



Letters

Book yourself a trip to the library

Dear Editor,

To my shame, I have not visited East Finchley Library for some while now. This is not because I have given up reading books, I hasten to add. Just before the New Year, I decided that I should rectify this, and took the opportunity to visit the library and choose a book.

Armed with my library card (and the book) I presented myself at the desk, only to be told that my card had been 'C-Listed' or something like that. This is the sort of thing that happens to those awful hangers-on from cheap commercial television programmes who try to gatecrash 'A-List' celebrity bashes, not me.

I was told I would have to apply from scratch for a new one, and needed to present several utility bills and my passport! Under the weight of my protests, they agreed to accept my driving licence as proof of identity, and, eventually, the transaction was done.

The librarian told me that they have recently been going through their records, removing accounts that have lapsed. He didn't explain why, but that may be because I was a bit short with him. With hindsight, it is not his fault (sorry, Mr. Librarian). It is obviously how the 'system' works.

However, if the end result is that the number of accounts at the East Finchley Library is reduced below a certain level, it will serve as useful ammunition for those who would seek to close the Library.

There is only one solution: everybody in East Finchley needs to get on their proverbial bikes and head for the Library, before there isn't one to head for. Make sure you have always got at least one book on current (not overdue) loan.

Yours faithfully,
John Dearing
Address supplied.

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Anna's recipe for desperate housewives

There can't be many gaps left in the over-crowded cookery market but Anna Angeli thinks she has found one. Anna is seeking to spread her love of the traditional Greek Cypriot recipes passed down to her through generations of her family.

A new website, www.desperategreekhousewives.co.uk, and a recipe book out later this year will keep her Greek recipes alive in an age when many kitchen traditions are losing the battle against fast food.

A living tradition

Anna, who lives in Bedford Road and whose day job is manager of the NatWest bank in East Finchley, says thousands of people have already shown an interest.

She said: "In book shops, I found that Greek cuisine is not promoted very much. There is definitely a niche in the market. 3,000 people have registered on the website and I'm hoping for 5,000 very soon."

"Many of them may be travellers who have been on holiday to Cyprus and want to know how to make the food they tasted. These days, younger Greek Cypriot people don't know a lot of the traditional dishes because fast food is everywhere. I want to keep those dishes alive."

Stuffed vine leaves, Greek meatballs and the mouthwatering dessert Baklava - a rich, sweet pastry made with nuts and syrup or honey - will be just some of Anna's recommendations.

She plans to write her recipe book and photograph the dishes on location in the sunshine of Cyprus this summer, as well as adding recipes and filmed demonstrations to her website throughout the year.

As a taster, here's Anna's recipe for Cracked Olives, known as Elyes tsakistes. It is one of the most traditional starters of the Mediterranean and full of flavour and goodness.



Anna Angeli

Cracked Olives

A large pebble or thick jar to crack the fresh green olives
Large glass jars for storage
Plastic apron
The amount of fresh green olives you wish to make and store

Water
Salt
Dry oregano
1 lemon
A few cloves of garlic
Drizzle of olive oil

To make the olives, you first need to smash them with a large pebble so they crack, but not too hard or they will go flying round the room. Apply enough pressure, so they split. This allows all the flavours to be absorbed. Wear your plastic apron, as the resin may spurt out and stain your clothing. Place them in a large glass storage jar and pour in water, measuring how many cups it takes to cover them. Add 1 teaspoon of salt per cup of water, seal and shake.

(Top tip: To check if your brine is perfect, an old wives' tale is to place a fresh egg on the surface of the water. If it floats it's just right; if not, add more salt). Leave them for one week to one month to marinade and preserve in your home-made brine. When ready they change colour to the olive colour we are familiar with.

To serve, take the required amount of olives and rinse under cold water. Add a drizzle of olive oil, a sprinkling of dry oregano, a clove of garlic cut into slices and mix together to give a truly flavoursome and very traditional appetiser. Cut a few slices of lemon to decorate and to add colour. They are then ready to eat. *Bon appetit.*

Pumpkins are not just for Halloween

By Laura Toniato

I like this time of year because it offers plenty of winter vegetables and in particular pumpkins. They have a deep orange colour and a soft velvety texture and can be used for either sweet or savoury dishes. I have found that the "Crown Prince" variety, available in most supermarkets, is excellent in both.

My mother always maintains that the best pumpkins are the ones that have caught a touch of frost; apparently it makes them even sweeter. Here is an easy recipe that I make regularly at this time of year that remind me of my early days back home in Italy.

Pumpkin Cake

This cake is really yummy and goes nicely with a cup of tea.

1kg of pumpkin (weighed with skin on)
100g Amaretti biscuits (crushed, not too finely)
2 tablespoons of cocoa powder
2 tablespoons of caster sugar
50g of unsalted butter
2 egg yolks
1 or 2 tablespoons of brandy or whisky
50g raisins or sultanas

Remove skin from pumpkin and boil or steam until tender. Mash with a fork and add the butter, sugar and cocoa powder. Allow to cool a little. Add the crushed Amaretti biscuits. Meanwhile soak the dried fruit in the brandy or whisky.

When the pumpkin mixture is cool, add the egg yolks one at a time and finally the soaked fruit. You should have a mixture that is not too wet or sloppy. Turn into a greased and floured cake tin (8/9ins or 20/22cm diameter). Sprinkle a few breadcrumbs on top and bake in a moderate oven (175° Celsius) for a good 40 minutes.

The cake is done when it has shrunk away from the side of the tin. Be careful when turning it out as it is a fairly gooey cake and don't expect it to rise as no baking powder is used.

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