



**Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2016**

Dear Customer,

A Happy New Year to you and I hope you have had a nice break. Everyone I know feels sure that 2016 is going to be a good year. "It's our year". They say they are due one. So...let 'Super-Year' begin.

I went for a meal with friends on New Year's Eve. We each had to state 10 things that we were planning to achieve this year, someone took minutes, we would reconvene in 12 months-time and be expected to have them in the bag. My own list is so demanding that if I were to achieve just one of them in my lifetime I should be grateful – so no pressure.

The New Year didn't get off to a good start. At 4.30am I eventually got to sleep and was awoken by a phone call at 5.20am. I knew it was London calling. I knew there was trouble. One of our drivers couldn't come to work. At 6am on New Year's Day it's not easy to find a new driver.

I myself had to do some local deliveries. It must be 10 years since I'd done any but I didn't mind, it would be a run out. Except that when I arrived at the depot in my sleepless state I couldn't find where the bags had been left. The cold store was padlocked. I couldn't find the key, I searched high and low, no instructions had been left and I couldn't reach anyone on the phone. My stress levels started to climb. I had a flat tyre and tried various garages, all shut. I borrowed Ernest's foot pump but as much as I pump and pump no air goes in, air just comes out, it gets flatter and flatter.

So with the first frost and ice on the roads I asked Ernest if he'd come along and be my co-pilot and keep the tyre pumped up. My delivery round was through the Dales and up into Teesdale, the Pennines, 'England's last great wilderness'. I did two drops in Reeth and headed on. I don't have a satnav and the only map I had in the car covered the whole of Europe so the remote farmsteads I was headed for didn't feature. Ernest said he thought he knew where Newbiggin was. I asked him where. "You know.... it's on the side of that road". "Which road?" I said. "Well...well... you know....it's on the side of that road". I didn't want to risk going over the 'top' in all the ice so went the very long way towards Kirby Stephen, not realising that road took us over an even higher 'top'. Ernest said it would be fine. I wasn't so sure. We made the ascent and after about 15 miles arrived at the descent – a vertical drop of sheet ice with a hairpin bend. I had to reverse back up the narrow, single-track road, uphill in the ice with a huge sheer drop to my side and had to go all the way back to Richmond to get onto the A66. By this time I was aching all over with stress and tiredness. I kept thinking 'My God! This is the start to my New Year. It's only been 12 hours and it's unbearable already.'

#### **Roasted Sweet Potatoes and Fennel**

450g sweet potatoes, diced  
sage

1 medium bulb fennel, cut into ½" strips  
3 tbsp olive oil

*Preheat the oven to 400F/ 200C / Gas 6. Toss the ingredients together in a large bowl and season generously with salt and pepper. Spread in a single layer baking tray and roast, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender and lightly browned, 45-50 minutes.*

#### **Puglian Potato, Tomato and Onion Casserole**

2 tbsp olive oil  
2 onions, peeled and thinly sliced  
2 tbsp dried oregano

2 large potatoes, peeled and cut in thin slices  
400g tomatoes, thinly sliced ( could supplement with tinned)  
slosh of white wine

*Preheat oven to 190C/ 375F / Gas 5. Spread the olive oil in a 9" x 12" casserole dish. Starting with the potatoes, make alternating layers of potatoes, onions and tomatoes. Sprinkle each layer with oregano and salt. Pour the wine into the dish at one edge. Cover the dish with foil and bake for 20 minutes. Uncover the dish and continue baking until top is browned and all is tender.*

#### **Fennel and Potato Gratin**

600g potatoes, peeled and cut into 3mm slices  
300ml double cream  
2 cloves garlic, crushed

3-400g fennel, cut into 3mm slices  
100ml milk  
freshly grated Parmesan or alternative

*Preheat the oven to 180C/ 350F /Gas 4. Put the cream, milk and crushed garlic in a pan and bring to the boil. Season and add the potatoes and fennel, mixing well. Transfer the mixture to a gratin dish, spreading it out so that there is an even distribution of cream. Cover with foil and bake in an oven for about 50 minutes until the potatoes and fennel are tender. Remove the foil, sprinkle with Parmesan or alternative and return to the oven for 10 minutes until browned on top.*

#### **Roasted Cauliflower and Tomato Dahl**

250g yellow split peas, rinsed  
1 tbsp freshly grated ginger  
2 bay leaves  
250g cherry tomatoes or 350g tomatoes, chopped  
½ tsp cumin seeds  
1 onion, sliced

2 garlic cloves, crushed  
1 tsp turmeric  
1 head cauliflower, in florets  
1 tbsp vegetable oil  
½ tsp chilli powder

*To make the dahl, boil one litre of water and add the split peas, garlic, ginger, turmeric and bay leaves. Return to the boil, skim off any scum, then cover with a lid and simmer for 45 minutes-1 hour, stirring occasionally, until it thickens. Heat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Toss the cauliflower and tomatoes with the oil, cumin, chilli powder, onion and seasoning on a baking tray. Roast for 20 minutes. Check the dahl. When the split peas are soft and fairly smooth, season well with salt. Serve in a bowl with the cauliflower and tomatoes spooned on top.*

I hope this year is a very good year for you,

Kind wishes,

Isobel

**PS We have lots of reduced price mince pies and Christmas cakes and Panettones left !**