



Monday 23rd June 2014

Dear Customer,

I can't watch the weather forecast anymore. The forecaster looks smug announcing wall to wall, sunshine but on inspection of the map, she doesn't mean for North Yorkshire which is a perpetual dark shadow. Sometimes the sun breaks through at around 7pm for a few minutes by which time it has lost its oomph. I should be satisfied and accepting after nearly a month in France, but it doesn't work like that. It makes it worse. It's warmish though midge weather....feels like a storm is going to break but doesn't.

I met up with one of my knitters the other day for the handover of three 'boyfriend cardis' she knitted. We always meet in the Sainsbury's café in Darlington. She gets the bus there and it takes her about 5 hours from Wallsend, a suburb of Newcastle, she has the free bus pass. She says it's a day out for her. She has been knitting for us for about 8 years on and off and I have always called her Modrey, only recently finding out she's called Marjorie. I think she's in her late sixties, she has long, curly grey hair, thick glasses, wears crimpolene dresses and sandals. Her toe nails are about two inches long and she has the worst stutter I have ever known, which with a Geordie accent makes her incomprehensible to anyone not used to her. I love her. Her 'mam' used to knit for us too. When I was filming with 'The Dales' her and 'mam' came to the knitting auditions in the village hall in Reeth, which were being filmed. When 'Mam' was on her deathbed last year Modrey said she kept talking about that day and how it was one of the best day she'd had. Anyway, what prompted this was that she always has dark tales to tell – she will sit and give me five or six horrible stories over tea and a cake in the Sainsbury café before I drop her back at the bus stop. This week she was telling me about how her aunt was struck by lightning and killed. The weather was fine when she had set off for her walk but changed quickly and it got her on her way back. We agreed, when it's your time to go, it's your time to go. She told me about her Yorkshire terrier which she rescued and how he had been used as a bait dog, and about some of her son's friends who had been shot dead and they never found the killers. Her son was now living with her after splitting up with his wife who he had been married to for two months. He had collapsed the other day and she thinks it is from when his wife hit him in the head.

Despite the lack of soleil English produce is starting – the lettuces, spinach, chard and carrots are all English and from Lyncroft farm. Here is an easy, tasty recipe you could try this week:

Tomato and Aubergine Gratin

1 medium aubergine
400g ripe tomatoes
salt and pepper

150ml olive oil
3 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 200C /390F /Gas 6. Cut the aubergine into 3mm thick slices. Place in a colander, cover with salt and leave to sit for 30 minutes. Rinse well with cold water and leave on kitchen towel to drain. Heat half of the oil in a frying pan and fry each of the aubergine slices in batches until golden brown on each side. Add more oil if the pan becomes dry. Drain on a kitchen towel. Halve the tomatoes and arrange them with the aubergine slices in a shallow ovenproof dish. Season with salt and pepper then sprinkle with Parmesan or vegan alternative. Bake for 10-15 minutes until browned. Leave to stand for a few minutes before serving.

David mentioned my spooky undertones in last letter, well the last concert I ever played was with one of the Undertones. We played as a three-piece at the Transmusicale Festival in Rennes. Undertone Damian O'Neill on bass, my friend Miroslaw on guitar and me singing and playing sax and guitar. It was the last time I ever sang or played an instrument. That was that, and it is 20 years ago next week that the music gave way to Farmaround. The first organic box ever, as we were the first, was delivered on 2nd July 1994.

I remember delivering Farmaround leaflets round Dulwich with my French boyfriend Sebastian (I'd picked up in Lille on a previous tour !) It was so exciting when the first customer placed their order. "Is this the Green Revolution" was the headline of the piece in the Telegraph magazine. It is interesting to view it now in the context of history – back then in 1994, everything started to change, green was heading mainstream . We were all mourning the destruction of our countryside ravaged by industrial farming, the polluting of our waterways, the destruction of wildlife habitats and the demise of species. We were worrying about the lax use of toxic chemicals - fertilisers, fungicides, pesticides - it was announced that we were three times more likely to get cancer than our grandparents' generation. Then came the horror of BSE, and dairy farmer turned 'underground scientist' Mark Purdey set out to prove that the organophosphates poured down the spine of cattle to treat warble fly was the cause. He proved this conclusively though the authorities refused to accept it. Green has slowly spread fibrously through society, through corporations, but it isn't enough is it ! Green versus greed and short-termism in the main.

We up here hope you down there are enjoying your lovely weather,

Kind wishes,

Isobel