

Monday 1st June 2015

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. There has been no let up with the wind up here. It has been over two months now of blowing all night and all day. Tonight there is a weather warning as they are speeding up – 50mph expected. I started writing this a few hours ago then had a call that not only had my friend, fierce cake critic Liz Jones and her boyfriend arrived at the Garden Centre, but also my brother. I knew he was going to do that – just turn up unannounced, like a hotel inspector. Anyway they all said it looked fantastic and that the food was great. We opened yesterday. The little A-board signs announcing it kept blowing over in the wind as they did today and no amount of stones heaped around them would keep them up. We have had some customers. They seemed happy and we think they will return. It's a start. So the new, hip café of Richmond is now open and this week we must open the shop. And then – we can really get going with some campaigns to let everyone know we are there. Various people have come in looking for bacon sandwiches and left again. That was always going to be inevitable. My brother looked uneasy as the café was empty – apart from Liz and David – the road outside was busy with cars passing but no one pulling in - the cakes were piled high under glass domes and the salad bar was full of delicious organic salads. When left alone with him, he started talking children's parties, talking about Frozen and how all little girls wanted to dress up like princesses and that I should speak to his girlfriend's sister who has young children and knows the score, the current trends – apparently her children go to parties nearly every day.

He'd just been up to his house in Alston as there was a viewing. Apparently it was a gentleman in his 60's from Bedford, newly retired and halfway through writing his first novel, looking for somewhere to live on.... his own. My brother's house is huge and in the middle of nowhere, high up on a moor, in utter wilderness. He said the man was keen and would take a decision tonight. My brother felt very concerned for him that he just had no idea how remote it was and how cold and snowbound it got in the winter. It would be a blessed relief for him to sell it though, especially as he's going off to France this week for a holiday. I asked him where. "Just Provence", he said. 'Just'. I'd quite like to 'just' go to Provence. I asked him if he'd be going to St Tropez. "Yeah, probably". I'd probably like to just go there too. The chips are down for me though now and I don't think I'll be going anywhere for quite some time.

Greek Vegetable Bake

100ml olive oil	1 aubergine, halved lengthways and thickly sliced
1 onion, thinly sliced	2 garlic cloves, sliced
600g potatoes cut into 1cm cubes	450g courgettes, sliced
400g tomatoes, thinly sliced	300g passata
1 tbsp dried oregano	2 tbsp flat leaf parsley, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 220C/Gas 7. Heat some olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and cook aubergine in batches, adding more oil if necessary, for 5-7 minutes, until softened and golden. Then, using a slotted spoon transfer it to a large bowl. Add the onion and garlic to the pan, with a little more oil if necessary, and sauté for 5 minutes until softened. Transfer to a bowl with the aubergine. Add the potato, tomatoes, courgette and passata and 200ml water to the bowl. Sprinkle with oregano and parsley and season generously with sea salt and ground black pepper. Combine well and transfer to a large ovenproof dish. Drizzle with any remaining oil. Bake for 30 minutes then turn oven down to 200C/ Gas 6. Bake for another 20-30 minutes, or until the top has browned and vegetables are tender. Allow to cool slightly before serving.

Chard and Tomato Pie

bag of chard, shredded	350g tomatoes, chopped
2 tbsp olive oil	1 clove garlic, crushed
1 onion, peeled and chopped	4 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
1 tsp dried sage	2 eggs beaten
115g Cheddar cheese, grated	shortcrust pastry for flan dish

Preheat the oven to 220C/425 /Gas 7. Line an 8" flan dish with pastry and bake blind for 3-4 minutes. Reduce the heat to 200C/400F/Gas6. Heat the oil in a pan and sauté the onions and garlic. Add the tomatoes, chard, herbs and seasoning and simmer the mixture for another 5 minutes. Pour this into the pie dish when ready. Place the beaten eggs over the sauté mixture, top with the grated cheese and bake for 15 minutes. Serve hot.

Rosemary Straw Potatoes with Lemon Salt

zest of 1 lemon	4 tbsp sea salt
800g potatoes, peeled and cut into matchsticks	a few sprigs fresh rosemary, leaves picked

To make the lemon salt, bash and mix together the lemon zest with the salt in a pestle and mortar and place in a dish. Heat 6-8cm sunflower oil in a sturdy pan and bring to deep-frying temperature. Pat dry the potato matchsticks then place them into the pan in batches. Make sure you have kitchen towel handy and a slotted spoon. Fry them for a couple of minutes until golden brown and crisp, then pile them onto the kitchen paper until they are all cooked. Add the rosemary to the chips as they are cooking, but just for the last 30 seconds. Let any excess oil soak into the towel then dust the chips with lemon salt and serve straight away. Keep remaining lemon salt for future use....please.

I want to tell you how amazing Diane, Lorraine and Eve, and various other helpers have been. They have worked non-stop getting this place up and running as well as doing their normal workload. We are all aching with bad backs and frozen shoulders from lugging things around.

And here is our new address: Farmaround, c/o Good Food Nation, Scorton Road, Brompton on Swale DL10 7EQ

Kind wishes,

Isobel