

## **WAITROSE & PARTNERS**

### **LIFE ON A PLATE**

#### **SEASON 1, EPISODE 4: HUGH FEARNLEY-WHITTINGSTALL**

#### **SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

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#### **SPEAKERS**

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, Jimi Famurewa, Alison Oakervee,

#### **Jimi 00:00**

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Welcome to Life on a Plate, the brand-new podcast from Waitrose, in which we talk to some very special guests about what food really means to them. We ask about their comfort foods and favourite dishes, their food memories and even their kitchen disasters. By the end of each episode, you'll know a lot more about them. With me, as ever, is my co-host Alison Oakervee, Waitrose food editor and kitchen sorceress. How are you doing?

#### **Alison 01:48**

I'm alright, thank you. Tell me what you've been up to?

#### **Jimi 01:50**

What have I been doing? I've been having a bit of a sort out. And that for me generally pertains to just kind of moving books around endlessly. Or actually, starting to move things around and getting distracted by some cookbook, and starting to read it, and thinking: 'Oh, no I can't put that in the loft', and then it just spirals. I'm quite bad at that stuff, but I feel like – are you good at that, are you kind of quite good at that kind of, sorting and decorating? You seem quite organised to me Alison.

#### **Alison 02:19**

Well, I've been on a bit of a mission. I have really started decorating and the trouble is when you decorate one room you then think: 'Ooh, that needs a paint job', so you then move on to the next room and then...

**Jimi** 02:30

You see, I don't have that problem. I don't have that problem – I want you to teach me.

**Alison** 02:34

The trouble is it just escalates, and then when you do a room then you have to have a massive sort out, because everything has to come out, and then go back in. And yeah, so you're continually sorting. But I mean, the upside is you end up with really toned arms with all the use of the roller – so it's not all bad, and quite a good way to start the year.

**Jimi** 02:53

Is this the real reason why you're decorating wildly – are you on a sort of fitness drive or whatever? I can see this being like a fitness video or something that you release: Roller fit.

**Alison** 03:07

[Laughs] Well, it's just a nice bonus but at the same time it's just really satisfying having things... getting everything in order and having a good sort out and chuck out.

**Jimi** 03:16

No, you're right. You're shaming me into wanting to be better. And I think maybe I will try to start small and do some painting and some decorating.

**Alison** 03:24

I tell you what, should I help you out? Should we talk about our guest instead?

**Jimi** 03:28

That is a very good idea. Our guest on this episode is the amazing Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall who is, of course, best known for his work with The River Cottage, which has been spun off into shows and books and even restaurants. But, what I really love about Hugh and how I first came to him, and I think how most people know him, is his incredible campaigning work, and the fact that, for decades now, he's been an advocate for better animal welfare, what he's been doing with chicken and yeah, he's an absolute whirlwind, and I really love that he makes these positive changes seem achievable.

**Alison** 04:08

He's got really good, strong food ethics. And that's really influenced the way we cook, and shop, and eat right now – it's kind of, everything we do. Whether it's the plastic cups that we used to just quite happily take and use, and now we're much more driven to thinking about bringing our own cups when we want to go out for coffee instead of a takeaway, a disposable cup. And, you know, it's really just changed, and it's all small, simple steps that we couldn't even do.

**Jimi** 04:37

Yeah. And it's at the heart of a new book that he was talking about, which charts his own personal transformation in a way – and the way he's looked at his lifestyle, and he's cut back on sugar and drinking. And what I really loved about our conversation was, these things can often seem like you are giving something up, or it's about being parsimonious, or not having as much joy. But he's all about relishing these changes and making them positives. And it's definitely something that some of the things he said have stuck with me long afterwards, as I'm cooking, as I'm preparing stuff. He's like a real kind of guru in that sense, but he wears it amazingly lightly. And he was very good fun as well.

**Alison** 05:21

It's just nice the fact he even had some really good things to say about retailers like Waitrose. He really listened to what people have said and about sourcing and provenance. And that's the information that we give and do now.

**Jimi** 05:34

Yeah, completely. I couldn't agree more. He was great, basically. And there's even some lovely cold water swimming chat, which I think people will be quite into. And it will make you possibly want to just dive into the nearest freezing body of water. Shall we get on with it?

**Alison** 05:55

That sounds a good idea.

**Jimi** 05:57

Here is our Life on a Plate interview with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, thank you so much for joining us, and welcome to Life on a Plate.

**Hugh FW** 06:19

Thank you, Jimi. Thank you, Alison. It's great to be with you.

**Jimi** 06:22

What sort of influence did your parents have on your relationship with food, what sort of things were being cooked in the household as you were growing up?

**Hugh FW** 06:30

Absolutely massive. My mum is a great cook. She entertained at home in the 1970s, which is when I was learning to cook, and I got to a point where I was pretty much in charge of the puddings for her 1970s dinner parties from the age of eight or nine. But also, I did, it wasn't only sweet stuff, I was interested in the savoury stuff too. Perhaps I had more of a sous chef role on the, on the starters, but I became very interested in this very 70s concept of a savoury mousse. And so there's egg mousse, and avocado mousse, and smoked haddock mousse – quite a lot of gelatin going down in these dishes – but these creamy, savoury textures, which, which I found appealing, and intriguing. So, I mean, I was also, you know, I love being outdoors, but if I couldn't be outdoors, I was very easily bored, and I was a sort of restless kid who was pulling my mum's skirt saying: 'Well, Mum, what can I do?, I'm bored'. But if she could spare a bit of time, she'd take me to the kitchen, we'd do some cooking together. I began to

get reasonably confident reasonably quickly and vaguely sort of self-determined in the kitchen. And then she would just keep a vague eye on me. And she was quite indulgent, which is why I developed the habit that eventually got me sacked from The River Café – which is not being really that good at the tidying up and the washing up.

**Jimi** 08:03

[Laughs] The less fun bit.

**Hugh FW** 08:04

The less fun bit. But I'm incredibly, always grateful to my mum for all of that, and also for introducing me to some foods, because I was also really quite fussy, oddly enough, despite being interested in food, I was quite fussy. I loved ketchup and I loved, I love fish fingers, but she would, she did that thing of making sure that before I was too old, she'd put a whole fish in front of me, and made a big ritual and showed it to me and got me excited about it. I remember eating a whole grilled mackerel, the first, probably the first piece of fish I'd eaten that hadn't been covered in orange breadcrumbs, and actually finding it delicious and exciting and then wanting to go and catch one and that kind of thing.

**Jimi** 08:42

Kind of on the other side of that, I've seen you also talk about boarding school and the food there, and maybe the influence that had in terms of it not really being something that you particularly enjoyed? Talk us through that.

**Hugh FW** 08:57

It was pretty grim. You know, pretty grim – vegetables, always overcooked. And, and, you know, meat, horribly overcooked slices of meat, put with gravy covering them that then went in the oven for an hour cooked in the gravy. Yeah, pretty grim. But so, and there were just one or two exceptions, they weren't the same for everyone. But of course, if there was something you liked you then absolutely descended on it. So it might have been one of the steamed greens or, or actually the roast potatoes weren't too bad, they were reasonably crispy. So you could go nuts for the opportunity to eat something that was a bit less grim. But that, that made... one thing that made me, it made me value home cooking. And when I got home that, and when I was away at school, my mum's cooking was something I thought about a lot and when I got home, getting into the kitchen and cooking with my mum, or for my mum, was something that meant more and more, and it meant you know, that you weren't putting up with the, the porridge and the, and the grim school stuff. And it took me... I love porridge now, but I was well into my 30s before I actually set about cooking a porridge, or preparing oats in a way that I could properly enjoy, because I'd been so put off by the lumpy, gruelly, watery porridge at school.

**Jimi** 10:22

Those associations go really deep, don't they? I remember at my own school...

**Hugh FW** 10:26

What was your grim school recollection, Jimi?

**Jimi** 10:29

I remember the vats of custard with the, with the skin on the top, that would be kind of taken off, and mashed potato that was like really dry.

**Hugh FW 10:41**

And no butter.

**Jimi 10:42**

Yeah, and lumpy, and you'd be made to eat it. And pudding was... I wonder if part of it is why we all became quite pudding obsessed, because it was probably the one thing that you liked, and you were always forced to finish everything else to get to it. And so you fetishised sweetness, and pudding, and sweets and things like that, from a very early age.

**Hugh FW 11:01**

That's absolutely right. And of course, sweets were often sold as the reward for eating the stuff you didn't like. And you know, whilst we could, you know, reminisce about that and have a laugh about it, at one level that has become quite a problem for the way we eat as a society. The sense that sugars are reward, that carbs are where comfort is so deeply ingrained in the culture. And that's what props up the industrial production of confectionery, sugared cereals, and baked goods. Which is not something that we should banish from our lives, but it is something that needs to be approached with caution, because there's not – in a lot of their versions of those products – there's not a lot of great stuff in them.

**Jimi 11:46**

Yeah, yeah. I wondered, there was a period where you went to Africa, was that correct? And you started out with this wildlife focus and conservation-ism. And it seems like something that you have carried into your work with food. Talk us through that period – where did you go in Africa? What was that like?

**Hugh FW 12:05**

That's absolutely right. When I left university, a trip I'd been planning for some time with one of my best friends, we went to Southern Africa, we bought a beaten up pickup truck in Johannesburg, and we drove it all around Southern Africa. We managed to get a sort of calling card for a few conservation organisations who let us in, we interviewed them. We were trying to research but we had this very high ideal that we were going to write a massive tome about the future of conservation. But of course, we were just wet behind the ears, we were students. But it did mean we got to go to some incredible places, and interview some amazing people, and see some wonderful wildlife. And actually, it was when I was... after that first trip, when I was back in London, trying to find a way to get back because I learned a lot and I knew... I'd realised I'd been very naive, but I did want to go back and get involved in the world of conservation. Perhaps to work for a while in that world before daring to start pontificating or writing about it. And it was while I was sort of marking time wondering how I was going to get back to Africa, that I went to see if I could get a job at The River Café because I already loved cooking. And then the cooking thing stuck and evolved, and I didn't make it back to Africa for a long time. I did return some years later with my wife and family. And then I went back seven, six or seven years ago, to make a programme about the illegal wildlife trade. And that concern about the wider environment has informed a lot of the food issues that I've looked at.

**Alison** 13:49

That conservationist aspect of your life is not something that I'd ever read about until I was doing some research for today. And it just suddenly, for me made sense, that link between conservation and your role now as a campaigner and how that drives you.

**Hugh FW** 14:06

It does seem, and it feels actually quite satisfying. But it's come full circle, and that there is a chance to explore issues, as I say the programmes I've done around plastics and food waste and the illegal wildlife trade have been a wonderful opportunity. And so often, we're also able to make the connection with food. And with most of these things, these programmes that I've been lucky enough to do, the first important thing is to drag the issue right out into the middle and shine a light on it so that everybody can see it. And, of course when it's one thing to identify these problems, and it's a whole different thing to solve them and I guess it's part of the conservationists, or campaigners, or activists lot that you never feel a problem is solved. Because it never is completely solved. But at least there is something... there is some sense of having raised awareness and having more people who understand the problem, more people who care, and that's what... it's not me being, I don't know, incensed about food waste that makes a difference, it's lots and lots of people out there, and shoppers, who then expect their retailers to do something about it, or big business, or government to change policy, or change the rules, or simply to practice business in a better way.

**Jimi** 15:54

In terms of how people first got to know you, I looked back at The River Cottage, and the first series –it's got a literal caricature of you driving out of the city and things like that.

**Hugh FW** 16:06

Oh, yeah, the cartoon Hugh. The little curly homunculus.

**Jimi** 16:13

And I wondered, how did you feel at the time, of that, almost cartoon version of yourself? Or people's perception of you? And how have you squared that with how you're living your life now? And things like eat better forever?

**Hugh FW** 16:28

Well, it's, it's funny, isn't it? I mean, yes, there was that little caricature, cartoon opening title sequence. But what I think we were doing with River Cottage – which is actually pretty consistent with what I'm sort of still talking about now – but it was just, it came through a different lens, but we... you know, we weren't being shy about it... we were showing people where food comes from. Okay, so I was trying to grow it, in my little cottage, grow my own vegetables, keep my own chickens. And, for me, that also meant, you know, when I kept pigs, taking them to slaughter, and we didn't shy away from those moments – we had me loading them up and talking about the experience. And I think that was, at the time, quite a new thing. So the issue of provenance and knowing where your food comes from, and it is a great development that supermarkets have stepped up to really talk about the provenance of their food and where it comes from, and tell you farmers' names, and offer that connection. And I think that's

important. And I think that's something that many people find very reassuring at a time when there's still a lot to be anxious about in the world of food. So give us the information, tell us where it comes from. Tell us, reassure us with clear facts and understanding, that it's good for us – and that it's going to make us, help to keep us well.

**Jimi 17:58**

I want to move on now to talking about your new book, *Eat Better Forever*. Can you talk us through the thinking behind it, and how long it's been in the works as a project?

**Hugh FW 18:11**

I mean, I've been interested in what healthy eating is for a long time. And I've kept a beady eye on the kind of books that seemed to me to be addressing the issue in a sort of sensible and interesting way. But it struck me for a long time, that... and this is partly to do with the way that the publishing world works. But a lot of books tend to gather or fix around a single idea. One big idea that's going to solve all your problems of eating, or weight loss, or whatever it might be. And I just feel I've been in a world of food and trying to look after myself, and taking an interest in issues like the national obesity crisis, which I made some documentaries about, *Britain's Fat Fight* for BBC. I've been looking at that for long enough to know that there isn't a single fix, there isn't a magic bullet for healthy eating. But it's also a very interesting time because there is quite a lot of consensus. What has been a very confusing issue for a long time. I don't think it has to be that confusing. I think there's a way to pick a path through it. The best way to do it for me is to talk about all the things we can do, why fixate on a single idea when there are actually lots of different things we can do to look after ourselves better and to eat more healthily. I'm hoping that people who use the book will find themselves in a better place, with a healthier way of eating, from which they are deriving a huge amount of pleasure. One of the most important things about this book is to make sure that there's a lot to relish. A lot to feel good about physically and in terms of your physical and mental health, but an awful lot to look forward to in terms of the sheer pleasure of eating good food.

**Alison 20:05**

It's the time of year that people are wanting to eat, good healthy food, but at the same time, they're also looking for indulgent comfort food. How's your comfort food changed over the years? What's your comfort food now? What might it have been?

**Hugh FW 20:17**

Some of my comfort foods are a kind of 'new', if you like, and some of them are very old school and traditional, but have probably been tweaked. So one thing I've done with lots of classic things like cakes and biscuits and puds, you know pies and crumbles, is I've upped the wholeness because a big principle of this book is to base our diet around whole foods or whole-er foods. By the way, I don't just mean brown rice and lentils, that whole foods are two separate words. I mean, foods, everything from fruits and vegetables, and meat and fish and milk, and grains and pulses and things like that. All those things that are whole natural foods that haven't been sent to a factory and been stripped of things, and messed about and heavily processed. But we have an opportunity to go whole-er still. So I don't really have white flour in my kitchen, anymore. That might sound a bit radical, but everything I ever used to make with white flour I now make with the light wholemeal flour. Not wholemeal bread flour, but the

light, wholemeal flour that's got some bran in, and I find for pastries and cakes, and biscuits, it works extremely well.

**Alison** 21:31

Are they a little denser then?

**Hugh FW** 21:32

They can be a little bit denser. But if anything, they've got a little bit *more* flavour. There's a... as in the same way that brown bread has more flavour than white bread – there's a nuttiness to the whole grain. You know, the bran and the endosperm that stays in a whole grain flour isn't just good for you, it actually has a taste, and it's a taste that you can absolutely learn to relish, and it will be a little bit different. But, I mean, one of the things that took me a long time to sort out was, was getting rid of the sugar in my tea because one of the reasons I've worked at this – I have a really sweet tooth, you know – I learned to cook – the first thing I ever learned to cook is peppermint cream.

**Alison** 22:16

Oh wow, they're really sweet.

**Hugh FW** 22:17

It's just sugar, egg white, icing sugar and a little bit of peppermint essence. Maybe some green food colouring. I mean, that's just sugary... that's just sugary Play Doh.

**Alison** 22:30

I think it's a real generation thing that everyone of that age learned to cook.

**Hugh FW** 22:34

Yeah, I think the *Katie Stewart Times Cookery Book's* got a lot to answer for – an absolutely fantastic section on sweets, and cakes and biscuits, which is what I cooked my way through. But, and, there was a short time I worked as a professional chef at The River Café, I was the pastry chef, I did the puddings. So I know a little bit about sweet treats. But I also know, you can absolutely make them delicious, without using a lot of refined flours, and refined fats, and refined sugars.

**Jimi** 23:08

You mentioned The River Café there and the period when you were a professional chef, you've written in the past very entertainingly about that. That time, that job being in that iconic kitchen, and also being let go from that job.

**Hugh FW** 23:25

[Laughs] Being, being 'let go'.

**Jimi** 23:26

I use the euphemism there.

**Hugh FW** 23:29

You did, you could have said fired because, well... I think they... I think that they might have felt they were letting me go but I kind of felt, I felt I was being fired. And it was quite distressing at the time. But at the same time I'd learnt so much there and I kind of knew that... I came in, I literally walked in off the street as an amateur, I'd had no formal training, and I knew that I'd brought a few bad habits into the kitchen with me though, I wasn't very good at tidying up after myself. I talked a lot, asked a lot of questions, I mean, I had a great time, but it did focus the mind. And I remained great friends with both Rose Grey, the wonderful Rose Grey, sadly no longer with us, and the brilliant Ruthie Rogers, and they take some consolation, I know it, when I say they did me a bit of a favour, because I had to focus the mind and decide whether I was going to go back into another restaurant kitchen, and try and make it as a restaurant chef. And I had to stop and ponder the fact that I'd just been fired from what was actually, probably, one of the most relaxed high, end restaurant kitchens in London. So was I really then going to go and work in a... for some crazed young chef trying to get his third Michelin star in some kind of dungeon kitchen in the middle of lunch? Obviously mentioning no names. But that's what I thought: 'Now, why don't I see if I could write about food'. And that's what I turned my attention to, and was very lucky, and got some lucky breaks and have hugely enjoyed the whole world of writing about, and then after that, making television programmes about food.

**Jimi 25:34**

I hope we'll get on to the campaigning, and we've already kind of touched on it, but it's been such a huge part of what you've done and such a consistent part of what you've done. And I personally, remember from *The Big Food Fight*, that series of shows around chickens, and, these were things that I just had never even considered as somebody growing up in, maybe like in more of an urban environment, and not really thinking about what was actually going on in terms of intensive food production. What lessons have you learned along the way, about the best way to get these messages out there, and how to adapt it for people that may have a different take on it? Or may have grown up with a different relationship to food?

**Hugh FW 26:14**

There is a lot we know now that we didn't know a while back. We can cut through the confusion with some really good evidence-based science. But what we can't do is peg all our hopes on some kind of single fixed diet, one big idea. But what I think is really important is to make sure that people feel that eating well is not going to be an act of asceticism or denial, and that it's not going to cost an absolute fortune. And the key to that is variety, again, because this is where pleasure comes from is in the great diversity of different foods that you can eat, and that you can find out there. And it comes in remembering to relish the deliciousness of foods in their natural state. And if we learned to just dial back the sugar, for example, suddenly, the flavours and aromas and natural sweetness of ingredients really start to shine through. So if we release ourselves from some of these dependencies, it may just take a little while to make the adjustment, but the rewards at the end of that are so huge, because we get to a point where we're drawing so much pleasure and goodness, from foods that are more natural and have the power to do us so much more good.

**Jimi 27:33**

Yeah. And I was just going to ask as you were talking there, Hugh, a lot of this seems to flow from your own personal experience. And you talked about your sort of genetic sweet tooth as it were, or like

having a really naturally sweet tooth. How have the changes presented themselves in your every day? And what are the things that... what's your kind of struggle been like in terms of keeping up these philosophies, and keeping up these attitudes? And...

**Hugh FW 27:58**

Well, I think it's precisely because I was aware that I was struggling at times that I really took the trouble to think things through and try and get past some of the issues that I was being stuck on. I've said in quite a light hearted way that I've always had a very sweet tooth. But people who do have a sweet tooth, will know that that can be quite tricky because you... and I've been in this place, where you turn to sweet foods and easily available sweet foods, biscuits and treats and confectionery to give you a treat when life gets a little bit stressful. And one of the slight ironies perhaps of, you know – I may have managed to cultivate a fairly wholesome image and I have grown my own vegetables, and reared my own livestock for quite some time – but I've also buzzed about the place, having a very exciting time but working hard, and sometimes getting really stressed, and in those times, I have grabbed unhealthy snacks and piled up a few not-very-thoughtful, calorie-laden snacks in the middle of the day, and come to depend quite heavily on the little boost and uplift of a drink at the end of that working day. And to a point where for a very long part of my life, I was drinking every evening almost without fail, not necessarily to excess, although occasionally, a couple of glasses too many, but just coming to depend on that. And, and one of the things I realised was that part of the reason, certainly for the sort of snacking, is that you were eating in order to distract yourself, and you were distracted while you were eating. So whilst you grab something because you wanted a boost or a sweet treat. And then when you're eating it, you weren't really even thinking about that, because you were thinking about the next bit of filming or something you have to do. And this is why one of the most important things for the book, for me, has been to wrap all the seven ways, or the first six ways, in the seventh way if you'd like, which is to approach eating in a mindful way. Now, that's a bit of a buzzword at the moment, and it can sound a little bit hippie dippie. But what that really means – another way of expressing that – is just to approach food in a thoughtful way. And in a conscious way.

**Alison 30:37**

I guess also, if you're eating mindfully, you're actually aware of whether you're actually hungry or not, rather than just bored.

**Hugh FW 30:45**

That's absolutely right. And the, the other thing that I've... there's been a lot of talk about, and it's a good thing to talk about, because it's definitely a powerful, potential powerful approach for a lot of people, is fasting, and not eating, and actually learning to be hungry. Now, that isn't easy for everyone, and it doesn't work for everyone and for certain... and for kids and, and pregnant women, it's not advisable or healthy. But for those of us who are either looking to lose a few pounds, or just boost our... the ability of our digestive system to rest and repair – we know the emerging science of fasting is quite compelling. And people like Michael Mosley have written about this. And of course, we've had the very popular 5-2 diet. But for me, it's not really ideal to take an idea like that in isolation and make it the diet, the 'go to' thing that's going to change your health. Much better to see it in the context of whole foods and, and eating a variety and dialling down the refined foods. It's part of the picture. And then it becomes potentially even more useful and even more powerful.

**Jimi 31:59**

Yes. You mentioned at the start of that answer there, the idea of children in this and you know, I've got young kids, and I'm constantly trying to make the sort of positive eating decisions that you are talking about there. How do you find that as someone with a family as well, to kind of balance what everybody else in the house is eating or wanting, against your own decisions that you're trying to make?

**Hugh FW 32:26**

Such a good and important question. And I have four kids of very varied ages. And they've all had very different tastes, and very different ways of eating, which we've had to accommodate. The good news is they all like some really healthy stuff. And yeah, that's a great start. And one thing you can do and there's a big spread in the book that shows you how to do it, is you could do a family veg audit, or a family food audit, and just to remind yourself who likes what, so that nobody gets left out. And the first thing is to work with those positives so that if you have got... if only one of your kids likes celery, well don't make that a reason not to buy celery. Make sure you've got and make sure they get... my young daughter for example, is quite fussy about cooked veg, but she loves munching and crunching almost any raw veg. And she'll pick up a fennel bulb and eat it like an apple, but if I put it in the oven with a little olive oil and garlic, and roast it till it's caramelised and deliciously tender, and smelling incredibly fragrant, and makes me want to devour a whole tray of it. Well, she won't touch it. But that's okay because I just take half a fennel bulb and put it on one side. So go with the strengths of what you know your kids like, and kids don't mind having foods that they like fairly often. But also remember that kids do actually love savoury flavours as well as sweet flavours, and lots of kids, for example, love garlic. So a little trickle of garlicky oil or butter on the peas, or the beans, or the greens, or the cabbage, can often be a little bit of catnip that gets those kids enthusiastic about the veg.

**Jimi 34:07**

Yeah, it's a really, really good point. And I've got a similarly a child who... raw veg, crudités, things like that, is all fine – but as soon as you cook it, or flavour it, or season it in a way, and roast it, in a way that I would love...

**Hugh FW 34:21**

Or allow two different vegetables to touch each other... whoa!

**Alison 34:23**

Oh, wow.

**Jimi 34:25**

Oh, yeah – what are you doing now? Yeah, of course. And you're right. The idea of an audit is such a good, and just to kind of remind yourselves.

**Hugh FW 34:35**

And it's fun. It's actually a really fun thing to do. You know, it's getting around the table to talk about food, and talk about what you like and, and plan and... 'Why don't we have....?', then they start, suddenly start to remember that, actually, everybody likes green beans, but we haven't had any for

ages, or whatever it might be. I mean, it sounds really simple, and elements of it are, but it's just to press refresh on your shopping list, and, and broaden your horizons a little bit. I get back to that idea of variety, and trying new things, or reminding yourself of new things.

**Alison 35:08**

It's a brilliant idea.

**Jimi 35:09**

You touched on the drinking there as well. And that's definitely something that I am always trying to find sort of non-alcoholic alternatives that still give you that feeling of a treat, or something out of the ordinary, or sharpness, or bitterness.

**Hugh FW 35:24**

You're right on the money. That's exactly what I think is the right thing to do. But – and it's been difficult – because it's so easy to fall back on very sugary, soft drinks. And, whereas actually what you want is something a little bit, maybe a little bit dry and acidic and aromatic that you can drink slowly. I think kombucha is a great find. You know, fermented tea. Drinks like that are, can be very interesting, much lower in sugar, natural acidity, and of course live, fermented, full of good bacteria. And, are very, very delicious. And again, you can make that your... I sometimes add a few bashed lemons, verbena leaves or mint, or squeeze in half an orange to make a little kombucha cocktail. And so these little rituals where you take that moment where you would, on another night have a drink, and, and it's getting those two or three days without alcohol into your routine, so that you just sort of break that total, regular: 'It's seven o'clock, I'm pouring a drink', or 'I am pouring a drink, but tonight, it's alcohol-free and tomorrow, also'. And then maybe have a drink on Thursday.

**Alison 36:35**

I've recently discovered – I think it's something I learned from you years ago – was saving the syrup from fruit so, poach it in a little bit of sugar, but not a lot, and then add that to a tonic water. So I've got a freezer full of quince juice.

**Hugh FW 36:49**

Or topping up with kombucha, and you've got an extra sort of fragrant quince element, to your... you've got yourself a nice quince kombucha cocktail.

**Jimi 36:57**

Yeah. And I think that you talk about habit and ritual. And I think so much of the time we've got these kind of hardwired ways and associations with: 'Oh, it has to be wine', 'It has to be this', 'It has to be that', but if you add it to your routine, and I think culturally in this country, there's a lot of, particularly the period we've just come out of, there's been a lot of focus on comfort and release and, you know, drink in like, in that kind of traditional way, and I think if you can bring in these new traditions, then, then it's going to be a positive step.

**Hugh FW 37:29**

That's right. I mean, habits are just that. Habits are just habits. Now, that doesn't mean they're easy to break. But, you know, you can, once you recognise them and make a decision. You can absolutely programme in a different way of doing things, or new things on your shopping list, and putting new things down on the table. And it may feel unfamiliar at first. You may even get a negative reaction from some of the family. I mean, brown rice, for example. I thought there was a moment where I thought the family just wasn't going to come with me on brown rice. I'd got into it. But I find it nuttier and tastier and more interesting, and I'm much happier with less of it. But there was certainly a... not because we don't have rice that often, maybe once or twice a week – if that. So it took a while before it was the new family habit. And, the first few times there was quite a lot of moaning: 'I wonder, why can't we have white rice? It's because you're writing this book, isn't it, Dad?'. Now I don't get a peep out of anyone when there's brown rice, everybody tucks in, and loves it and, and mumbling and the grumbling has all gone away and everybody's super happy to have it on the table here.

**Jimi 38:42**

You got to push through that pain threshold. I'm going to get the brown rice on later and see how that goes.

**Hugh FW 38:48**

Soak it for a couple of hours if you can, it helps cook it to a nice tenderness that makes it really nice and slightly fluffy around the edges, so it soaks up the sauce just as good as any of the white rice.

**Alison 39:01**

That's the secret. So do you... is it you or your wife that does that cooking most nights midweek?

**Hugh FW 39:07**

Well, I'm delighted to say that it's everybody and the kids in their different way – all very keen cooks. They've each got their specialities. My daughter Louisa likes baking and making, she makes a wonderful apple tart. Old fashioned. Cuts it beautifully – it's a slow methodical process for her. She does it really, layering the apples right round in a spiral inside a pastry made of wholemeal flour, which everyone again is very, very happy with. Whereas my teenage son loves a stir fry, or noodles, or broth spiced with chilli dash of soy sauce, ginger, all that kind of vibe. He totally loves broths and stir fries. That's his thing.

**Alison 39:52**

Nice. So in the family store cupboard, if you're trying to balance unprocessed whole foods with time and convenience – are there any good store cupboard ingredients that you kind of rely on?

**Hugh FW 40:10**

Well, one of the things I made a real effort to do and I'm really enjoying now, is I used to have – like a lot of people – a lot of pulses at the back of the cupboard, or at the back of the shelf and, and they just didn't come out often enough. And now I have tins as well as pulses. So there's that instant option, and I do get them out, and I do soak them and cook them sometimes. Not just to throw into a stew, which I do often, or you know, make a bolognese into a chilli, and maybe have it with a salad rather than you know, rather than pasta. But also to batch up into hummuses, or to throw into lunchboxes with a load of

crunchy veg. I mean, I think tinned foods are brilliant, there's quite a lot of recipes for tinned fish and tinned pulses, especially if they're then mixed with something fresh like a grated root or a sliced apple. And mixing up roots and fruits and leaves, and shredding them, and changing the textures, so that they're juicy, and that things mingle together, or there, we know my daughter doesn't like it when that happens. But the rest of us love it. So all that mingling of different things and sprinkling of toasted seeds, or, nuts on the top. So there's loads of recipes in the book for lunches and lunch boxes, portable foods that, you know, in 15 minutes in the morning, or the night before, you can chop a bit of this, grate a bit of that, pop it in a box, sprinkle a few spices or seeds on in the morning and take it with you. And know that you've got something really stimulating that's got a lot to relish, lots of different textures and flavours to take with you.

**Alison 41:53**

So if outdoors plays a big role in your childhood, and if you weren't in the kitchen, you're outdoors. How does it play now, do you... are you able to spend much time outside?

**Hugh FW 42:04**

Absolutely. I'm outside every day. So many of us have learned to just value that time outdoors, and to understand just how important it is for our wellbeing. And exercise is of course important, but even just being outside, and having the sky above you, and being able to see trees, I mean, people will certainly have heard of the research that showed that people who even had a view of greenery out of their hospital window had faster recoveries than people who are maybe looking out on a wall or a car park. That's just solid science that, that the way in which this connection with nature helps us to be well. I've incorporated that, I've incorporated that into my life in one way or another for a long time, partly just by being a keen gardener and enjoying outdoor walks. For the last couple of years I've done something very systematic, which is to try and have an outdoor cold water swim as often as I possibly can. Right through the year. I'm very lucky to have a pond at the bottom of a field at home. It's not fancy, sort of natural swimming pool. It is just a pond, I've shared with the ducks, and the reeds, and the tadpoles, but it's deep enough in the middle that the weeds don't grow and we can swim up and down. I've done it pretty much every single day. And so I've been right through this cold spell with a water temperature going down... with frost on the ground, water temperature going down to four or five degrees.

**Jimi 43:36**

Do you kind of have anything to eat or drink after or is that part of the ritual?

**Hugh FW 43:41**

I have a nice cup of tea afterwards. I might, depending what kind of day I've got ahead of me, I might... it does make you feel a little bit hungry, but a nice cup of tea. I also like Masala Chai, I've got this little habit, I use leaf tea, not tea bags these days. And so I save the leaves from my first two cups of tea. And then I chuck them in a little saucepan and add some cardamom, some bashed ginger, a twist of pepper, maybe a little fresh turmeric grated if I've got it, and then a good dash of milk and I boil that up. So my third cup of tea is Masala Chai, with the tea boiled and recycled and a nice hit of spice from the ginger, and that's the one I quite often have after my swim.

**Alison 44:30**

Wow. Sounds delicious.

**Jimi** 44:33

Hugh, thank you so much for your time, and for your wisdom on food and cold water swimming and lots of other things besides. It's been really great to have you, thank you for joining us, and thank you for sharing, sharing your thoughts.

**Hugh FW** 44:46

Thank you Jimi and Alison. It's been great.

**Jimi** 44:59

You've been listening to Life on a Plate with Waitrose. I'm Jimi Famurewa, thank you to my co-host Alison Oakervee, and our guest, Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. To learn more about the series, go to [waitrose.com/podcast](http://waitrose.com/podcast), and please subscribe wherever you get your podcasts.