

Sick Day Banquet



Soft Sanctuary

Sick-Day Banquet, Soft Sanctuary

Created by Bella Milroy for Human Libraries

“Bella Milroy - Sick Day Banquet - Soft Sanctuary at Bootle Library - Human Libraries, 2019“

When I was first asked to curate a day that celebrates the sanctuary nature of the library here at Bootle, I was immediately drawn to a central focus of what this particular sanctuary setting does so well; food. I first came to Bootle Library back in February of this year, where after a wonderful workshop morning filled with plants, propagation and winter fragrances, I was greeted with a bowl of dahl made by the library’s core volunteer group. It was served to me in a handmade pinch-pot ceramic with a saffron coloured glaze that matched the aromatic tea that accompanied the meal. I felt instantly at home; cared for and looked after in a way that put me at ease and made me relax into a savory slumber.

This experience is what lies at the heart of the Sick-Day Banquet. As someone with chronic illness, food is an essential source of happiness for me. When pleasure is in such short demand living amongst pain, discomfort, uncertainty and stress, the food we eat and the way we experience it can be profoundly transformative in supporting our mental wellbeing. This experience is particularly significant for those of us living under such demands, a practice that goes far beyond comfort food. There is ritual to be found here; those boiled sweets we reach for stored plentifully in dressing-gown pockets when our mouths turn to syrup and nausea sets in; the kindness that is distilled into cups of tea and fermented in cheese on toast, cut into soldiers with dollops of Branston pickle, made by those who care for us.

Nostalgia plays its part in these moments too, spotlighting tastes and textures that tap into such tender memories of pleasure, transporting us through time to softer, gentler places in every mouthful. And those of us who are lucky enough to have that care filtered through love, these acts of support become such expansive moments of joy that cannot be quantified like the hourly doses of pain management, and clinical, medicated maintenance. To have food prepared for you undoubtedly changes the experience of it, but to place that experience within the disabled and chronic illness context illuminates it, making it shine in ways that brighten up our darkest days.

There is an unfortunate privilege to these experiences in how we encounter them both in frequency and quality. Not all of us are so fortunate to have this very basic need fulfilled, and the ever-politicized nature of food and who gets to eat it, only further perpetuates this tragic lack of support.

Lets face it, you don't have to be sick to know the power of what a cooked meal can provide in more than just sustenance alone. The Sick-Day Banquet is a chance to highlight the importance of what these meals do for us and why they are so essential to our wellbeing. Designed by disabled artists, this series of free lunchtime meals will represent their ideal sick-day foods. The meals will focus on comforting, simple, accessible and soul-warming foods that celebrate and prioritise joy. Cooked and prepared by the real stars of the show, the Bootle Library Volunteer Group, the banquet will be an opportunity to create meals that bring pleasure when we need it most, and offer library-goers an experience of foods that acts as important components of day-to-day mental health nourishment.

*“Bella Milroy - Sick Day Banquet -
Soft Sanctuary Season Online - Human Libraries, 2021”*

I began writing about this second iteration of the Sick Day banquet as I began to heal from a hugely turbulent period of health. Much of life lived with illness can feel like a constant state of survival mode, and 2020, like for most of us, was a particularly heightened and painful state of this. It felt like I was witnessing this mass lowering of standards, not just on a personal level, but across the wider world too where standards of care, compassion and a basic respect for humanity seemed so woefully depleted. I felt completely exhausted, becoming so overwhelmed that my most basic bodily motions felt like a chore. Sometimes I would long to be free of the trials of existing in a body that requires maintenance; imagining a life free of the burdens of trimming toenails, eating breakfast or brushing my teeth. I found so much of the minuterics of life not only impossible amongst the realities of living with chronic illness, but almost uncalled for. There was a rudeness to a body that so frequently interrupts my days with pain and fatigue, and asking me to also brush my hair was like an insult! Very quickly I found myself on a rapid decline, placing the demands of my most basic needs under an umbrella of no-time-no-energy. When deadlines, emails and invoices compete with whether or not I have washed this week, it doesn't take much to understand how little value gets placed on these most basic needs for living. I felt like I had nothing left in the tank. All. Gone. And when this personal-system-wide depletion occurred, I felt like a lot of me just forgot how to do all this. How do I do this being ill thing again? What is it I need to do to feel alright? I can't quite remember? Everything just felt dark and lonely and scary; it all felt like a body incompatible with life.

I don't think this painful tension is ever going to be something that is completely absent from my life. It's something that defines the cramped nature in which illness squashes and severs. And when you live in a world that shouts loudly and repeatedly about how little it values a body like yours living in it, it takes huge, dedicated effort to avoid becoming consumed by this earthly rejection.

So how does this relate to this new iteration of the Sick Day Banquet? The first section of this writing was written back in October 2019 when Soft Sanctuary originally came about... back when we could be in each other's company, back when we could be around one another without the presence of a deadly threat hanging in the air. I refer in that piece to the transformative power of food being one that has always been a cornerstone of my disabled experience in how I find pleasure and resilience in my day to day life. With my reserves non-existent, there still remained the transformative wonder of food. I needed to bring a consciousness of joy back into my relationship with it. I needed to both declare food a crucial part of my existence, and remember how to celebrate it too. This is the essence of what the Sick-Day Banquet is about. It is the very epitome of why such celebrations not only need to exist, but be practiced too. In that original text, I also refer to the politicized nature of food. It is something that has only been exacerbated by the pandemic, a reality I'm sure many of you reading this know first hand. It's a tragedy compounded by a government whose chronic neglect of those most vulnerable has further revealed its inadequate systems of care and support. Joy and pleasure are so finite right now, both in the practical sense of there being such a scarcity of resources and outlets for it, but in the spaces we hold for ourselves too; the pains of poverty and hardship taking up all the room, all the time.

And so we begin the year, with sustenance, comfort and resilience at an all time low for most of us as we wade our way through this current lockdown; quite a dark and dismal way to kick-start 2021. Amongst the gloom that this text finds itself shrouded in, we have pulled together a collection of Sick Day Banquet recipes that attempts to offer some brightness, cheer and relief. This collection is an embodiment of the Chopping Club, endeavouring to sooth, soften and spin some gold into the world over a bowl of something hot. Here joy can be read, joy can be witnessed, joy can be cooked. This collection of written works and beautiful recipes uniquely designed by some of my favourite disabled artists hopes to celebrate these moments of nourishment, wherever that may be found. I hope it is something you find with frequency, and in plenty. I hope that it fills you up.

Comfort Ramen



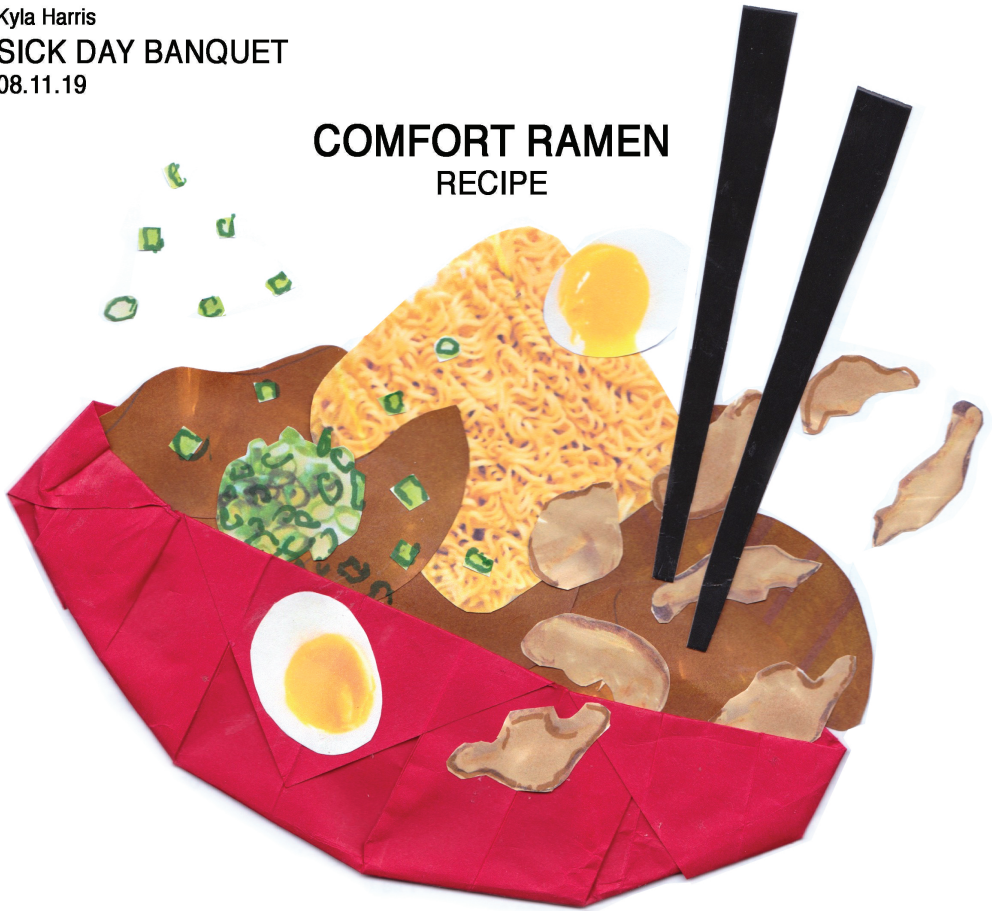
Kyla Harris

Kyla Harris

SICK DAY BANQUET

08.11.19

COMFORT RAMEN RECIPE



Kyla is a visual artist, writer and activist who explores the perspective of 'the other'. Her work subverts relationships with the body, capitalism and normativity. Kyla is the creator of The Other Screen, a film event dedicated to widening the outlooks of disabled people and the D/deaf community. She is currently writing a television series for Channel 4.

There's nothing more life affirming than a warm broth, intense with flavour, contrasted by silky noodles. Too grandiose, and sweeping of a statement? Definitely. But this is how I feel about ramen. This is an ever changing recipe, adaptable to what's in the fridge, time and of course, personal taste.

At times when it is difficult to access the outside world, or desperately need a creative, meditative day in the kitchen, this is the dish I make. To me, food truly has transformative powers. Fire, salt, fat and acid change any ingredient and in this recipe, combined, they become a bowl of nostalgia and comfort that I hope you take as much pleasure in as I do.

COMFORT RAMEN

RECIPE CONT'D

Note: For maximum flavour, cook the stock beforehand and strain the next day. If making the stock from scratch is too arduous, you can use premade stock, boil it with the star anise and ginger for 20 minutes, discard them and then go to the 'turning stock to broth' instructions below.

SERVES 4 For the stock (if making from scratch):

1. Prepare the carrots, onions, celery and mushrooms by finely chopping them into small cubes. This can be a laborious process but the more surface area you have in a vegetable, the more flavour you can extract.
2. Heat a large pot and add oil. You may have to do the next steps in batches.
3. Fry the onions until golden brown, add the celery and stir frequently.
4. Add the star anise and bay leaves. Stir until aromas are released. Put all contents into a large bowl.
5. Fry the carrots, once almost browned, add the ginger. Stir and cook for another 3-5 minutes. Remove the contents and add to the large bowl.
6. Fry the mushrooms until browned, add the peppercorns and cook for 3-5 minutes.
7. Place the large bowl of vegetables and spices into the stockpot.
8. Add the parsley. Cover with water. Stir in three tablespoons of bouillon.
9. Let the stock boil for half an hour and then simmer for a further hour.
10. Once the stock has finished cooking, let it cool, strain and reserve the liquid!

For the ramen:

1. Slice the mushrooms for the ramen and put in a bowl. Add four tablespoons of sriracha and set aside.
2. Finely slice the spring onion and set aside.
3. Put at least six large ladles full of stock into a pot.
4. Add the ingredients to turn the stock into the broth (see below) and gently simmer.
5. Gently fry the mushrooms in oil during the below steps.
6. Put two medium sized saucepans on the stove, fill them 2/3rds full of water and put to a boil. The eggs and noodles will have to be cooked at the same time.
7. In one pot of boiling water, gently place four eggs. Cook for 6 minutes.
8. In the other pot of boiling water, add a large pinch of salt to one pot and once it's back up to a boil, add one 'nest' of noodles per person to the boiling water.
9. Run cold water over the eggs. Peel the eggs and reserve.
10. Cook the noodles for 1 minute less than the recommended time. Strain and reserve.
11. In individual bowls, place a nest of noodles and stock. Pile the mushrooms in one section on top of the noodles. Do the same for the spring onion. Place an egg on top and slice down the middle, exposing the yolk.
12. Take a brief moment to be proud of your ramen endeavour, then dig in!

INGREDIENTS

For the stock:

- 1 kg carrots (finely chopped)
- 6 large white onions (finely chopped)
- 500g of shiitake, chestnut or a mixture of both mushrooms (finely chopped)
- 10 celery stalks (finely chopped)
- 50g parsley including stalks (finely chopped)
- 6 bay leaves
- 8 whole star anise
- a small handful of whole peppercorns
- 4L of water
- three tablespoons of vegetable bouillon (I recommend marigold vegetable bouillon, reduced salt)
- A thumb of peeled ginger
- olive oil or sesame oil for frying
- a handful of dulse or wakame seaweed (optional)

For the ramen:

- 1 packet of Biona Organic Spelt Noodles for Stir Frys
- Six finely chopped spring onions
- 500g shiitake mushrooms
- 4 free-range eggs
- A large pinch of salt

Turning the stock to broth:

- Three tablespoons of marmite
- A level tablespoon of sriracha or equivalent
- Four tablespoons of soya sauce or tamari (plus more to taste)

Sweet Jacket Potato



Leah Clements

Sick-Day Banquet 10th October 2019 by Leah Clements

Sweet Jacket Potato



This is one of my favourite meals, made by my partner George. He's a really wonderful chef and does the majority of the cooking at home, I'm very lucky! This is great comfort food - it's nourishing and delicious, and is both a winter warmer and salad-y-summery thing. It's great on a sick day because it's packed full of goodness and is also really yummy and satisfying :)

I can be in quite a lot of pain when I'm in a bad phase, and food can feel like something nice my body can experience. If I was left to my own devices, it'd be cereal for dinner every night, or the recipe writer Alice Hatrick who also has M.E. gave me (while we were on a residency at Wysing Arts Centre thinking and talking about sickness, crappiness and disability) - a tin of sweetcorn. Meals like this Sweet Jacket Potato make me feel a bit more human again.

Bio

Leah is an artist based in London, working mostly in film and performance. Her practice is concerned with the relationship between the psychological, emotional, and physical, often through personal accounts of unusual or hard-to-articulate experiences. Her work also focuses on sickness / crappiness / disability in art, in critical and practical ways.



Ingredients

(serves 2)

2x spring onions
1x mild red chilli
x 2 sweet potatoes
1 white onion
3 x cloves garlic
1/2 punnet cherry tomatoes
1x teaspoon cumin seed
1 jar jalapeños
1x bunch coriander
Cottage cheese
1 can of black beans

Elderflower Cordial

I'd recommend this as an accompanying drink :)

Ingredients

Elderflower cordial
Sparkling water
Still water

Method

Dilute the cordial as desired with either water

Method

Fork holes in sweet potatoes. Bake in oven 200°C for 30- 40 mins until soft and tender.

For the beans

Toast 1 teaspoon of cumin seeds in a saucepan (no oil). Add a glug of olive oil and a roughly chopped onion, caramelise onions until soft and golden brown. Add 3 cloves of garlic (finely chopped). Cook for a further minute before adding black beans. Season well, cook until beans are soft and creamy.

For the salsa

Finely chop spring onions and add to a bowl, add cherry tomatoes chopped in quarters. Take jar of jalapeños, liquidise whole jar (liquid and all) in a blender. Use 2 and a half tablespoons of liquidised jalapeños as dressing for salsa, put remainder back into jar and refrigerate for future occasions. Add 2 sprigs of roughly chopped coriander leaves. Season and add a splash of olive oil.

To serve:

Open potato, add beans on top and to the side of the dish. Top the potato with two large spoons of the salsa a dollop of cottage cheese, some finely sliced (mild!) red chillies, coriander leaves and olive oil, seasoning.



Burrito



Romily Alice Walden

Methodology:

I don't even know if I should call these burritos because in no way do they resemble the complex and delicious flavours of an authentic burrito. But, for me, they do resemble a very comforting and delicious thing that I want to eat when I'm feeling sick, sad, hungry, angry, tired, happy or any time at all. You can make a vat of the mix, freeze it and then eat it with salsa and guacamole if you have the energy, or as is with some rice / cheese if you can't manage the chopping. When I feel low, I crave tasty, uncomplicated food that also leaves me feeling nourished. There's something implicitly comforting about holding onto the warm and heavy parcel that is a freshly wrapped burrito; and for that reason I always eat this meal with my hands.

This is also a really lovely meal to share with friends. There's lots of bowls full of different little bits on the table, so you have to pass things to each-other, help those for whom reaching is hard, share the spoils and talk about what you want. I like that this communal meal facilitates conversations about needs, desires and pleasure concerning food. Whether you cook alone and then share, or make the whole process communal, there is an ingrained element of pleasure-seeking when you construct a meal that can be tweaked and adapted to each individual eater's desires. I think it can be hard to find moments of pleasure, joy and awareness in day to day life, especially if one is dealing with pain, stress, sickness or care. A moment taken to put together a burrito isn't going to change your life, but it may well change your mood. Sometimes the simplest pleasures remind me that there can be space for joy and desire, even within suffering.

Bio:

Romily Alice Walden is a transdisciplinary artist whose work centers a queer, disabled perspective on the fragility of the body. Their practice spans sculpture, installation, video and printed matter, all of which is undertaken with a socially engaged and research-led working methodology. Recent work has shown at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art: Newcastle, Hebel Am Ufer: Berlin, SOHO20: New York and Tate Modern: London. In 2019 Romily was a Shandaken Storm King resident and in 2020 will be resident at Rupert, Lithuania. Romily is currently a fellow of the UdK Graduate School, Berlin.



me comforting my friends



everyone is getting married and having kids, and I'm just here like...



how u b lookin at the microwaved burrito u just dropped on the floor at 2:32 am



When you get home from work and you can finally be yourself again



Guacamole:

4 ripe avocados, mashed
5-10 jalapeño slices from a jar, finely chopped + some jalapeño liquid from the jar if you like spicy
1/2 a large fresh red chilli deseeded and finely chopped
1/2 a finely chopped red onion
Juice from 2-3 limes to taste
1 small handful fresh coriander including stalks, finely chopped
1 tomato, finely chopped
pinch of salt

Burrito Filling:

1 large aubergine
2 big peppers (red, yellow or orange)
1 punnet of cherry tomatoes
3 red chillies (this makes it medium spicy)
2 red or white onions
3 cloves of garlic
2 tins chopped tomatoes
3 tins of kidney or black beans Lingham's chilli sauce (available in big Tesco/ waitrose/online)
1 teaspoon cumin

Salsa:

8 tomatoes roughly chopped
a handful of sweetcorn from a can
Juice from 1-3 limes to taste
1 small handful fresh coriander including stalks, finely chopped
pinch of salt
1 large fresh red chilli deseeded and finely chopped
1/2 a finely chopped red onion

Recommended Extras:

Wheat or corn wraps
Grated cheddar cheese
Sour Cream
Shredded lettuce
Chopped fresh coriander to serve.

*it is also very easy to make this vegan by leaving out the cheese and sour cream. And GF is possible too if you use 100% corn tortillas

Method:

Guacamole and salsa: chop / prep ingredients for each in a separate bowl. Adjust salt/lime/coriander quantities to taste.

Burrito filling:

Chop the aubergine and peppers into 2-3 cm chunks. Heat up a good slug of olive oil in a large pan and fry the aubergines and peppers for 10-15 minutes until softened and golden at the edges. Add more oil if needed.

Roughly chop the onions and chili and garlic.

Cook the onions in olive oil in a separate pan for 10-15 minutes on a medium heat until soft and golden, then add in the chili and garlic and cumin and cook for another few minutes.

Combine both pans. Add in the cherry tomatoes and another glug of oil. Cook on medium for another 5 minutes until the cherry tomatoes are a little browned/bruised.

Add in your chopped tomatoes, beans and a really good glug of the lingham's chili sauce.

Cook with the lid on, at low/medium for 30 mins stirring occasionally, then with the lid off stirring occasionally for another 30 minutes. This filling tastes best if cooked a few hours or even the day before eating.



To serve:

Ladle some burrito filling in a line in the centre of your wrap. Add salsa, guacamole, sour cream, cheese, lettuce, coriander or any combination of these things.

Wrap as below and enjoy either very messily with your hands or much more politely with a knife and fork.

Fruity Spritzer



Romily Alice Walden

Drinks options:

Most of the time I just drink water, but hey, this is a *BANQUET* so let's push the boat out or maybe just lie in the boat and sip on our snazzy drinks as we're rocked gently by the waves.

I'm including a more labour intensive option that involves a blender and also a simpler option where no tools are required for when you want to feel fancy but blending things is just too much.

Fancy and tired: FRUITY SPRITZER

Tall glass
Ice
Fizzy water
Generous squeeze of lime
Splash of grenadine syrup or
ribena or whatever syrup /
squash you like.

Simply combine ingredients
to taste.



Fancy with blender: WATERMELON COOLER

Tall glass
Fizzy water
1 watermelon
3 limes
A handful of mint

Combine the watermelon,
mint leaves, and lime juice in
a blender.

Strain it if you're very extra
or just keep it thick and your
drink will end up with more of
a slushy texture.

Add ice and fizzy water to
taste.

Baked Beans



Raisa Kabir

Baked Beans By Raisa Kabir

Baked Beans don't sound super glamorous do they? They are something we eat out of everyday comfort, brilliant on a Jacket potato with grated cheese, and more than likely you can be guaranteed to have them in your cupboard. I know from days when I had pretty bare cupboards, I could count on transforming a tin of Baked Beans into a quick easy dinner.



It all started from a seed dish that I used time and time again on Sick DAYS. When I used to have days with very little energy and that meant no energy to go to the shops, so a very bare kitchen, relying on things that had been in my cupboard for a while. These were also days I couldn't really cook a full meal for myself because of low energy.

Baked beans have haricot beans in them, which are full of protein and really nutritious. On these days I would put the can into a sauce pan, add fresh tomatoes and feta cheese, a crushed garlic maybe, or a sprinkle of chilli flakes, possibly some chopped olives, and eat with parsley on top. Whatever I had to hand, would throw it in there and have a warm bowl of food. It fed me and filled me up when I had little resources or spoons that day.

Here I have reinvented a recipe that creates it's own very nutritious and full of flavours version of the humble but dependable dish of baked beans. Instead of using bought baked beans (which you certainly still can!) I am using tinned butter beans, which is another hearty type of white bean, and can be substituted with, haricot beans, cannellini beans or baked beans in tomato sauce as well. You can also use a mix of different white beans in the same dish (just use one of each).

During lockdown of 2020 I spotted a tray bake dish in a newspaper recipe booklet, and it quickly became the favourite dish of the week, delivering amazing flavours, and was a joy to eat during those difficult months: it was soothing, comforting as any type of baked bean dish, and was incredibly very very easy to make. A low energy dinner - but stunning to serve, eat and share a meal together.

It was so reminiscent of those days of turning a dinner of baked beans, into something special. So here I've tweaked and altered this recipe and it is tried and tested and eaten at least once a week in my home.

This wonderful baked bean dish has spicy flavours of rose harissa paste, and garlic cloves, but also fresh leeks and eggs. If you don't want to use eggs you can skip that part. It is also great to eat the next day for lunch. The flavours develop. It can also be doubled/tripled in size depending on how many you need to feed, and can easily be made up for small families of 1- 4.

This recipe has four eggs in and serves four, or two people with seconds/left overs. You can use a large oven tray bake dish and put six or eight eggs in to stretch it even further, and maybe use a large leek or two small ones to bulk it up. (There were days during lockdown where we couldn't access a supermarket, so we would walk to the community garden down the road, to pick whatever herbs we could find, fresh mint leaves and carry them home. So use what you have, and tweak it to your tastes)



Ingredients

80ml Olive Oil
10 whole Garlic cloves, peeled
Salt
Pepper

Prep - 15mins
Cook - 1 hour

1x teaspoon Smoked Paprika
3x tablespoons Rose Harissa Paste

2x tins of 400g Butter Beans
2x tins of chopped tomatoes
or peeled plum tomatoes

380ml water

For the topping

4 x eggs

1 x leek chopped into slices

Feta Cheese chopped to crumble
Mint and Parsley chopped finely to
sprinkle

Preheat your oven to 200 degrees or 180 degrees with fan





Peel and chop the garlic in halves



Use a roasting dish and add the 2 x 400g tins of rinsed and drained butter beans into dish

Add the salt and pepper and 1 teaspoon of smoked paprika (or 1/2 hot and 1/2 sweet to reduce spiciness)





Add 3x table spoons of the Rose Harissa Paste. A little goes a long way, so reduce if you need to

Add the chopped garlic gloves

Add the 80ml extra virgin olive oil



Mix all the ingredients together, so the spices
and paste covers all the beans





Add the tinned tomatoes:
2 x 400g chopped tomatoes

Fill one empty can with
water (approx 380ml)





Add the tin of water to the dish,
give it a stir

Now it's time to put it in the
centre shelf of your oven for
45mins

Chop your leek into slices, and soak in a bowl, with a 1/2 table
spoon of olive oil and massage the oil into the leeks

Chop your herbs and cube the feta





After 45 minutes in the oven, it should have reduced nicely, and will be thick and sticky

Add your chopped leeks over the top of the dish



Make a well with the back of a spoon

Crack an egg into the well

Repeat four times, or until you've covered the amount of eggs you're using

(for large tray bakes you can have up to six or eight)



Season eggs, and put back in oven for 10-15mins

Once out of the oven, check eggs are cooked to your preference.

Take care the leeks do not burn/colour too much. The chopped garlic should be easily squish-able with the back of a fork.



Scatter with chopped
herbs, and feta, and serve!





Michel's Fried Rice



Bella Milroy



Michel's Fried Rice

Sick Day Banquet

Soft Sanctuary 2020

Bella Milroy

Image description :

A digital photograph of a grey ceramic bowl of what looks like rice, vegetables and pieces of scrambled eggs sat on a lit, pale wooden surface. The rice is presented in a stylised way where it has been moulded into a dome. This presentation makes it very appetizing, giving it a feeling like it perhaps belongs in a restaurant or posted on instagram. It is still a very humble looking bowl of rice, and the image makes you want to eat it - it looks yummy.



Cover image description :

A digital photograph in portrait which shows a blur of different colours; greens, orange, yellows, browns and blacks. Though the image is blurred, there is depth to it, with a surface of what appears to be some kind of transparent glass with blotches of condensation on it. It isn't clear what the colours are, but some of the shapes appear as spheres of green and cubes of orange. The liquid magnifies some of the colours and shapes below it, making it very watery and abstract. The scale of the image is unclear, but the combination of textures allow for a dreamy, hazey scene.

Since I began food writing, I have swayed many times to a particular favourite meal of comfort, safety, nostalgia; Derbyshire Oatcakes. They are this wonderfully stodgy , deeply comforting food that I grew up eating. They're essentially like a crumpet but flat and in the shape of a pancake. They are totally delicious grilled with cheese, can be used as the base of a fry up and can even be topped with butter and jam. I would eat them for breakfast as a weekend treat, as a fryup for tea, and always on family holidays to Wales, enjoying them alongside other novelty vacation staples of fancy orange juice and cereal variety packs. They are delicious, I love them and they bring me deep deep joy to eat them whenever I'm in need of such comforts. And, in thinking about writing this piece, I have often tried to evoke the feeling when I eat this food, particularly when I eat this food when I'm unwell. But what can happen with that is that I can often fall down the nostalgia-vortex of what this food means to me, particularly given that it's a special food that is unique to my local area (you *could* go across the border and find Staffordshire Oatcakes in the neighbouring country, which are, *supposedly*, just as good).

Alongside Derbyshire Oatcakes, the foods that I most crave when I am unwell are savoury, bland foods like plain tortilla chips or soy rice crackers. These are the kinds of foods which really allow me to quash some of the nausea that I experience when pain is high. Something that always fulfills this criteria is a kind of barely-cheese-on-toast prepared by my Dad. When I'm in a lot of pain and all my senses are extremely flared, it means that I can only manage very small amounts of dry textures with flavours to match. So sometimes my dad will make me cheese on toast with just a scarcity of cheese, almost as if the toast and cheese have merely waved and said hello to one another in the briefest of introductions. To some this perhaps sounds like a grim, flavourless piece of edible two-by-four, but when you're in a lot of pain, sometimes this is all it takes to really hit the spot.

Continuing the theme of gentle, savoury flavours, a benchmark of sick-day foods for a long time has been scrambled eggs on toast. I love them so very much. They have that lovely blandness to them, but also the nourishing goodness of the buttery toast alongside fluffy eggs, which I insist on having covered with a heavy scattering of salt. The eggs have to be silky and runny, almost like a quiche. I don't like any pepper in it at all, just lots of salt, lots of butter. That, for me, is what makes good scrambled eggs.



Image description :

A digital photograph of a blue and white ceramic bowl of what looks like some kind of shiny orange liquid. It looks like the liquid could be eggs, as it is being whisked using chopsticks. There is movement and motion to the image, as the chopsticks are slightly blurred. It looks like the bowl is being held on a kitchen countertop, with a red chopping board in the background. The hands holding the bowl have white skin. The image is lively and interesting, with the shapes of the moving liquid caught in a way that makes them look silky and bright.

But something has changed in my life over the last few weeks which has made me think about the food that I eat in a way that I haven't really experienced before. Back in November 2020, I took on a PA (Personal Assistant or Carer) for the first time. My experience of illness has solely been supported by loved ones and family members, and so my care has always come from that. Over the course of last year as my health spiralled badly, and alongside the strain of pandemic, the care I received from my partner and my parents had become increasingly complex and wearing. I have an incredibly good setup with my family, and the care that I receive from them often is intermingled with leisurely family time, something I always feel very privileged to have in this way. The difficulty about care coming from loved ones in my particular context, is that you don't get to objectively assess what is happening and what is going on. It's something that a friend of mine was describing to me as to why they don't have care from their family in how both parties compromise too much; the carer is knackered and tired, and you, the person being cared for, asks for less because of that. It's taken me until very recently to realise that that is what has been going on for me for some time now. It's hard not to feel like every ask is an I.O.U, something that really eats into your agency of asking for what you really want. And these things stack up, becoming small resentments over seemingly unimportant tasks like how you like your washing to be hung, where that mug goes in the kitchen or *"...I asked for brown toast, not white!"*. It's also where my internalised ableism harbours in its most steadfast setting, feeding the part of me that feels heavy and burdensome, a place where I often transform into the albatross around the necks of the people I love. The reality of this care has always been in the back of my mind, particularly as my parents get older. I wanted to preempt the moment where we're all running around like headless chickens when mum has had a fall or dad has gotten sick, and the care isn't there on either side and things turn quite bad, quite quickly. I also wanted to gain a different perspective and maybe a better sense of agency over how my care is carried out, allowing me to consider what it can offer me in a way that perhaps I hadn't done before. This new venture has been both incredibly challenging and wonderfully transformative to embark upon. I am entering into a completely new stage of my disabled experience, and it is thrilling.

One of the things that is a really interesting example of this new way of operating is the food that I am eating. There has been the discovery of a new found favourite sick day food; Michel's fried rice.

My PA Michel is a wonderful cook of Japanese food having lived there for most of her life, and so when she told me that she made good fried rice I was very excited. And so, after many a sick-day of eating scrambled eggs or the corner of buttered toast, on a poorly day recently, all of a sudden the food I craved was Michel's fried rice, and it did not disappoint; offering up the most delicious, savoury, perfectly greasy bowl to my tired mouth. It was cooked in a way I never would have cooked myself, with chopsticks to whisk the eggs and stock powder sprinkled over the wok full of delicately chopped greens, onions and just a scatter of frozen peas. It was a creation of careful, generous support, fulfilling that desire of taste, texture and comfort that I so desperately need in those moments. When the food that we need to comfort us is being cooked by someone else, there's this really interesting dynamic that plays out between what I *need* and what I *desire*. It requires you to find that meeting point between those two things, considering what is important, what is achievable, what is meaningful and what is practical. As artist Kyla Harris described to me in our voice note exchange (as featured in the Sick Day Banquet film as part of this 2021 Soft Sanctuary series), *"so often working with a PA is about figuring out their strengths and playing to them"*. Perhaps scrambled eggs are not going to be the thing that I request as my go-to meal from my PA, particularly in this delicious discovery of her fried rice. Sometimes the food you desire is not always the food you think of first, but it's the food that the person who is cooking for you is most equipped at putting together. It's as if they take your needs for something savoury and bland with steady texture, and mould it into their version of that. There is something really exciting about the way in which you can discover those kinds of comforts in another translation, something that I feel I'm experiencing all the time with this new formal PA setup. This is not just happening with the food I eat, but also in how my bed is made, in the cleanliness of my home, and the voluptuousness of my regularly clean hair - a novelty I have not experienced on a regular basis for many years.

Needing care is extremely complicated; *having* care is even more so. There are your own needs and desires, there are the people offering to facilitate that, and there is the meeting point in between; a space full of complex compromise, shared wisdom, and an often quite bumpy terrain in which we navigate how those needs and desires are met. I am extremely excited to try and realise those desires and bring them to life in ways that I hadn't considered before. Right now, my sick-day food is Michel's fried rice, and within that exchange of flavours, smells, comforts and support, I can begin to hear my voice speaking louder about what I need, what I want, and what makes me feel full; mind, body and soul.



Image descriptions :

Two digital photographs of what looks like a frying pan of rice, vegetables and pieces of egg. There are green peas in it and the egg is bright yellow. It looks like a lively, cooking scene with bits of rice thrown over the sides on the pan. The image has movement and motion to it with the rice being stirred by a wooden spatula. Parts of the image is blurred with the motion of the stirring but this only adds to the feel of it being a scene of live cooking.



Michel's Egg Fried Rice

Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 cup of rice plus one cup of water
- 2 cloves of garlic, peeled and diced
- Half a carrot, peeled and diced
- Half an onion, diced

(I use frozen supermarket pre-chopped)

- Two eggs, whisked
- Half a cup of frozen peas
- 2 teaspoons of vegetable stock
- (I use bouillon stock powder but you could use half of any stock cube crumbled up)*
- Half a teaspoon of chilli flakes
- 1-2 tablespoons of soy sauce
- 2-3 tablespoons of olive oil (for frying)
- Optional additional:

Mushrooms

Kale

Green pepper

Leek

Marinated tofu pieces

Method:

Pour the rice into a pan and put on the boil. Once the pan has reached a boil, turn the heat right down to low for about 15 to 20 minutes so it seems - you shouldn't need to drain the rice.

Chop all the vegetables and set aside.

Whisk the eggs in a bowl.

Heat a large frying pan on high. Once hot, add a glug of oil.

Pour the whisked eggs into a frying pan and scramble until they are soft, golden pieces. Once cooked, set aside.

Using a piece of kitchen towel, wipe the empty frying pan so any remaining bits of egg don't burn in the next step.

Put the pan back on a medium-high heat. Once hot, pour a glug of oil into the pan.

Add the diced onions, carrots and garlic (and any other vegetables you've chosen) and stir fry.

Turn the heat right down and cover the pan with a lid for about 5 minutes to give the vegetables time to soften and sweat. Once you've sweated the vegetables and they are tender and soft, add the peas and cover with a lid again for another five minutes, with the heat still on low.

Check the rice to make sure it's not catching at the bottom. If it still needs a little more time but is looking a little dry, add a splash more water to allow it to steam. Once it is cooked, leave in the pan and set aside.

Once this is done, sprinkle in a teaspoon of the stock (the rest will be added to the rice separately) and stir.

Season to taste with black pepper and chilli flakes. Cook for a further 3 to 4 minutes with the lid off on low, stirring frequently.

Add the cooked scrambled eggs to the pan and stir, then remove from the pan and set aside.

Add a touch more oil to the empty pan and add the cooked rice.

Turn the heat up but be careful not to burn the bottom.

Add the remaining teaspoon of stock and more pepper and chilli flakes (optional). Stirring frequently, the pan should be sizzling.

Drizzle in a glug of soy sauce. Stir for a further 2-3 minutes.

Add the fried vegetables and eggs back into the pan with the rice, and stir fry for about 2 more minutes to heat through. Add another glug of soy sauce to taste.

Enjoy in warmed bowls as a side or main, for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

Back image description :

A digital photograph in portrait which shows a blur of different colours; greens, orange, yellows, browns and blacks. Though the image is blurred, there is depth to it, with a surface of what appears to be some kind of transparent glass with blotches of condensation on it. It isn't clear what the colours are, but some of the shapes appear as spheres of green and cubes of orange. The liquid magnifies some of the colours and shapes below it, making it very watery and abstract. The scale of the image is unclear, but the combination of textures allow for a dreamy, hazy scene.



Sick Day Banquet

Soft Sanctuary Season Online

Human Libraries, 2021

Sick Day Banquet is part of Soft Sanctuary, a project which artist Bella Milroy first developed for Human Libraries back in 2019 as a series of events at Bootle Library. The project centers disabled experiences through a universal concept of finding care and wellbeing, and celebrates the sanctuary nature of the library as a place to relax, feel safe and looked after. It has since developed into a programme of live events, written essays, recipes, film and podcasts. Featuring exclusively disabled artists, Soft Sanctuary explores the ceremonies of everyday life, and the disabled practices which offer us joy, ease and rest.

Special thanks:

to all the artists featured in this publication who worked incredibly hard to produce these brilliant pieces. Their efforts to create this work amongst the challenges of fluctuating capacities whilst living through the stresses of a pandemic, are hugely appreciated. we are grateful for the honesty, vulnerability and pleasure found in your work.

To Maria Brewster, Niamh Riordan and Laura Yates of Human Libraries, whose continued efforts and genuine dedication to flexibility have made every bit of difference in how the creation of this collection was made possible. Working with you on this has been a joy.

To our fantastic designer Hannah Thomas, who worked so hard in producing this publication for us and brought this collection to life.

Human Libraries is an arts project by Sefton Libraries and Rule of Threes. Supported by National Lottery Community Fund, Arts Council England and Sefton Council.

<https://humanlibraries.co.uk/projects/soft-sanctuary-online/>



Sick Day Banquet, Soft Sanctuary

Human Libraries, 2021

Created by Bella Milroy

Publication design by Hannah Thomas