



Monday 4th October 2021

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Autumn has dropped in like a bomb. It's Saturday morning - chilled, drenched and windswept. I took Lainey up to the racecourse. A few committed souls were braving it. Hoods up, leaning into the wind. It's ok. Just seven months of it to come. We can do that can't we.

Here are a few tasty recipes you could try this week:

Baked Sweet Potatoes with Spiced Chickpeas

500g sweet potatoes
2 tbsp sunflower oil
½ tsp ground black pepper
1 tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp ground turmeric
1 small onion, finely sliced
2 tbsp coconut milk yoghurt

400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed
½ tsp salt
1 tbsp cumin seeds
½ tsp ground allspice
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
½ green chilli, finely chopped
coriander leaves, roughly chopped

Preheat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6. Scrub the sweet potatoes and pat dry with kitchen paper. Prick the skin several times with a knife, then bake on a foil-lined tray until the flesh is soft and tender, approximately 40 minutes. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, mix the chickpeas with 1 tbsp oil and the salt, pepper and spices. Spread evenly on a baking tray and roast in the oven with the sweet potatoes for the final 20 minutes of cooking time, stirring halfway through. Fry the garlic, onion and chilli in the remaining 1 tbsp oil over a medium heat for about 5 minutes, until the onion is soft and translucent. To serve, toss the roasted chickpeas through the onion mixture. Slice open the sweet potatoes and divide the chickpea mixture between them. Top each one with a dollop of coconut milk yogurt and a sprinkling of coriander.

Sweet Potato and Potato Dauphinoise

15g butter or margarine
1 garlic clove, crushed
170ml single cream
100ml organic milk
500g sweet potatoes, peeled and finely sliced

1 onion, finely sliced
1 tbsp thyme leaves
170ml double cream
500g potatoes, peeled and finely sliced

Preheat the oven to 170°C/ Gas 3. Grease a 1.5 litre baking dish. Heat the butter/ margarine in a saucepan over a medium heat until foaming. Add the onion and cook for 5 minutes until softened. Add the garlic and thyme and cook for another 3 minutes. Add the creams and milk to the pan, bring to a simmer then season. Tip the potatoes into the pan, simmer for 6–7 minutes, then add the sweet potatoes. Stir, then tip everything into the baking dish. Bake for 1 hour until the top is golden and the potatoes tender.

Leek and Almond Soup

600g potatoes, diced
450g leeks
250ml almond milk
2 tbsp almond butter

drizzle of olive oil
600ml vegetable stock
50ml dry white wine
75ml dairy or vegan crème fraiche

Boil the potatoes until soft then drain and set aside. Meanwhile heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and fry the onions for 5-6 minutes until soft. In the large pan combine the leeks and potatoes with the remaining ingredients. Bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Transfer to a food processor and whizz until smooth. Serve with a drizzle of olive oil and some crusty bread.

The other morning I was fast asleep and the phone rang. It could only be one of the drivers at that hour. No, it was my friend in France who I only speak to every few months, and never at 6.30am. Oh no, what's happened to her, must be something bad.

"What the hell's going on? Are you ok? I'm freaking out here" she said

The night before, I'd decided to carry on with the spring cleaning and set about deleting everything on my Facebook page. I finished off with changing my profile picture of the Mediterranean sea to a picture of grey. Aesthetically it looked much better against the main black and white photo - a 1960's street scene of a Lancashire mill town with washing slung between the terraced houses. Then I went to sleep. It didn't enter my mind that my new profile picture would be firing out through the night. That it would be seen as a suicide note or that something catastrophic had happened. My friend told me I should go on Facebook straight away and let people know I was ok.

I'm not very good on Facebook. Can't get the hang of it. It mirrors how I have been all my life.... an outsider. One to one I'm fine but put me in a large group or gathering and suddenly I'm removed and distant. It has always been like that. My Facebook history consisted almost entirely of years of expired animal welfare petitions with horrible pictures of puppies being boiled alive and rabbits having their hair ripped out. For social media to be part of your social life you have to be committed. You have to 'work' it. Not something I'm capable of doing. Yet in it's favour it has reconnected me with some long-lost friends. The people from your life are all there kicking about reassuringly.

And so the pandemic goes on. Quietly nibbling away at us. A thousand deaths a week the new normal. There was good news though in the last days, a flu drug Molnupiravir which has been found to halve hospitalisations and deaths if taken early enough. Numbers have been fairly static haven't they for a long time now with 30-40k daily positive tests. Where it goes from here we do not know. I still have hope that it might one day start to slowly ebb away.

Another gruelling week ahead for our drivers I fear, trying to find fuel and get through the terrible road congestion.

Warmest wishes,

Isobel