



Monday 14th March 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Today is Sunday. Our valley is full of a yellow, sun-infused mistso almost sunny. There's no blue sky but it's a start – prettier even. I sat on my doorstep with a cup of tea and it was quite warm. The birds are singing and it feels like first day of spring.

Here's a lovely Easter cake you could try:

Carrot and Apple Cake with Cream Cheese and Lime Frosting

300g carrots, peeled
150g soft butter
100g golden caster sugar
3 tsp baking powder
2 tsp ground cinnamon

150g apples, peeled and cored
100g soft dark brown sugar
3 free-range eggs
1 tsp ground ginger
180g flour

Frosting:

250g cream cheese
50g caster sugar

juice and zest of 1 lime (or use equivalent of orange)

Preheat the oven to 150C. Grate the carrots and apples and squeeze out any excess juice into a glass to swig separately. Put the sugars and butter in a bowl and beat until light and fluffy. Add the eggs and beat until fully incorporated. Combine the flour, baking powder, cinnamon and ginger and then blend into the mixture. Fold in the grated apples and carrots. Butter a spring-form tin and dust with breadcrumbs. Pour the batter into the tin and place on the middle shelf of the oven. Bake for around 1 hour, until an inserted skewer comes out clean. Leave to cool on a wire rack. For the frosting, combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix until smooth. Spread the frosting onto the top and sides of the cake and sprinkle with any remaining zest if you wish.

I'm pleased to say that my big toe made a speedy recovery. I guess it must have been the gate.....so life goes on. The restructuring has gone well and we are now installed in a small, modern office in Colburn, with snazzy fobs and lights which come on automatically when you walk through the building. I know that this will seem very last century to you in London whose doors glide open with wink of your iris - or a split second DNA sample from a particle in your breath - but for up here, we're state of the art with our fobs.

Thank heavens we've finally shut the door on the Farm Shop / Café chapter. It was a nasty business and really took its toll.....on my brother. It's been terrible for all of us. I called him the other day because I could finally give him good news, that I had found a way forward, that elusive light glinting at the end of the tunnel. I said to him that I hadn't heard from him for a while and he said he hadn't heard from me either. I was right about how harrowing I am for him. He sent me an email that evening saying he hadn't contacted me because I give him sleepless nights, that I take risks that he would never dream of and there's nothing he can do about it because I won't take his advice. Sometimes I thank God my parents aren't alive to witness my tightrope walking. I must like learning curves. No, actually I'm sick of them. But while it all feels so convoluted I feel sure I must be working to a greater plan and that everything will come together in the end.

I'm so excited about the EU referendum. Everyone's saying they will be fed up of the whole thing by June. I won't be, I love it. I love that Brexit is so abstract..... and so alluring. But it isn't as abstract as trying to work out who actually governs us and on what basis and with what mandate - what Brussels actually looks like and how one can possibly bring any pressure to bear on the things one cares about. Can you imagine waking up, if we ever went to sleep, on 24th June, to find we've left European UnionOMG !! Britain would be ours again. Wouldn't that be a brave new dawn. Or we will wake up to more of the same. I made my mind up over 20 years ago. I made it up around the time I started farmaround when I looked around and saw the industrialisation and destruction of our countryside and its rich tapestry of small farms growing our food, tending coppices and the hedgerows which gave shelter to their animals, gave habitat and food to our wildlife – places to nest, berries to feed on. Then came the Common Agricultural Policy and the cash bonanza. Every inch of land had to be brought into production. Land shot up in value and it was bought by big business for the big CAP cheques. Hundreds of thousands of miles of our ancient hedgerows were grubbed up, all the small woodlands, ponds were ploughed over, our ancient apple orchards were destroyed – all to make way for the big farm machinery, for prairie-scale arable farming. The delicate and beautiful eco-system which had evolved over thousands of years since medieval strip farming – destroyed in a few years. It was changed beyond recognition. With the onset of industrial farming came the factory farming of animals – beyond our worst nightmares. The Milk Marketing Board was done away with because of EU Law – the MMB had ensured that small dairy farms could survive, collecting their milk, guaranteeing their prices. Now nearly all the small dairy farmers have gone. Today only the large scale ones can survive and to keep costs down, the cows are kept indoors all year round, until the day they go to slaughter. Without the EU I don't think the people of this country would have allowed any of this to happen.

I can't count the times I've contacted my MP about something only to be told that nothing can be done and some Treaty is cited. We can't ban live animal exports and we can't ban un-stunned religious slaughter, there are a million and one things we can't do. Europe is in stormy seas and may benefit from a strong London and UK outside the Union. I don't think we're stronger together, I think we are weaker and that we have to separate to become individually strong again and then reunite on areas that matter, but in a different format. The peoples and economies of Europe are struggling under common denominator policies – they always have. There are rumblings everywhere. Frexit ? Spexit ? In many way the EU has been a magnificent thing, it has united us and we can remain united without being subject to it.

The world moves on and everything is in relation to everything else. Sometimes some things are outgrown and become no longer fit for purpose. If any country wants to leave the EU, they should be able to without the American President rushing over or being threatened with punishment. They should still be able to trade freely and sign up to specific things like security. It should be 'a la carte', each country should be able to pick and choose and not have things imposed on them. That would be meaningful and sustainable. Democracy is sustainable and anything else is not.

Well I wondered how long I would be able to contain myself on this subject. It wasn't very long was it but I will try not to mention it again. We will all take our own view as we contemplate what we want our future to look like.

Kind wishes,

Isobel

Please take note of our new telephone number: 01748 831 905

Our new address: Farmaround, Unit 7 Innovate Building, Chartermark Way, Colburn DL9 4QJ