

## **A day in the life of a Viking**

"Hello, my name is Gudrun. I live on a farm with my father Olaf, my mother Sigrid, my Aunt Frith, my brothers Svein and Egil, my sister Unn and baby Thora. My cousin Harald also lives with us. He, and his mother came to live with us after my Uncle was killed in a place called Jorvick, far away to the west."

"We also have a thrall (you would call him a slave) to help on the farm. His name is Thord, and he used to be a neighbour of ours until he lost all his possessions and couldn't pay everyone he had borrowed money from. He was given to us as a thrall at the thing (you might call it a court) as he had borrowed food and money from us. Because we are free people and have our own farm, we are called karls".

"Today I am very tired. We were all up very late last night because it was the ceremony of Frey. He is the god of new life, and we always have a feast for him at planting time. We have a statue of him that gets decorated with lots of flowers and carried through several villages. In our village, we sacrificed a whole goat for him, but in the next village they could only find a chicken. That means our crops will be much better than theirs this summer. I am glad I don't live there!"

### **Gudrun working on the farm**

"Even though we were up very late, we still have to get up at sunrise. Egil and I have to feed the pigs and chickens, after we have washed our faces and combed our hair. I have a lovely comb made from deer antler. I have it hanging from one of my brooches that hold my tunic at the shoulders. All our special things are carried there to keep them safe. Mum is making griddlecakes from ground oats, which we will eat with butter and honey; we will also have buttermilk to drink. It is still very cold so I have my lovely warm cloak to wear over my dress and tunic."

"After breakfast, I will help Mum milk the cows. We grow and make everything that we need on our farm. I have heard that you have places called shops where you can buy anything that you want, but here in our village there is nothing like that at all. We have to make everything ourselves. I will use some of the milk to make butter. We pour the milk into a tall thin barrel and then I have a special stick, which I have to thump up and down for ages until butter starts to form in the milk. Any milk that isn't turned into butter, we call buttermilk and use it as a drink. Egil is supposed to help with this but he sometimes slips out when Mum isn't looking and goes off down to the stream to sail his boats or fight great battles with his friends. However, Dad, Svein and Thord will need him to help

scare away the birds after they have planted the oats and the barley. The birds would eat all our seed and leave us with nothing to eat, if we didn't chase them away. Next month, Egil and I will have to weed the crops to make sure that the seedlings get enough light and water to grow"

### **Gudrun making flour**

"Now it is well after midday. I have heard that you have a meal at this time, but we don't. There is still lots of work to do. I have to grind the few remaining ears of oats and barley that we have left from last year to make flour. I have two round flat stones to do this. The top stone has two holes in it. Father put a handle into one to allow me to turn the stone, and the other hole is for putting the grain into, so it drops between the two stones and gets ground up as I turn the top stone. My sister Unn used to do this every day, but she has a really good job working for the Jarl (the local chief) and his family. She helps in the kitchen there, and is always busy. The Jarl has lots of feasts and banquets for other Jarls."

"Soon, when all the crops have been planted, Father will sail west with the Jarls. They will go to that big island that is now called Great Britain, to trade. Grandfather used to tell stories of his grandfather and how they used to just sail over to the island and took anything that they wanted. Of course they did have to fight for it, but the people that lived there were really scared of them and ran away most of the time. Nowadays we trade with them rather than fight. There are many Vikings that live over there now. We even have a king over there, and although he doesn't rule the whole island, the main part in the middle is all Danelaw."

### **Gudrun weaving**

"Even now, having worked for hours already, I still can't go out to play. All girls and woman must learn how to weave cloth. I am getting quite good at it although I can't do some of the fancy patterns that all Vikings love yet. We have used all the wool that we clipped off our sheep last summer and spun it into a yarn. Now we use a loom to turn it into fabric. Sometimes the fabric is used for clothes, sometimes it is for blankets and sometimes it is used for sails for the boats."

"We use lots of bright colours. For the colour red, we use the root of the madder plant, for blue, we use the leaves of the woad plant, for green, we use club moss and for yellow, we use a plant called dyers rocket. Aunt Frith has just finished weaving a sail for the brand new boat that my cousin Harald is building with the

shipwright. The Jarl will be using it when he and father sail to Great Britain this year. They will be back in time to bring the harvest in. I think Harald will probably be going with them for the first time this year. He is really looking forward to it. He struts around the village now showing off his new trousers. All the young men think these are very fashionable because they are really tight, but all the old men laugh at the teenagers and think they look ridiculous."

"Soon Mother will begin making the evening meal. We will be eating wild boar tonight. Father caught it two days ago and I can't wait. I love the taste of boar. We will be eating it with some of last year's turnips that have survived the winter. It would have been really nice to have some berries to put in with it, but they are all finished now. It will make a nice change to have meat for dinner. Most of the time we eat vegetable stew, but we sometimes have chicken, pork from our own pigs or occasionally beef. We usually eat these in the autumn, because we don't always have enough fodder to keep all our animals alive over the winter. "

"Tonight will be fun. Svein has made himself a new flute so he will play alongside Harald and we will have some music, and Egil and I are learning how to play hneflafl (it is a bit like your chess). I can usually beat Egil but I have never won against Svein. He is really good at it and can sometimes beat the older men."

"Thord will be busy making and sewing on new soles for our shoes. They have to be replaced very frequently but rather than throw the whole shoe out, we just put new soles on them. Father will be relaxing. He spent a lot of evenings making, mending and sharpening all the swords and knives and now he is ready for his trip across the sea. "

"We will all go to bed quite early because there is lots of work to do tomorrow!"