

Monday 28^h January 2013

Dear Customer,

I hope this letter finds you well. It is Sunday evening. We were deep in snow as we fell asleep last night and woke up to green fields this morning. Underneath my snow were snowdrops in flower. Oh what joy ! The same joy you will experience when you delve into your bag and find that beautiful, multi-limbed creature celery. It's a fine food. It's full of vitamin C, potassium, folate, calcium and iron. You can trim and wash it and put the stalks in a glass in the middle of your table or try one of these great, simple recipes:

Braised Celery

1 head celery, trimmed and cut into 3" pieces
1 medium onion, peeled and thinly sliced
225ml vegetable stock
salt and pepper

25g margarine or butter
100g carrot, peeled and thinly sliced
1 tbsp parsley

Melt the margarine or butter in a frying pan and cook the onions for 3-4 minutes on a medium to high heat until lightly golden. Add the carrots and cook for a further 2 minutes. Add the celery and fry for another 5 minutes until everything is slightly browned at the edges. Season with salt and pepper then pour in the hot stock and place a lid on the pan. Turn down the heat and simmer gently for 20 minutes until the vegetables are almost tender, then take off the lid and increase heat to medium and simmer until the liquid has reduced and become slightly syrupy – about 5 minutes. Serve the celery with the juices poured over and sprinkle with the parsley.

Celery Soup

2 tbsp butter, margarine or vegetable oil
1 head celery, finely chopped
1 vegetable stock cube
salt and pepper

1 large onion, finely chopped
900ml water
150ml milk

Heat the butter, margarine or vegetable oil in a large pan and add the onion and celery. Cook for about 10 minutes until soft then add the water and milk and crumble in the stock cube. Simmer for 25 minutes then allow to cool and whiz. Reheat and season with salt and pepper to serve.

Celery Braised in White Wine, Cream and Thyme

1 head celery, separated into stems
150ml white wine
1 clove garlic, crushed

small bunch thyme, woody stalks removed
250ml double cream
25g butter or margarine

Preheat oven to 180C. Using a potato peeler, take a slice from outer edge of each stem to remove stringy bits. Cut each stem in half. Lay the celery end to end on a rectangular baking dish and tuck in the thyme sprigs. In a jug, stir together the wine, cream and crushed garlic and season generously with salt and pepper. Pour the wine and cream over the celery and dot with butter over the top. Loosely cover with foil and bake in the oven for an hour or so, or until the celery is just tender. Remove the foil and bake for a further 30-40 minutes until the top is golden and bubbling.

I have a friend who lives in Bath, she is a clinical psychologist and academic. She texted me, very concerned because she had found a list of astrological faults "not pleasant reading" she said. I told her surely she didn't have any. She went on..... "Well I think bad time keeping, disorganisation, not assertive enough, spread self too thinly, lazy at times, fit pretty well". I told her it just sounded to me like she was human. She was seriously upset by it. She has a whole host of rescued animals including a donkey, 10 sheep, a horse, collies, cats and rabbits and 3 pigs. For their dinner the pigs have a bowl of their pig food and an apple each. One of them, Honey, takes her apple and puts it next to her bowl so she can have it for pudding.

The Montezuma's chocolate snowmen are back to haunt me. I have had a nice weekend with a nice tooth abscess. For once, snow came in useful. I always used to submerge my face in a hot water bottle when I had toothache.....that is until I read that heat spreads the infection which I guess it would ! So I did the opposite and made a snow pack in a tea towel and moulded it round my jaw. You can't do that with ice cubes. It was really raging so I got some clove oil from Boots. I got home, sat down, and read the print around the bottle.... 'Do not use on skin or gums' it said. You have to be joking ! I read it again and again. 'For dental use', it said. So.....did one pour it down one's ear. What ... so a little dab on the enamel of the tooth....the would calm the fire in the jaw. And anyway, that would end up on a gum or a tongue. Had I felt better, I would have stormed back to Boots to interrogate an assistant on how to use it and whether it was fit for purpose. Or is it a canny legal disclaimer. Will we soon be buying bags of crisps which say 'don't eat' and hats that when you look at the inside label.. say... 'do not wear on your head'.

I will do all I can to avoid antibiotics and also painkillers. I like to know what's going on and to feel the bloody battle between my immune system and the infection – then I know where I am and who's winning. With painkillers how do you gauge it. Before the 1940's when there were no antibiotics, everyone didn't just die when they got an infection did they ? Surely not.

I read this week that we are losing the battle in developing new antibiotics and that 20 years from now, the new super-strains of E Coli, MRSA, CD, TB will be resistant. It is yet another thing to add to the list of things that my generation has plundered and robbed from the next. The greatest discovery in the history of medical science, abused to impotency by over-prescription and use as a food additive for factory farmed animals.

I feel a bit sick and to be frank, writing this isn't helping much ! It's 8.45pm and I'm going to finish this, send it, and see if there's a bit of snow left against the wall for my tea towel.

I don't have space here but next week will tell you about something very strange and wonderful which happened to another friend of mine – the one who has premonitions of the future. Please if you have any personal experiences of premonitions or telepathy you want to share, do let me know and I can include it. I find such things endlessly fascinating and mind boggling – searching for the answers which wonderful Brian Cox can't provide.

Kind wishes,

Isobel