

## Cooking and eating together on Fridays at East Finchley

*By Cecilia Montero Mórtola*

One cold and dark November evening, I got lost in East Finchley trying to get to one of my student's houses. I decided to go to the library in East Finchley to try and find my destination as my phone battery died and I was unable to use the trusted Google maps. I was disappointed when I found the door closed, however someone with a card let me in.

There were only readers and no librarian, it was around 5 pm. Then I asked someone about the address where I was going to, one reader explained to me, more or less, how to get there. Already more relaxed, I began to look at the flyers displayed in the library. One immediately stood out - it was one by Bread n Butter inviting people to attend free cooking sessions from 11am to 1pm every Friday in Saint Mary's Church Hall. It was almost in front of the library! Here was an opportunity for cooking and eating together plus taking food home! I regretted not being able to go that same Friday so I organised my schedule and made sure I was free to attend the next gastronomic meeting.

As soon as I arrived I felt very welcomed. On some tables I saw cutlery, kitchen tools, boxes with fruit and vegetables; and on other tables there were bags full of condiments, pasta, tins, big spoons, milk, cream, cheese, jugs, and containers of all different colours and sizes. The experience at that first session was great and very enriching on a personal level. I welcomed the opportunity to take part in informative practical learning. It was really interesting to see the different types of palates of the people in the class and to observe their culinary creativity. The food we cooked was delicious!

The experience made me think that throughout human history food has harmonized and enriched us. When we combine food with community, nurtured by respect, tolerance and appreciation we are building our sense of connection. Comments like "This is good for...", "Care for your hands with..." "This is easier than I had thought" "More fresh than...". "To make this with children is such fun".

As human beings we already know that food is a necessity. Eating means so much more than filling our belly. We can't reduce meals to the nutrients only. We need to be more aware about how food is produced, distributed and eaten. When thinking about food and social interaction we need to consider: how food is prepared, meal time conservation, ages, social class, gender, cleaning and table manners.

Animals don't cook. Cooking made us human. As we cook and eat, we are thinking and talking. The trivial conversation during meals is not so trivial, it shows many things, significantly, that we are humans eating and speaking together. In previous generations the incorporation of women into the work place took them outside the house. This left an empty space in the kitchen where men only entered as chefs. Now in the present day it is often said we are just what we eat. It is very reductionist to consider food in this way.

A culinary feature can't be only the whole identity. We eat as we live. And that brings me nicely back to talking about this unique and lovely weekly food workshop.

Every Friday I participate with great joy in the cooking and eating of food together. Our group sometimes numbers 10, other times 15. It is mostly adult participants, but there are also some small children aged between 5-9 who are very helpful at the sessions.

The three spaces in the church hall are divided into preparation areas, cooking areas and a washing up station. Delicious meals are prepared from scratch and littered with conversations and exchanges. We share each other's culinary knowledge and experiences.

There is a warm, supportive atmosphere at the sessions. There is always someone to lend a hand and offer some friendly advice or suggestions.

These Fridays have something that stands out from other cookery classes. Everyone that attends the group leaves learning something new and sharing a unique experience. A sense of belonging is created through the medium of food. One thing I observe from these sessions is how people are making time for themselves and doing something that enriches their lives.

I would be happy if the sessions were extended to 3 hours to allow participants more time to develop their culinary skills and share them with others. Being in the kitchen and making meals, speaking, learning notions of time, space, textures, noises, cleaning, health, tidying up, organization, sociocultural transmission.... the benefits go on.

Hopefully, there are many cooking events like this all over London, that appeal to people regardless of their race, religion, gender and background.

Notes and Info look for it  
in [http://www.breadnbutter.org.uk/community\\_cooking\\_together-2/](http://www.breadnbutter.org.uk/community_cooking_together-2/)  
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Their board of residents gave Bread N Butter a grant to offer the workshop in this area - to bring residents together and share skills.