

Food

I was a fussy eater; as a child there were many things that I would not eat. Mum sought the advice of the doctor, who suggested putting a range of foods in front of me and that I would eat when I was hungry. I didn't. After a week when I had only drunk water and eaten tinned pineapple chunks, mum gave up this strategy.

I have no real memories of food until we got to Firsby Avenue when I was seven, which is odd as other early memories are so vivid. I can vaguely remember sitting in my high chair but not eating. I was a bottle-fed baby and I still have some of the coloured Cow & Gate plastic milk powder scoops.

Breakfast was usually cereal but only Shreddies or Sugar Puffs, with added sugar. There were often free gifts in the cereal packets. I can also remember animal masks that could be cut off the back of the packets. In the late 1970s, there was a sugar shortage when John and I were camping on the Isle of Wight. We tried crumbling sugar cubes, the only sugar available, on to cereal. It was so awful that I never had sugar on cereal after this. As a child, in winter I would have Reddi-brek. I also had cold milk to drink, toast and marmalade. As a primary school child, there was often a cooked element to breakfast, poached egg, fish fingers and bread, or bacon and 'bacon toast' (fried bread). At guide camp we had 'eggy bread', bread dipped in raw egg and then fried.

I have only ever drunk tea to be polite when there is no alternative and when I do I like it strong, with very little milk. I didn't drink coffee until I was a late teenager and always black. By the time I was about twelve I had given up drinking milk. In order that I should drink something, I drank fizzy drinks. Lucozade or Tizer 'the appetizer' in bottles, or cans delivered by the milkman containing lemonade, coke, ginger beer or e-number filled virulent fizzy orange. I would drink half a can at a time, with the second half being returned to the fridge for next time, at which point it was always flat.

I drank alcohol between the ages of about fifteen and twenty one but only once or twice a week at parties. I did often drink quite a lot on these occasions but didn't seem to get hungover. When I was first married, we made home-made wine, usually dandelion ('always gather the dandelions on St George's Day', said mother-in-law). I gave up drinking when we decided to start a family and never really went back to it. Now I drink alcohol perhaps once or twice a year at the most.

By the time I was a teenager and living at Parkfields, we didn't have room for a dining table to be put up all the time. We had one that folded down to about six inches wide. There was a 'flap' in the kitchen, where one person could eat, so mum took to putting my breakfast on a tray and bringing it in for me to eat in bed. Although breakfast once again became a downstairs thing when the girls were growing up, as they left home, I returned to taking my breakfast up to bed to eat from a tray. At Parkfields, evening meals were eaten on laps, whilst watching such programmes as 'Ask the Family' or 'Nationwide' on television.

School packed lunches were usually sandwiches, brown bread only (Hovis), filled with home-made chutney (and nothing else apart from butter), or fish paste, processed cheese slices or cheese spread (Dairylea cheese triangles); alternatively, I might have a separate cheese triangle. These would be accompanied by a packet of crisps and a Club chocolate biscuit. For a short while I had rather strange fizzy drink tablets which reconstituted when put in water. I don't think they caught on.

The evening meal, 'tea', was restricted to a narrow range of choices. Potatoes were roasted or chipped. Chips were cooked in a deep chip pan filled with dripping. I also did not eat pastry. So the options to accompany roast potatoes were liver (always lambs liver) and bacon, lamb chops, lamb, beef or occasionally chicken. With chips there would be fish fingers, fish cakes, sausages, or mum's home-made rissoles, later replaced by beef burgers. Occasionally we had stew. Vegetables would be peas, tinned carrots, or more rarely, green beans. An alternative might be corned beef and salad, beetroot, lettuce, tomatoes,

cucumber and mustard and cress. The only meal I can ever recall eating at my paternal grandparents' was cold meat and salad. I remember losing a tooth when eating beetroot there once. Strangely, although we visited often, I have no recollection at all of eating at my maternal grandparents' home. Perhaps this too is a victim of my total lack of early food memories.

I didn't like typical stodgy puddings, apart from tinned sponge puddings with treacle. Instead, I had ice cream, jelly, trifle, mousse, tinned fruit and 'evap' (evaporated milk); peaches and fruit cocktail were my favourites. I also had 'banana custard', although actually I wasn't very keen on custard. I liked strawberries, with sugar and evap and although we grew raspberries, I didn't like these.

If we had cake, it would usually be shop-bought: Battenburg, fondant fancies, or cupcakes. The latter were very different from today's cupcakes and were sponge, topped with a layer of hard icing, which I used to eat first. We did occasionally make fairy cakes. We also had chocolate Swiss roll, either large ones, or chocolate-covered mini rolls. Then then there were Tunnock's tea cakes, which were chocolate-covered marshmallow and jaffa cakes.

As a child, bourbons were my favourite biscuits, later superseded by chocolate digestives and more recently chocolate covered ginger biscuits, which I am no longer supposed to eat. My 'posh' biscuit of choice might be chocolate chip cookies, ideally with white chocolate, or honeycomb cookies.

Reading at mealtimes was the norm, initially, I think, to encourage me to eat and then the habit continued until I had children. Now I normally eat my main meal on my lap, whilst watching television.

There were many sweets that were iconic at the time, although I was never a great sweet eater. Black jacks and fruit salads were ½d chews and purple and orange wrapped ones were 1d. There were flying saucers, lemon sherbets, mint humbugs, Spangles, Milky Bars, Fudges,

Fry's 5 boys, Fry's Chocolate Cream and Fry's Cream bars with five different flavours in one bar, Mars Bars, Milky Ways, honeycomb filled Crunchies, Trebor Mints, Polos, Rolos, Love Hearts, Refreshers and Opal fruits. We collected Beatles cards in packets of bubble gum.

Boxed chocolates, such as Black Magic or Dairy Milk, might be a Christmas or birthday treat for adults. Children would have 'selection boxes' containing a variety of small chocolate bars or packets of sweets; sometimes these were presented in a stocking. Since the 1990s, Christmas also brings tins of Cadbury's Roses or Quality Street; I prefer the former as there are more soft centres, with the caramel barrels being my favourite. My chocolate bar of choice now would be Cadbury's caramel, Crunchie or Mars bar. We often had 'fun sized' chocolate bars in the 1990s, scaled down versions of their larger counterparts. I have had phases of mint humbugs and sherbet lemons being favourite sweets but I rarely eat chocolate and almost never eat sweets now.

Our diets changed in the late 1970s, with the introduction of 'foreign' foods such as pizza, quiche, curry, chilli and pasta. Two spicy dishes that have been regulars over the decades are spicy rice and chicken and spicy pork sauce, eaten with pork chops.

As one of a long line of non-cooks, once I was responsible for providing my own meals, I tried to delegate the task. John took over the cooking when we were both working and I was also studying for my Open University courses and I never really resumed the role. My cooking disasters are the stuff of legend and the girls still talk about how I used to turn the fish fingers over so the burnt sides didn't show, hoping that they wouldn't notice. I find cooking boring; there is always something else I would rather do. If it requires anything beyond putting it in the oven and taking it out again later, I lose interest. The only exceptions are the annual chutney making and the Christmas cakes and puddings, none of which I am now supposed to eat. The chutney is the only thing that could possibly be said to constitute a family recipe, as my mum made this too.

I love most of the things that are bad for me, chocolate, ice-cream, particularly honeycomb, coffee cake, roast potatoes, roast lamb or beef, lamb chops, shop bought chicken and chips. I do like some fruits, particularly mango, strawberries and blueberries. Eating out, hunter's chicken or chilli would probably be my choice. I am also very fond of the unlimited salad at Harvester restaurants. I am definitely not a lover of nouveau cuisine and I like a plateful rather than an artistic bit of drizzle. I like Sholer non-alcoholic grape juice to drink, or fruit juice, or elderflower presse but unless I am out, I now normally drink water, with one mug of decaff black coffee and one mug of hot ginger and lemongrass cordial a day. I used to drink fruit juice on a daily basis; something else I have had to give up because of the sugar content.

Daily shopping in the lower Addiscombe Road, when I was very small, was replaced by less frequent shopping in small supermarkets in the mid-1960s. These were of a size that would now be called convenience stores but they were self-service and that was new. When she went back to work, mum used to shop in George Street, Croydon on her way home. When I began shopping for myself, the lack of a car meant that I confined myself to local shops. I didn't have access to a supermarket, in the modern sense of the word, until the early 1980s, as they were late coming to the Isle of Wight. Shopping, for anything, not just food, is not really something I enjoy and again is something I delegate. When we were in Aylesbury, John would buy food on the way home from work, as there were no food shops within walking distance, apart from the tiny corner shop that sold a few tins and packets, as well as bread and cakes. In order to avoid taking small children food shopping, he carried on doing the shopping when we moved back to the Isle of Wight. I did do supermarket shopping once we had a car. More recently, food shopping, involves touring a variety of supermarkets for the best prices, favouring Aldi and Lidl. I have had access to a Cash and Carry (Wholesalers) since the 1980s, so have often bought in bulk there. Very recently, we have taken to buying whole lambs from a local farmer and during COVID and the aftermath, food was delivered fortnightly by Tesco's.

Eating out was a very rare occurrence until the 1990s. As a child we

might go to a Wimpy Bar once or twice a year and mum would go to The Tudor House Restaurant occasionally. I didn't have takeaway until I was a teenager, when we would sometimes get chips to eat from newspaper packages. In the late 1970s, we used to have a ploughman's lunch at a pub when we were on holiday, or chicken in the basket, which was about the limit of a pub menu at the time. Ice-creams were limited to one per holiday and we never went out to a tea shop, although these did exist by then. It was the 1990s before I started going out for meals with any regularity, usually to a pub, which I prefer to a 'posh' restaurant. Going out for a coffee is an activity that began in the late 2010s.