



Monday 11th February 2013

Dear Customer,

I hope you are having a good week. What cold, grey and dreary weather it is. I guess most of us are longing for some warmth and sunshine to nourish us. It's been a long winter after having no summer. The fields everywhere are seas of mud. The farmers can't get any machinery onto their land. It's the time of year when they are deciding what crops to grow and ordering in their seed. After losses on such a massive scale I bet they are thinking long about hard whether some things are worth the risk. Anyway, here are some perky little recipes to cheer you up:

Penne with Crispy Courgettes, Cherry Tomatoes and Pesto

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| 50g capers | jar of pesto |
| 400g courgettes | 200g cherry tomatoes |
| 25cl double cream | 600g penne |
| coarse salt | olive oil |
| 100g Parmesan shavings | |

Cook the penne according to packet instructions. Cut the courgettes into small cubes, cut the capers in half and quarter the cherry tomatoes. Thinly slice the spring onions. Pour a splash of olive oil into a hot wok and sweat the spring onions and courgettes, adding a pinch of fine salt. After 2 minutes, add the penne and finish cooking. Add the capers and pesto according to taste. Lower the heat and add the cream. Bring to the boil and check the seasoning. Remove from the heat and mix in the cherry tomatoes. Serve topped with Parmesan shavings.

Potato, Tomato and Cabbage Soup

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| 1½ litres vegetable stock | 1 onion, finely sliced |
| 400g potatoes, scrubbed and diced into 1cm cubes | oregano |
| 400g tin chopped tomatoes | 150g January King cabbage, shredded |

Saute the onion in a large saucepan until tender then add stock, the potatoes and the tomatoes. Bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the cabbage and oregano and simmer for a further 4-5 minutes. Season to taste and serve hot. How easy it that !

I can't really let another week pass without mentioning horse 'meat'. Every day I open up the newspaper and see cartoons on the subject and journalists using it as a subject for 'amusing' columns. But it isn't amusing. If they'd seen the covert film footage filmed by Hillside Animal Rescue which was screened on Sky TV, they wouldn't laugh. Horses standing in blood for days with carcasses around them waiting for their turn and then being hauled up by their back legs, dangling in the air and then slaughtered. I couldn't have watched it but I know the content. It makes one aghast at the number of horses that must be involved in the trade. I reckon that most of the horses in Europe, UK included, end up this way. One only has to look at the local papers and see the horse and pony auctions – attended mainly by the knacker-men. Why do people send their animals to these sales, why cant they euthanase them if they've had enough of them. Of course horses are not different to cows or pigs but at least there were some species we didn't perceive as food. An old friend of mine was from a peasant farm in Brittany. I remember him telling me how they had a horse which spent twenty years pulling the plough, working their land, earning their living. When the day came that they could afford a tractor, instead of putting him into the fields, the ones which his hard work had bought, and caring for him in his retirement, they sent him straight to the abbatoir.

Following the incident of the poor baby in Bromley, I guess we can also now look forward to the cull of the London fox population. There are 8 million people in Greater London and 10,000 foxes. Please have a look on our Farmaround facebook page at the YouTube clip called 'Man - l'homme', an animation by Steve Cutts. It is simply brilliant. You will recognise the character.

I am making this spooky season with a spooky account of the week ! So..... this week's ' tale from the other side' and first spooky subject is my friend Helen:

Helen lost her beloved father suddenly on New Years day. He flew Lancasters in the RAF during the War and despite gaining a scholarship to University, after the War he became a fireman in his native Liverpool and devoted his life to rescuing people. He loved animals and supported many animal rescue charities. I remember a couple of years ago Helen driving her father on the M1 and a Polish lorry driver whilst on his laptop, drove into their lane and they went under the lorry. Her father was trapped in the wreckage and he told her leave him, get out the car and get away, presuming the car might explode. They survived. Her father's wish was that after his death, his corneas should be used to give others their sight. Four people now have their sight back thanks to him.

A few weeks ago, from her desk at the Financial Times (not from a gipsy caravan), Helen texted me and said she had two pictures she wanted me to have a look at. In her grief, she had been going through his belongings and found a picture which she had painted when she was 7 years old. It was called 'Heaven'. It was a picture of her with plaits, the apple tree in the garden and a huge pink paper hat-type crown, utterly out of context, and taking up a third of the picture. She then sent me the very last photo she had taken of her father. It was taken on Christmas Day and he was sitting there in a big pink paper crown. A coincidence ? If you knew Helen you would know this was no coincidence. This is the friend who on 16th June 2010 as we lay by a pool in the South of France, looked up at a perfect blue sky and said, not that it would rain, not that there would be a storm, but "there's going to be a natural disaster". "No there isn't Helly" I said. The next day we drove away from the villa heading back for England through a horrendous torrential rain that brought flash floods, the worst in 200 years, to the whole Cote d'Azur, killing 40 people. I remember once her visiting me and we drove a circular tour round Swaledale and Wensleydale. Though I hadn't heard the song for years, it wasn't autumn, just moorland landscape, the song California Dreaming was going round my head. Then all of a sudden she started humming it. You see, I don't need to read text book case studies, with Helen I am here on the front line !

By kind permission of Helen, you can see for yourselves the photos of the pink crowns – also on our facebook page.

Kind wishes,

Isobel

PS Your spooky and wonderful stories still very welcome !!