

Great British Picnic

Nadiya Hussain talks to Emma Freud about korma and Mr Kipling, and why Brexit Britain needs comfort food

PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR RADIO TIMES BY ELLIS PARRINDER

IMAGINE BEING NADIYA Hussain. Imagine getting married at 19 to a man you first meet at your engagement party and then see for the second time on your wedding day. Imagine being a Yorkshire housewife with an anxiety disorder that gives you regular panic attacks and discovering your husband has entered you for the highest-rated TV show in the UK to help you get over them. And now imagine winning that show in front of 15 million people - and, as a consequence, discovering that your baking abilities have been deemed an important step toward shifting stereotypes about the Muslim community and that you have become a symbol of cultural diversity in Britain today.

Nadiya Hussain expected her "shelf life" following *The Great British Bake Off* to be a few months, possibly a year, before she returned home to a lifetime of being asked by strangers why her face looks vaguely familiar... but it hasn't turned out that way. Since her victory in August 2015 she's written two cookery books, made a documentary tracing her culinary roots in Bangladesh, >



◁ published a novel, baked the Queen's 90th birthday cake, appeared on *Desert Island Discs*, begun writing a weekly column in *The Times* and is now practically a fully qualified National Treasure.

Today, that Treasure is joining me for a picnic. She arrives at my house, early and instantly adorable. She meets my dog Posy, the cats, the tortoise and our new, controversial giant house rabbit, Big Sue. I'm not sure if she actually likes them (nobody likes Big Sue apart from me), but she pats most of them and sits down to chat. I offer her a piece of home-made cake. "It's Ramadan, I'm fasting," she explains. It was my youngest son's idea and he just did really badly in his Religious Studies exam – I now see why.

HER FOURTH BOOK is about to be published, to accompany her new BBC1 show *Nadiya's British Food Adventure*. In her privileged position as flavour of the year, she could probably have written a book on road-kill recipes and still broken existing records. But being the most interesting 32-year-old in the UK, she has decided to explore her cultural legacy.

"I'm lucky – and I'm also unlucky – that I'm part of lots of different worlds. I'm Bangladeshi, I'm Muslim, I'm British. The question I've often asked myself is, 'What is British food?' For me British food is a korma and Mr Kipling, because my parents are from Bangladesh and my mum didn't bake, but the interesting thing is everyone seems to have a really colourful answer. And now here I am with a series and a cook book, both trying to address that question."

But as the programme progresses, it reveals its depths. On the surface, it sees Nadiya travelling around Britain exploring the relationship between British produce and our culinary traditions; but go a bit further, and it explores multicultural Britain and the rainbow of influ-

ences that have brought about the way we eat and live, and our current national identity.

"You're right, it's not just about the food. I spent my whole life asking where I belong. And the big reason I did this programme is to ask who we are and what we all bring to this country. Britain's going through a really tough time at the moment – and we take our comfort in food. For me, a meal isn't something you just 'whip up', it's about love, it's giving and sharing. And when different cultures and worlds collide, it becomes really colourful – because that is the Britain we all live in."

She's really not your regular reality-show winner. This is the woman who grew up eating every meal on a rug on the floor with her fingers, and turned down a degree at King's College London because her parents asked her to stay at home. This is the woman who taught herself to cook from YouTube videos, and who went on to make Mary Berry cry with pride

‘For me, a meal isn’t something you just whip up’

when she won *Bake Off*, saying, "I'm never going to put boundaries on myself again. I'm never going to say, 'I don't think I can.' I can and I will." And this is the woman who has now become the most high profile and influential Muslim in the UK.

How does that sit with her? "I certainly didn't enter a baking show in the hope of representing anyone. Being a Muslim for me was incidental, but from the day the show was launched, I was 'the 30-year-old Muslim' and that became my identity. I struggled at the beginning, because I thought, 'Am I the token Muslim?' I'd never, in all my years, been labelled like that. I heard it constantly, 'Oh, she's the Muslim, she's the Muslim.' And I was so shocked by the ▷

LOOK BUT DON'T EAT
Picnic time for Nadiya and Emma (and Big Sue) – but Nadiya couldn't eat or drink because she was fasting for Ramadan



Ploughman's cheese & pickle tart

People say not to go food shopping when hungry, but I disagree, and a ploughman's sandwich is my favourite thing to eat while I do the weekly shop. That combination of strong cheese and tart chunky pickle is my inspiration for this recipe. Cut through the cheesy filling and you'll find a hidden layer of pickle waiting to tantalise your taste buds, with a hint of heat from the pastry.

SERVES 8 PREP 25 MINUTES, PLUS CHILLING

COOK 1 HOUR 10 MINUTES

- 350g shortcrust pastry
- 1 tsp paprika
- Plain flour, for dusting
- 4 medium eggs
- 150ml whole milk
- 200g Branstons pickle (small chunks)
- 250g mature Cheddar cheese, grated

1 Take the block of shortcrust pastry, flatten it out slightly and sprinkle all over with the paprika. Fold the edges in over the top, then knead the pastry until all the paprika is incorporated. If the pastry starts to stick to the worktop, dust with flour.

2 Wrap the pastry in cling film and place in the fridge for 15 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4 and put a baking tray in to heat up.

3 Dust the work surface with flour and roll out the pastry to the thickness of a pound coin and large enough to cover the base and sides of a 23cm diameter, 3-4cm deep, loose-bottomed flan tin.

4 Line the inside of the tin with the rolled-out pastry. Press it into the edges, right into the grooves, leaving some overhang. Pierce the base all over with a fork. This stops it puffing up while baking.

5 Cover the base and sides with a large piece of baking paper and fill with baking beans to weigh the pastry down. Take the hot baking tray out of the oven and place the prepared tart tin on it.

6 Bake for 25 minutes, then take out of the oven, remove the paper and baking beans, and bake for another 15 minutes.

7 Meanwhile, put your eggs into a jug and lightly whisk. Add the milk and stir.

8 Once the tart shell is out of the oven, spread the pickle all over the base and cover evenly with the grated cheese.

9 Pour in the milky egg mixture and place the whole tray back in the oven, on the middle shelf, for 25-30 minutes, until the filling is set and golden with just a very slight wobble in the middle.

10 Once the tart is cool enough to handle, slice off the pastry overhang using a sharp serrated knife. Leave to cool in the tin for 30 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

< amount of negative comments I got.”

There was a lot of hostility online during that series – and not just about the moment when Iain Watters had a diva fit and threw his arctic roll into the bin. Social media had a field day with Nadiya, and her home had to be police checked after she was threatened by anti-Islamic trolls, angry she had won the “not-so-British Bake Off”. For someone with an anxiety disorder, that must have been frightening.

“I was really apprehensive at the beginning because of all the aggressive comments, but I realised by the end what a lovely country I live in. I hear the negativity, I see it, but it doesn’t affect me because, my goodness, they’re the minority – just a few keyboard warriors who say what they want in the middle of the night. We are so much more accepting than that: I never realised Britain had such open arms.”

THIS WAS THE moment I fell in love with Nadiya: she was attacked by the one per cent of this country who trade in hatred and it made her appreciate the 99 per cent of people who don’t. If Nadiya is putting that heart into her new series, it’s a heart we really do need in our lives.

“OK, great, can we go and have fun now?” she asks. So we haul Big Sue into the park and lay out our picnic... All the food comes from her new cook book, a one-world mix of multicultural sources: the Asian fusion pork pie of duck and Chinese five-spice; an Anglo-Indian scotch egg made with salmon and mustard seeds;

a European Union quiche that contains a layer of Branston pickle between the cheese and the pastry; and a uniting of UK and USA values in the mother of all cakes, a deeply moist chocolate sponge on the bottom layer with biscuity, marshmallowy rocky road on the top. All as unexpected as she is.

While we’re talking, I notice people photographing her from behind trees – she is now recognised everywhere. Even the gynaecologist

‘Family is everything. My grandparents have 72 grandchildren’

performing her last smear test asked her what Paul Hollywood is like. “I said: ‘Can I answer that once you’ve taken out the speculum, please?’”

I eat double portions because she is fasting, but we chat incessantly about food, including this gem: “My favourite meal is still the dish my dad made for us when we were ill, a bowl of Smash instant mashed potatoes covered in half a tin of tomato soup.” Most impressive of all, Nadiya positively welcomes Big Sue to the table, unlike the rest of my family, who have taken against her as being one giant pet too many.

I decide I like Nadiya more than my children. We talk families; despite the insane glamour of the past two years, her home is her purpose. “My life is solely to be a role model to my children,” she says. “Everything else that comes with it is a

bonus. I was one of six – and two of my siblings were ill for most of their childhoods. My parents were endlessly at the hospital, so we were looked after a lot by our grandparents. Family is everything.” How many grandchildren do your grandparents have, I ask. “72,” she replies.

SHE GIVES ME the rest of the cake to feed my kids later, even though they don’t deserve it, and we move back indoors. We’d sat in the sun for an hour and while my face has melted into the duck pie, Nadiya still looks like a perfect, tiny supermodel. I ask her to sign our lloo wall (it’s a thing in our house) and she writes: “For heaven’s sake, eat more cake.”

She says a little goodbye to Big Sue and as she leaves I ask her what the plan is now. “I don’t actually know what I’m doing or where I’m going, and I like that. I didn’t know I’d do *Bake Off* two years ago, I didn’t know I’d be making a TV series this year – I didn’t know I’d be here in your house until yesterday. That’s the state of my life. I get the joy of all this, and then I get to go home, feed my kids, clean my toilets, eat a big bag of crisps and watch *EastEnders*.” As I said... we’ve got ourselves a new National Treasure.

RT Books Recipes taken from *Nadiya’s British Food Adventure* by Nadiya Hussain (Penguin). To order for just £17.49 (usually £20) incl p&p, call **0344 245 8092** quoting RTBOOKS29



Rocky road cake

I love the combination of chewy fruit, sticky marshmallow and crunchy biscuit, all covered in rich chocolate. Rocky road is one of the first things I ever made in the kitchen with the kids. I say “made”, even though it is more a case of “putting together” as opposed to baking. But this variation is a rocky road with a soft landing – in cake form.

SERVES 16 PREP 45 MINUTES, PLUS COOLING

COOK 1 HOUR 25 MINUTES

FOR THE CAKE

- 225g plain flour, sifted
- 350g caster sugar
- 85g cocoa powder
- 1½ tsp baking powder
- 1½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 250ml whole milk, room temperature
- 2 large eggs
- 125ml vegetable oil (or any flavourless oil)
- 250ml boiling water
- 2 tablespoons instant coffee

FOR THE ROCKY ROAD

- 250g dark chocolate, chopped
- 250g milk chocolate, chopped
- 100g unsalted butter
- 200g malted milk biscuits, roughly broken
- 100g marshmallows (if mini, that’s great – if they are big they will need cutting into smaller pieces)
- 200g glacé cherries, halved
- 2 tbsp icing sugar

1 Preheat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4. Grease the base and sides of a 25cm round cake tin. Cut out two rounds of baking paper and use one to line the tin, putting the other one aside for later.

2 Put the flour, sugar, cocoa, baking powder and bicarbonate

of soda into a large bowl and give it all a whisk.

3 Put the milk, eggs and oil into a jug and whisk until they are combined. Add to the dry mix and whisk to a smooth batter.

4 Using the same jug, measure out the boiling water and the coffee. Mix together and pour into the batter. You won’t actually taste the coffee in the cake, but it enhances the flavour of the chocolate, so you should taste a lot of chocolate. This feels weird, and it seems the two will not mix together. But I promise that they will, so persevere and continue to mix until you get a smooth batter. But be careful – the water will be very hot.

5 Pour the batter into the prepared cake tin and bake on the middle shelf for 45–50 minutes, until a skewer inserted comes out clean. Leave to cool completely in the tin.

6 Meanwhile prepare the rocky road by putting the two chocolates and the butter into a microwaveable bowl and melting in the microwave until the mixture is smooth. Do this in 30-second and then 10-second bursts, stirring between bursts.

7 Now add the biscuits, marshmallows and glacé cherries, and mix well until everything is coated.

8 Pour the mixture all over the cooled cake, using the back of a spoon to help spread it out if needed. Now take the extra round of baking paper you cut out earlier, place it on top and press firmly to flatten. Place in the fridge for 2 hours.

9 Take the paper off the top and turn out on to a cake stand or serving plate.

10 Now take off the other piece of paper and dust the cake with icing sugar before slicing.