

Food Glorious Food

Prisca Furlong (Baillie 1964-69) got the chat going on one of our very favourite topics - FOOD - one wet and windy Sunday in January when she asked the Common Room "Did any of you learn to make a roux sauce in DS classes at school? I did but I clearly wasn't well taught or observed by Miss De B... very sweet though she was as a person ... because my sauces were always lumpy and only fit to be thrown away which put me off making sauces from scratch until 54 years later ... a couple of weeks ago. I was doing cauliflower cheese to go with the Sunday roast for the family and when I discovered I didn't have the packet instant cheese sauce I thought I had, I had to bite the bullet and attempt a roux sauce. With the same false confidence I adopted somehow on the day I passed my car driving test I set to... I placed a healthy chunk of butter in the pan and added a little sieved flour. Miracle of miracles the paste was smooth... my confidence increased and I gradually added the milk. No lumps at all! Finally, after all these years, I realised the secret is to have plenty of butter to add the flour to. If only I had been told that when I was 12! Now I'm addicted to making sauces!"

Kim Cook (Kimmin 1959-64) said " Well done! Yes, Prisca, roux sauce was one of the first things we learned, along with short-crust pastry (used to make cheese and tomato tricornes), Victoria sponge sandwich, thick beef stew, and many other recipes I still use, but without using the actual recipe...! My DS exercise book has long since disappeared, but I've used the basic recipes so often that I now use guesswork, with plenty of improvisation. We also learned about kitchen planning and hygiene, plumbing, heating, and other useful adjuncts to the actual cookery. I've always been very grateful for what Miss de Baughn taught me."

Lilly Nicholson (Chester 1994-99) sent "Congratulations!" adding "It's all in the sieve and stir"

Penny Barnes (Ryall/Hunt 1957-61): "Thankfully I chose Latin over DS" but Shirley Read-Jahn retorted "Wish I could have done both."

Prisca said that she I wasn't given the choice... "because I only got 65 percent in my first year French exam I was placed in DS instead of Latin - I've always regretted not doing Latin!"

Lis Eastham (Ferguson 1969-76) was made to do Latin (by her father), but, in her words "was so rubbish at it that I eventually switched to DS but hindsight is that a Latin grounding is a very useful thing. I went on to become a Catering Manager...and I can make a roux without even thinking about it (sorry, Prisca). Well done though for biting the bullet, though!"

Prisca commented, very truly, that "Success breeds success and early failure can put a child off ever having the confidence to try again... until needs must in a desperate situation." She added that "I just love the sound of Latin... especially singing masses etc and over the years, having spoken pretty basic Spanish in Peru for several years and having to learn Latin botanical names for my garden design course, I have a bit of understanding so I can decipher quite a lot of it in the archives when I'm trying to get to grips with old documents... not enough for full comprehension unfortunately." Lis concurred, saying she sings (in the choir she is a member of in her French home) "I sing in Latin and French and Italian, it has been beneficial when getting to grips with French fluency....and I use Botanical names to figure out what a plant is in French....I just I don't study it."

I recalled that there was "no opportunity for cookery for me, but lucky lucky me I had a mother who was not only a superb cook but a great teacher so roux (and other things) were in the DNA. I remember clearly being invited to lunch in the DS room, down by Elliott and the San, by 'general VI' schoolfriends - a GREAT treat."

Prisca said that "Penny was lucky to have a mother who enjoyed teaching her to cook. I never went near the cooker at home in all my growing up years... unlike some of my day-girl school friends like **Corinne Andrews (Hannant 1963-69)**, and **Jane Watson (Amherst-Clark 1963-71)** who I remember put me to shame in the kitchen... not least when I helpfully suggested to Miss de B that I go round the DS lab to see whose cooker was causing the burning smell... only to discover it was my boiling potatoes that had burnt dry! In the end I learnt by trial and error and cookery book."

(And Prisca is a wonderful cook...so it just goes to show that you only need a brain and perseverance!)

Jane owned up that her family has "a long standing joke that I burn something in every meal I cook! It started in the Post Office years, and I like to keep them happy now if I cook for them. Meals I cook for myself are spot on."

Sian Spencer (Williams 1967-77) had a "Welsh granny taught me how to make cheese sauce with the all in one method in the 1970s; all ingredients in the pan cold heat up together stirring all the time. My French saucier uses the same method and is still used weekly. It is now making some very strange noises but Moulinex have stopped making them so I am keeping it going. It was always my task as a youngster to make the Sherry sauce that went with the Christmas pudding (basic white sauce sugar and a fair slug of Sherry). As the youngest in the family why it fell to me no idea but probably because I was the most sober particularly in my teens after a day skiing."

Heather Johnson felt sure that "Miss Be B must have taught us how to make a roux sauce but it was actually my mother who taught me. It was always my job at home to make the white sauce and I still make them regularly. Sorry it has taken you so long Prisca to get it right but sure the family are all enjoying your sauces now. I also made the brandy butter at Christmas time, always did it while listening to Carols from Kings. Mine was beaten butter and icing sugar and rather more brandy than Mrs. Beeton suggested, delicious!"

Jackie Riley (Rogers 1978-81) recalled making rice pudding...One of my personal favourites then and now!

Katie Johnson (Cook 1979-85) said that at SMH "I was taught the "proper" way with butter and flour, then gradually add the milk. I've since discovered the "chuck it all in" method and not looked back since!"

Shannon O'Neill (1989-91) recalled only ever making cakes..."I specifically remember Mrs ?Rotherham saying my chocolate cake looked like a cow pat! Seriously, I was baking with one and non-dominant hand whilst nursing a broken collar bone."

This reminded Prisca of her father who used to say to her sister and her: " 'A bit sad, Prisca' or 'A bit plain, Jane'. My cake baking has improved though since the time, as a young adult, I made a chocolate cake that you couldn't get a knife into. In disgust and disappointment I threw the whole thing out of the window into the snow which I thought would soften it for the birds. The following day my 2 yr old son came running in from the garden saying: 'Mummy, there's a dead rat out there....' ... we never worked out whether it had been hit on the head by a solid flying chocolate cake or whether it had tried eating it and died of indigestion!"

Marie Fieldhouse (York 1989-96) reminded Shannon that "we did more than cakes - I remember doing winter salad (some kind of coleslaw?) and a curry (I remember that in particular as I forgot to bring in a container and had to transport it home in a bucket! It did not look appetising in a bucket 😊) And we could cook whatever we liked in our last ever HE lesson. I chose a chocolate cake recipe my Mum had, which included mayonnaise as (it turned out) a key ingredient. I thought this was very weird and left it out, with the resulting cake a complete disaster! I wasn't particularly good at HE..." Prompted by this Shannon recalled, "Oh yes we had Miss W (I can't remember her full name) in Y3. It was quite traumatic to the point I almost blocked in out! She was a vegan and asked us to cook something without eggs, probably to get us out of the 'HE is about cooking cakes' attitude. I was indecisive about what to cook and Miss W suggested I made the same as the boarders – a chicken curry. Mrs James usually ate whatever I made and I used to get nice little thank you cards from her so my cooking must have been OK."

"No wonder you don't like to remember that," replied Marie, " although how kind of Mrs James. Yes, I think it was with Miss Wed that we branched into meals. My main memory of that, however, is having to write up what we did and evaluate ourselves. I think many of my evaluations included low points for remembering to bring in the right equipment and ingredients."

Prisca voiced many of our thoughts when she commented that it was interesting that by Shannon/Marie's time it was Home Economics and in hers it was Domestic Science!

She also mentioned to Marie that she once made a chocolate cake with mayonnaise in it when her children were little which, "unusually for me, was a success but I've never made it since... it was nice

and moist without being sad." Shannon said she was off out of the Common Room to look up how to cook a mayonnaise cake! And Prisca said yes, she was off to her recipe books, too! Marie chimed in that she has "not made many cakes as an adult but I have started baking more since having children, so maybe I should attempt a mayonnaise cake for old time's sake"
So, the room emptied and the sounds of beating of butter and sugar echoed round the SMHA world!

***Has this prompted any memories for YOU
of your 'cookery' 'domestic science' 'home economics' (etc.) lessons at school?
Do tell us – we love hearing them!***

***Or have you been cooking from your copy of the SMHA Cookbook?
There are lots of ideas for new things to do as well as the old favourites.
You can download a copy any time from
This website!***