



Monday 11th November 2019

Dear Customer,

We were spared last week after another pluvial assault on Yorkshire. I was at the ready, kept my eye on the Environment Agency website as South Yorkshire started going under. The thickest of the rain belt moved slowly across the country just beneath us, slimly missing us. We are saturated but not flooded. The sheep could stay put by the river. But blimey, it's got cold....4C today.

The rain stripped the leaves from the trees, I've got my view back - the annual consolation prize as we head for winter. As every year, I am amazed at how much is still in flower - the asters, roses, hydrangeas plus all the things I can't name. I've been online to order more tulips and also ordered some raspberry plants. I'd inherited some very productive ones when I moved into the house. But alas I took them for granted, left them for the birds, then let them perish. There are allotments at the bottom of Westfields which I walk through on the way back from town. They are always full of raspberries which no one bothers to pick. It really annoys me, and the temptation is too much, I always pick one and eat it. Just the one. So I decided to stop pinching them and grow my own again and try to look after them better this time.

And what a week with the election campaigning getting into full swing.

It's fantastic, Britain's won the lottery, austerity is over and there's money coming out of our ears. The fiscal headroom can soar to infinity...250 billion for this, 100 billion for that...we can have anything we want. This is 2019, this the virtual world, the world of our imaginations and anything goes.

But back in reality, on 12th December we will trudge off to the polling station, stooped over, hands behind our backs. As we pick up our pencil and our ballot paper the choice will be stark.....The Gallows, The Guillotine or a Bullet in the Head.

We have custard squash in the bags this week. You could fry slices for 5 minutes or so until tender. Toss in lemon juice and butter or margarine and season before serving. To roast, heat a little olive oil in a roasting tin in a preheated oven at 200 C/ 400F/ Gas 6 and add chopped patty pan with a selection of sliced vegetables such as aubergines, courgettes and halved tomatoes. Toss the vegetables to mix, season, and sprinkle with a little dried rosemary and cook for 35-45 minutes until tender.

Aubergine, Courgette and Potato Gratin

3 tbsp olive oil	2 cloves garlic, chopped
1 tsp dried oregano	400g tinned plum tomatoes
1 aubergine, trimmed and sliced	1 onion, finely sliced
700g potatoes, scrubbed and sliced	2 courgettes, sliced
125g buffalo mozzarella, torn into chunks	2 tbsp dried breadcrumbs
25g hard cheese, freshly grated	

Preheat the oven to 200^o C/ 400F/ Gas 6. Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a large pan on a medium heat. Add the garlic and cook for a minute until pale golden. Add the oregano and tomatoes and simmer slowly for 15 minutes. Season to taste. Meanwhile, toss the aubergines, courgettes and onion with the remaining oil and place in a single layer in a roasting tin. Roast for 15-20 minutes until browned and tender. In a deep dish, layer the tomato sauce followed by a layer of aubergines and courgettes, and then potatoes. Scatter with the mozzarella. Repeat until you've used up all the ingredients, finishing with a little sauce. Scatter the top with the breadcrumbs and grated cheese. Bake for 50-60 minutes until the potatoes are tender.

Aubergine Caponata with Cannellini Beans

2 tbsp olive oil	1 aubergine, roughly chopped
½ tsp dried oregano	1 onion, finely sliced
2 garlic cloves, finely sliced	10g flat leaf parsley, roughly chopped
1 tbsp capers, rinsed and drained	30g pitted green olives, ½ chopped and ½ left whole
1½ tbsp balsamic vinegar	3 vine tomatoes, roughly chopped
250g can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed	20g pine nuts, lightly toasted

Heat the oil over a high heat in a pan. Add the aubergine, oregano and a pinch of salt. Cook for 6 minutes until golden. Lower the heat and add the onion and garlic and cook for a few minutes until starting to soften. Add the capers, olives and vinegar. Cook for a couple of minutes, until the vinegar has evaporated, then add the tomatoes and cannellini beans. Simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 15 minutes, or until all the vegetables are tender. Season and add more vinegar to taste. Drizzle with a little extra virgin olive oil, if liked, and scatter over the pine nuts and parsley. Serve hot or cold with chunky bread.

Mick who helps me with the sheep called me on Friday. He told me he had bad news. Rocky was dead.

Rocky was my beautiful chestnut Shetland. I rescued him as a baby, it must be 14 years ago. As a little lamb he broke his leg and spent months with it in plaster but he was full of spirit and mischief. It didn't stop him leaping about and climbing up on haystacks. It was during this time that he developed a disdain for other sheep and a love of humans. Therein lies a deep guilt. He would have loved nothing more than to be part of a human family. If I could turn back time I would have built a barn / living room onto my house where he and Barney could come and hang out - Barney, who I bottle-fed shared the same contempt for his fellow sheep. I would have had them live with me. I thought about it many a time but my garden was too small and not sheep friendly.

When the sheep were living in Hornby, one of them had sneaked through a hole in a hedge and was spotted a mile away in an arable crop. I called Rocky for help, he came running and walked beside me down lanes, across fields to find it. The escapee then followed us back. When I needed to walk the sheep up the lane I'd always rely on Rocky and Barney to walk alongside me knowing the others would follow. They would have followed me anywhere. Sometimes in summers I would sit in the sheep field. Barney would always lie down beside me and Rocky would always lie down behind me and put his head over my shoulder. They taught me so much about the bond one can have with 'farm' animals, no different to a dog – their characters, their intelligence, their emotions, their love and their loyalty. They were my window into their species, my bridge. Barney and Rocky are both gone now but will never, ever be forgotten. It was my privilege to have such noble sheep.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel