the villa coyly bearing a mysterious parcel. Opening this she astonished us all by holding up an extraordinarily shapeless garment of black cloth, covered from top to bottom with hundreds of frills and pleats and tucks.



“Well, what d’you think of it?” Mother asked.

We stared at the garment and wondered what it was for.

“What is it?” asked Larry at length.

“It’s a bathing costume, of course,” said mother. “What on earth did you think it was?”

“It looks to me like a badly skinned whale,” said Larry, peering at it closely.

“You can’t *possibly* wear that, Mother,” said Margo, horrified, “why, it looks as though it was made in nineteen-twenty.”

“What are all those frills and things for?” asked Larry with interest.

“Decoration, of course,” said Mother indignantly.

“What a jolly idea! Don’t forget to shake the fish out of them when you come out of the water.”

“Well, *I* like it, anyway,” Mother said firmly, wrapping the monstrosity up again, “and I’m going to wear it.”

“You’ll have to be careful you don’t get waterlogged, with all that cloth around you,” said Leslie seriously.

“Mother, it’s *awful*; you can’t wear it,” said Margo. “Why on earth didn’t you get something more up to date?”

“When you get to my age, dear, you can’t go around in a two-piece bathing-suit ... you don’t have the figure for it.”

“I’d love to know what sort of figure that was designed for,” remarked Larry.

“You really are *hopeless*, Mother,” said Margo despairingly.

“But I *like* it ... and I’m not asking you to wear it,” Mother pointed out belligerently.

“That’s right. You do what you want to do,” agreed Larry; “don’t be put off. It’ll probably suit you very well if you can grow another three or four legs to go with it.”

Mother snorted indignantly and swept upstairs to try on her costume. Presently she called to us to come and see the effect, and we all trooped up to the bedroom. Roger was the first to enter, and, on being greeted by this strange apparition clad in its voluminous black costume rippling with frills, he retreated hurriedly through the door, backwards, barking ferociously. It was some time before we could persuade him that it really was Mother, and even then he kept giving her vaguely uncertain looks from the corner of his eye. However, in spite of all opposition, Mother stuck to her tentlike bathing-suit, and in the end we gave up.

