

WAITROSE & PARTNERS
LIFE ON A PLATE
SEASON 1, EPISODE 2: SARAH MILLICAN

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SPEAKERS

Sarah Millican, 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. And 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 all-round recipe-Yoda. Yeah, I'm going to go with it. How are you, Alison? Are you alright?

Alison 01:53

Do you know, I'm alright, thank you. I'm doing well. Tell me, I've been thinking. Everyone knows that you're a restaurant critic and they're used to reading your reviews of restaurants. But what are you like in the kitchen? What are you like? What do you cook?

Jimi 02:04

Oh, man, I'm being put on the spot. Yes, you're right, I do pass judgement on other people's food and never really reveal that much about my own. But, of course, I like to cook all sorts of things really. It's when you've got young kids, you have to balance what you're really craving against what will not just end in, kind of, tantrums and fury and screaming. So we tend to do things where there's a few elements. And so generally, if there's one or two things that they quite like, and they're familiar with,

then we can mix it up with some unfamiliar bits. Recently, just the other day, I made some tacos. And I did little skewers of chicken, and I griddled those, and it was almost like a kind of a shawarma-style vibe. And they were happy with the chicken, a bit sort of turning their noses up – literally holding their noses in some cases about some of the other stuff that me and my wife were having – but that was pretty good.

Alison 03:07

Nice. I like a fridge clear out.

Jimi 03:09

It's a good thing, isn't it? They're the best ones where you just don't really know what you're going have. But yeah, you sort of throw something together. It's great, isn't it?

Alison 03:18

The meal kind of evolves... or the dish comes together as you kind of empty the fridge – that's my type of cooking. And I'll see at the start, what we're going to have? And it's like: 'I don't know, let's just see what it ends up like'.

Jimi 03:29

I know exactly what you mean. And actually, it's related nicely to our guest today, who is very funny, and very interesting on just those things. Sarah Millican is our guest, and we just didn't stop laughing, did we Alison? She was great.

Alison 03:45

She just had us in stitches the whole time. And we were just... it was just a really good conversation about food and cooking, and just her joy of being at home.

Jimi 03:55

Yeah, it was really great. Sarah, for those that don't know, is an award-winning acclaimed comedian. She broke through at the Edinburgh Festival – an Edinburgh Festival that I was actually at I think – which I think we touch on, in 2008. Her DVD *Chatterbox Live* is still, and I didn't know this, the best-selling female stand up DVD, of like, all time. She's got a huge, really engaged online community. She's an enormous *Bake Off* – and general baking – fan. And she's just a beam of funniness and frankness, and joy, and laughter. And yes, she was a riot, I really loved how she really celebrated home and that it wasn't always about cooking some multi-ingredient thing where 'you've grown your own veg' – it's, you know, sometimes it's a ready meal. Sometimes it's a tin of biscuits.

Alison 04:52

It's just a really lovely approach to food. It's actually realising that sometimes you just haven't got the right time to cook from scratch. And actually a ready meal is the best thing, or, when she makes a cake, you know, she goes and puts a lot of love in it as she's doing it. It might not be a looker but it's all about the taste and flavour.

Jimi 05:13

Yeah, completely. Lots of fun stuff about going on tour as well, and the reality of doing that and her tour rituals, which were very fun. And she's just a joy to be around. We could have talked for hours and hours, and I suppose we should get down to it, shouldn't we?

Alison 05:35

Sounds good to me.

Jimi 05:36

So, without any further ado, here is our Life on a Plate conversation with Sarah Millican.

Sarah Millican, thank you so much for joining us. How are you?

Sarah Millican 05:54

Yeah, alright. Actually, I'm not too bad. I've eaten and I'm clean. I mean, these feel like massive achievements these days, don't they?

Jimi 06:02

They do, they do – in the context of recent struggles. But I wanted to start off by looking back to where it all began for you. You broke through Edinburgh. I think it was at that Edinburgh in 2008.

Sarah 06:19

Did you come to my show, Jimi?

Jimi 06:21

Yeah, of course – that's the correct answer to that question, isn't it? But I wanted to go back to that. It's always framed as: 'Oh, you know, you had a job before, you worked as a civil servant and you broke through in comedy'. Were you always funny? Did you grow up in a house where everyone was funny? Was comedy always there?

Sarah 06:43

I think it's weird – when you grow up in a family where you spar– I don't like banter, because banter is often aggressive. People go: 'Oh, it's just banter', and you think: 'I think you're being mean to me'. That's not banter. But we used to verbally spar. But if that's all you know, you don't realise that means that you're all funny. I think, you just think, this is what all families are like. And I wasn't funny at school, for sure – because I was really quiet and I didn't really say much to anybody at all. And then it was only when I got a job in a cinema, and all of a sudden, I was popular. And I'd never ever been popular before, and I think that's just because I knew about films, and because I was quite funny. And then every now and again, people have reminded me that when I left a job, which I did many times, never without another job lined up though – like me mam taught me. But when I left a job, sometimes in the card, somebody would write: 'Oh, we'll miss... you're a breath of fresh air', or, 'You're so funny', or just something that would imply that. But never... there's a difference between being funny, and then sort of assuming that you can charge for it. There's a big gap between those two things.

Jimi 07:54

Yeah, otherwise everyone would be doing it.

Sarah 07:59

Well quite!

Jimi 08:00

In terms of that, you grew up in South Shields, is that right? And in terms of that sparring and that atmosphere, how did food figure into that? What were the meals that were being cooked around that time?

Sarah 08:10

Well, my mam was never great at cooking, but she could do a really good dinner. She could do a really good dinner, but she would never do like a soufflé or a flan. That's not the kind of house we grew up in. My mam would sometimes watch *The Victorian Kitchen Garden* on the television, and we'd come in and she'd been experimenting which was not always great, exactly. And she just put a tin of beans in a casserole. And we'd say: 'What was on *The Victorian Kitchen Garden?*', and she'd say: 'Apple pie'. They made an apple pie and it didn't inspire her to make an apple pie, it inspired her to put a tin of beans in a casserole! So we were raised on, like, good dinners. She could do a really good dinner, but it was never very experimental. And I suppose I'm sort of similar now, that I can make a good dinner, but I don't stretch myself because part of my lifestyle is eating out a lot, because whenever you're on the road you don't have a kitchen, and a lot of your life is eating in restaurants. And so I tend to cook at home the things that you can't really get in restaurants – like beans on toast, because, I mean, it's great. If you find a caf when you're on tour that does baked potatoes, it is so exciting because often you're having quite lavish meals, and sometimes you just want a baked potato with a bit of coleslaw on.

Jimi 09:29

[Laughs] Yeah, I can totally relate to that. Alison?

Alison 09:32

I was just going to say, did you do much cooking when you were growing up to help your mum a bit?

09:36

I think... because I remember when... because my mam was disabled, and so after a while she couldn't really manage to, sort of, stand for too long in the kitchen. So I would get in from school and I would do the dinner for four of us. But it would be 'that' out of the freezer and in the oven, and 'that' out of the freezer and in the oven. So it would be fish and chips – something really easy. So certainly never what I call proper cooking, which is where you start with an onion. You always start with an onion. Everything starts with an onion, doesn't it? That's my sort of shorthand when we haven't planned our meals properly. This week, for example, I'll say to my husband: 'I don't want to start chopping an onion at eight o'clock at night'. Like, cause that's like proper cooking, isn't it? 'Is there something we can bung in the oven, that doesn't start with an onion?'. So that's probably the first sort of meals I cooked. But what I don't know if you count warming through as cooking. Technically, they're cooked, I suppose. But I don't know if it's... I mean, it's food and we're eating it. And it has been cooked thoroughly. But it's not starting from scratch. I think, probably the first time I experimented a little bit was when I was first

married, the first time, and I would have people over from... I was an audio book producer – and I would have the readers, the actors – who did all the voices and were incredible – and I would have... Because they would be stuck in Whitley Bay for four nights in a little flat, and I would have them come round to me. And I would... I can't even think that it was very tasty – I would do like a chicken-y, pasta-y thing and I never... I'm very recipe-led now – but I never did recipes, then. And I think I must have been quite an entertaining host because they always came back. And I think the food was *very* bland.

Alison 11:19

It can't have been that bad if they kept coming back.

11:22

Sometimes, when I'm on tour, the nicest thing somebody can do for me is to cook me a meal, and invite me to their house. Because it's so rare, because you eat either in restaurants or cafés, or you get, you know, takeaways backstage at the venue. And it feels like some people probably think: 'Wow, that sounds amazing'. But, the same as anything, it gets boring, because you do it for two years solid. And then sometimes somebody will say... Oh, like every time I'm in Newcastle, my sister will invite me round, and she'll cook a roast. And she'll invite me, and my tour support, and my tour manager, and we all go round, she'll do a roast. And it just feels like such a treat when all of your home comforts are gone, because you're staying in hotels, you're living out of suitcases, and then for somebody to make you a proper dinner in their kitchen. And then you can move into the living room and have... Ah, this is what restaurants are missing – is living rooms for a bit of, sort of, unbuttoning of jeans and a small nap afterwards. I think there's a definite gap in the market for that.

Alison 12:23

Especially after a Sunday roast?

Sarah 12:25

Exactly, exactly.

Jimi 12:27

You could just have a little anti room where everybody just sprawls out, everyone's in elasticated trousers and everything.

Sarah 12:36

So that if you go in and there are too tight clothes in there, like maybe there's a dress code. They're like: 'No, no, no, you need these', and just give you some really comfy pants.

Jimi 12:46

Yes, yes. Like sort of reverse cloakroom, you pick them up on your way in. One thing that you do like, if your Instagram is anything to go by – and you've mentioned it in your shows as well – is cake and baking.

Sarah 12:59

I'm more of a baker than a cook, I think.

Jimi 13:02

Yes. So talk us through your history with baking. And was it always the case that you were cake mad?

Sarah 13:09

Not really. I think I've always liked, I mean, I don't really trust anybody who says they don't like cake. Some people are like: 'Oh, no, I'd rather have a bag of nuts'. And I think: 'We'll we're not going to be friends – ever'. Let's all sit around and have a bag of nuts with a cup of tea. No thanks! So I have always been very busy. I'm a massive workaholic. And then a few years ago, when we moved to the countryside, and we had a bit more time, and I would have slightly bigger gaps between tours to kind of just live a little. And you know... and it wasn't quite so manic all of the time, I started to bake. And a friend of mine is very good in the kitchen. And she gave me this massive list when I first moved into this house. She said: 'Here are the things you should have in your kitchen'. And it was ingredients and all sorts of equipment, and utensils. She's great. But every now and again I'll just find like – this now an eight year old jar of nutmeg, and think: 'Ooh, she was wrong about nutmeg!'. Because nutmeg's never come up. I think the thing with cake is I like to be able to bake something and then provide. And I like the compliments. I think if you don't... when you're in lockdown, you can't get the compliments, you might post it on Instagram. And then you get compliments. Although we also sometimes get people saying that looks awful. I once made a casserole, and I put a picture up on Twitter, and somebody had said: 'Oh, it looks like it's been thrown up in a shop doorway'. And Nigel Slater said, God bless him, said: 'Actually I think that looks delicious. Can I come round?'. And I was like: 'Yeah! Thank you!'. It felt like, you know, when you're at school and somebody bullies you and then somebody stands up to the bully and I was like: 'Thank you Nigel Slater'.

Jimi 14:55

That's amazing. Nigel to the rescue.

Sarah 14:58

When I make, it's nice to be able to give cake away because otherwise, you eat the cake. And it's not good. So if I make a decent sized cake, and Gary – my husband – and I can have a slice, and then I can palm it off on other people. Then I've had the pleasure of baking, the pleasure of eating, but not this sick feeling of, well, I'm going to have to finish it because I don't like waste.

Alison 15:22

That's why you should play what I do. I kind of post it to people.

Sarah 15:27

I didn't even know you could post cake. Why has nobody ever posted me cake? That's incredible.

Alison 15:33

Give me your address and one will turn up!

Jimi 15:35

If nothing else...

Sarah 15:36

Add me on to that mailing list.

Jimi 15:38

I do feel like it's a subscription service waiting to happen, like, be careful what you wish for. Alison, you'll be inundated.

Sarah 15:45

Well, you can get gin delivered. Why can't you get cake delivered? Smart. I like it.

Alison 15:51

So do you bake the same kind of cake? Or do you have, like a variety of bakes? Do you get bored with doing the same thing the whole time? Or do you have one that you've cracked?

Sarah 15:58

I have a few because whenever *Bake Off's* on I like to bake along, but I don't do that thing, that people do, where they say: 'I'm going to bake whatever they're baking'. So I'm going to do: 'Oh, it's pie week', or, it's you know, 'Free-from week', which we all know is flavour-free week – all of these things. And I just do a cake every week, or biscuits every week. So my favourite one is, probably – I do a chocolate and banana cake, which is incredible. And it hasn't... What I like about baking is I don't do fancy icing. I don't always do fillings. This chocolate and banana cake needs neither. It is not a pretty cake. But it is a delicious cake. And I just took, weirdly, John Barrowman's banana bread recipe off the BBC website. And I added two bags of giant buttons. Well, I mean what recipe can't be improved? What situation in life can't be improved by two bags of giant buttons? And it really is an amazing cake. And I run a little new material gig in the real world, and I'll have five or six comedian friends on, and I'll make a cake, and I make sure the venue has coffee and tea making facilities backstage. And I'll make a cake, and when they come off stage having done the new material, they get a wedge – and it's not a slice – it's a wedge. A slab if you like. Of cake. And sometimes they go: 'Oh no, I'm alright'. And then they see other people going: 'Oh my God'. What I like about it is it's a surprising cake. It's not a cake where it looks amazing. You know, sometimes, like cupcakes, for example, look really pretty. But when the cake is dry because they've done all the singing and dancing: 'Ooh, it's – look, it's got a whole Oreo on the top, and a half a bag of Maltesers'. But the cake itself is poor. This is the opposite of that. This looks like: 'Well, it's probably alright'. And it's: 'Oh my god, this is amazing'. It's one of those cakes. So that's probably my main one. But I do Nigella's flourless chocolate. I do a lemon drizzle...

Alison 17:53

Ooh, yeah it's a nice one.

17:54

Yeah, I did a lemon drizzle so much – it made my dad... It was so lemon, and so drizzle, that it made my dad's face screw up like I'd never seen it before. And he swallowed, and he went: 'Ooh, it was great'. I wasn't sure if there was a compliment coming or not!

Alison 18:09

That is the sign of a good lemon drizzle.

Jimi 18:12

I think Alison is with me on that. It kind of needs to hurt a bit as well.

Sarah 18:18

It's got to make your teeth rattle.

Alison 18:18

I always find, there's cakes that are either looker cakes, or taster cakes. And that sounds like you do the taster cakes.

Sarah 18:25

Well you know, when you buy a cake, that is, you know, like a fruit cake, or often, it'll just be a cake. And it'll not have any icing, and it'll not have any middy bit. Nothing. No bells and whistles. And you know what? That's a good cake.

Jimi 18:38

I think it's really great the way that you kind of post these things on Instagram and you are always just asking people what they're eating. And that's one of the things I really love about food, that kind of nosiness about what people are eating as well. Is that something that you really love and enjoy?

Sarah 18:55

Yeah, I really like it because I think, especially when it... because of something like *Bake Off*, which is a thing, you know, millions of people are watching, and I can't not be eating something sweet while it's on. Because – just the sugar pangs are too loud. My husband did... At the beginning of the last series of *Bake Off*, I'd given up sugar. I mean, he says that he just has all of his sugar in one day of the week. And the rest of week he has no sugar. But on that one day, it's like a children's party here. And he was like: 'Oh, I'm not having sugar today'. And then he said: 'Why have I got such bad sugar cravings?', and I said: 'We're watching *Bake Off*. Are you mad?'. So, I enjoy the variety of responses I get when I ask: 'What are you eating?'. Because it's not what have you made? 'It's what are you eating?'. And some people are too busy. Some people don't cook. Some people are sitting with a Twirl. And other people have got a croquembouche [laughs]. I love the variety of things. It's so incredible. But everybody is eating something, but then you'll get the odd person who is: 'I just like a bag of nuts', and I think: 'Go away, why are you following me?'. [Laughs]

Jimi 19:56

Well, I think it goes back almost to what you were saying about your upbringing, and you knew you had to put those things into the oven and warm them through. But I'm sure they were still appreciated and loved. You know, in my home, sometimes it was leftovers that my mum had made and left out for us to do. Or frozen stuff, but it was great and you appreciate whatever somebody gives to you, in the act of love as well.

Sarah 20:20

And also, when you're not raised in a house like that, when you're raised in a house where somebody puts a meal in front of you – however it's made – whether it's been microwaved, whatever, that is still somebody who's taken... there is still care, and there is still love involved. My mam used to... when I was a kid, I lived quite close to the school, so I never really stayed for... during the miners' strike in 1984, I stayed for school dinners, but the rest of the time I came home for lunch. And my mam would do a bowl of oxtail soup, which I mean, we all know is just gravy. But oxtail soup out of a tin, and warmed it, you know, on the hob, and she'd put our slippers on – we had a coke boiler because my dad worked down the pit – and she'd put our slippers on the pipes around. So you'd come in to this smell of gravy, which is what it is, and your slippers would be warmed. And you can't tell me that there is less love in that than somebody who started with chopping an onion. You know, it's the provision, isn't it? It's somebody providing something for you that will nourish you.

Jimi 21:38

You just talked about your grandparents being keen growers and gardeners and that memory. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that.

Sarah 21:44

Yeah, my granda – he had changed a room in his house, and he had a little flat – and he changed the room to be like... where he would grow... you know, essentially a greenhouse. But it was my mam's old bedroom, which I think is glorious. And he would grow... Yeah, he was a very keen gardener. And none of this really... until I moved to the countryside, and I decided to get it: 'I'm going to have a greenhouse'. And at the moment, it's just full of twigs, because I haven't had the time, or indeed the patience. But I've been growing herbs, and it pleases my husband so much that when he cooks a roast, he nips out into the garden for rosemary. That is so not like us, that is not us at all. There was one time we had friends over and we were doing; we did some baked potatoes, and we had some sour cream. And I said: 'Oh, I'll just nip out and get some chives'. And because our friends that knew us very well, and knew what we were like when we lived in our little flats, and we have these busy sort of hectic lives. And I said: 'I'll just nip out for chives', and one of our friends was like: 'No, no, you don't have to'. And I said: 'I'll only be a couple of minutes'. He thought I was driving to the supermarket. And I was literally going around the back garden with me with the clippers to bring some in. But it was just glorious that he was like: 'What you're growing it?', and it's when you live in the city, the idea of somebody growing herbs is so odd to you. But I have grown courgettes and tomatoes, and raspberries and strawberries.

Alison 23:12

It's so much more satisfying cooking something that you've grown. What did you do with your courgettes that you grew?

Sarah 23:18

Oh, I mean, there wasn't a huge amount – that's the thing, I've done very well at a few things in a small amount. Tomatoes, you know... generally with tomatoes, they wouldn't reach cooking, because they're so tasty compared to the kind of water-filled ones you often get in the shops, because my granda used to grow tomatoes, and that smell of a homegrown tomato – that you cannot get anywhere else – it's the reward for the time you've spent growing your tomatoes – is that smell. And that always reminds me of

my granda because that's how tomatoes smelt at his house – because they were always homegrown. Lovely.

Jimi 23:54

What are some of the most memorable, incredible things that you've eaten, while you've been out? And what are some of maybe the more, sort of, desperate, or disastrous, things that you've been forced to eat when there's been no other option?

Sarah 24:06

Like now there's apps where you can just order food from a proper restaurant. And it's not just, you know, what can we manage with today? It's actually proper, good foods. Really nice food. And then obviously, I know restaurant food is full of sugar and butter and salt. And that's why it's so delicious. [Laughs] You always gain weight to hopefully lose it in the gap to gain it again – that's always the plan. And Weston-super-Mare has a special place in my heart because we found takeaway roasts that would deliver any day – so not a Sunday. It was a Wednesday, and we had a roast delivered to us. And it wasn't, you know, it wasn't elaborate. It was fairly simple, but it's always stuck in my mind and when I look at my new tour, and I look, and I go: 'Ooh, two nights in Weston-super-Mare – smashing, that's two roast dinners'. [Jimi laughs] Because roast is something that during 2020 became a bigger thing for us because we normally don't have the time, we're not at home. And my husband and I started – he's very good in the kitchen – and he started to do a roast once a week. And we'd do on a Tuesday, and we do double dinner – so we call it double dinner – so you do too much. You plate up another dinner, and then the next day, you get the luxury of the lovely food without any of the work. And I will come in last minute and do 'show boater' Yorkshire pudding, which as we know are just fluff, but look amazing on a plate, and take very little work. And he's toiled over roast potatoes and a chicken that he's done upside down for some of it, and then he's turned it over, and he's got rosemary up the garden, and I just come in with my da-da-da-da-ta with my Yorkshire puddings. And they fill up half the plate and they look amazing. I mean they're flour and water at best. But on tour, we make sure we have a really good breakfast – which is usually brunch by the time we get up because we've got in really late. And because we have that shifted body clock, which we still have even when we're not working – it's just so ingrained to go to bed at two o'clock and to get up at 10 o'clock. And, often I'll say to my dad: 'Oh, I've just had my lunch', and he's like: 'It's three'. And I'm like: 'Yeah, lunchtime is three', and then evening meal is eight, and then off we go again. So we'll have a really good brunch. And then we'll have something at the venue. And then, the rule is, if you are on the coast, you are allowed chips after the gig. And luckily, we are quite a small island with quite a big coastline. [Laughs]

Jimi 26:38

Your entire tour is just all coast. She never comes inland...

Sarah 26:45

You have to push the Brummies out... [Laughs]

Jimi 26:47

You mentioned your husband having his own partially successful sugar ban.

Sarah 26:55

He gives up sugar loads! So, it's not that successful!

Jimi 26:57

I was going to say, how have you been with that, because you've mined it for comedy quite a lot, in terms of, especially the pressures heaped on women, and then the shame associated with sweet things and butter and all these kind of things that we crave. And they're quite vilified these days, aren't they? But how have you kind of found it? Have you always been somebody that is just up for celebrating, balance? And yeah, the fun stuff?

Sarah 27:23

Yeah, I just, especially after last year, like if it makes you happy, just eat it. Like I had a friend stay over once. And a couple of friends actually – comics – who stayed over when they'd done a gig nearby when I lived in Manchester, in the city centre. And they came and stayed. And the following morning, because I had a couple of girls round, I thought, I'm going to break out the cup of tea and maybe we'll have some biscuits. And I had some chocolate fingers. And I said to one of the girls: 'Would you like some chocolate fingers?', and the other one said: 'Can't believe you having those for breakfast', and she's a proper mam, she's got loads of kids. She's like: 'How many of those are you having for breakfast? That's disgusting'. And I said: 'Like, (a) you're staying in my flat for free', and also: 'You had a lot of wine last night'. And I don't really drink. I'll have three or four shandies a year. And that's it. So 'this' is my alcohol. So if you're going to knock back your wine to the point where you're slurring, I'm going to remind you of that when you criticise my biscuit eating.

Jimi 28:18

[Laughs] Yeah, I might remember that one. Next time, there's somebody...

Sarah 28:23

People are so quick to judge and I don't eat any differently to what I did when I was a kid. Like, it's not my fault that they've been putting sugar in all the dinners behind my back. It's like all the processed food, I always ate processed food – I've been eating it for years. And I think it's, I suppose, it's everything in moderation to a degree but I think after 2020 I'm not sure everything in moderation counts anymore. I know for a fact that when, you know, life opens up again, and things are 'normal' – in inverted commas – whatever that is for you, I know that I will be moving around a lot more, and I know that I will be exercising more, and I know that I will be living on the road, but I will be like: 'Oh, you know, we've been a bit sweet today, let's have some fruit instead'. When you're in such an extreme situation as we have been over, you know, this last 12 months, I think if having a little cake makes you happy, you have the cake. Just have the cake. Please don't ask anybody's permission, just buy bigger trousers. There's always time to lose it if you want to. And if you don't, that's also fine.

Jimi 29:28

It seems like it's a real part of the... because you've got this huge online community in terms of your Twitter followers, and your Instagram followers, and I know the incredible work that you have done with the JoinIn campaign – that was a Christmas time thing – that you know, was it the 10th anniversary this one that we've just had? Talk us through a little bit of that for the people that don't know.

Sarah 29:52

JoinIn. I'm a bit of a softy. So the thought of people feeling sort of miserable on Christmas day is so sad to me. And I think because life is complicated, and you can be lonely all of the time, of course you can. But there's always things that you could... try this maybe, oh, I've got friends, or I can chat with people at work. But Christmas day because people just close their doors. So you spend time with your family, and some people are like: 'I'm turning my phone off, I'm not available'. And I think there's people who are just on their own, and for whatever reason, it can be something as simple as their partner's at work on Christmas Day. Simple as that, doesn't have to be anything dramatic or sad. And sometimes it is dramatic and sad, of course. And we have, you know, a lot of people who sort of reach out and it takes real guts to say: 'I feel like I need somebody to talk to you'. And of course not everybody explains why they feel sad or what their situation is. But some people will just say; 'What are you having for your tea?', and I'd be like: 'Oh, I'm having this for my tea. And have you watched the Queen? Let's watch the Queen'. It kicked off a couple years ago, because I put up my top favourite, my top five Quality Street. And people are: 'I can't believe the purple one's not there!'. And it just caused chaos. And that is people having a conversation and then not all saying I'm lonely, because they don't have to. But they are saying I would like a conversation. And that's enough. And we just use a hashtag JoinIn. We use capital J, capital I, because blind people have software that reads the text to them. And with the J and the I, it reads as 'join in' because otherwise it reads as 'joinahi', which is presumably French for something. I don't know. And, we had, yeah for 10 years we've done it and it's so heart-warming to see. Especially in a place like Twitter, it's not always great, as we know. And to see people just... you'll see somebody posted a thing saying; 'Oh, I'm struggling a bit today'. And you'll see; 'Oh, they've got two replies', or 'They've got 10 replies', or 'They've got 15 replies', or 'They've got 200 replies' from people just going: 'Oh, you know, have you thought about doing this?', 'Have you got anything nice for your tea?', and it's just people lifting people, and it is so beautiful to see. And it is heart-warming, and I sit and I cry, and I laugh, for the entire day. And I have a very understanding husband who makes the Christmas dinner. And he quite likes it because I don't go in and stir things and touch things. I just leave him to it. And he leaves me to my people, and I leave him to his dinner.

Alison 32:23

His dinner. Ah.

Sarah 32:25

It's lovely. It's really people at their best.

Jimi 32:27

Yeah, that absolutely is. Have you always had that kind of nurturing instinct of getting people to join together, and wanting people to not miss out, and be involved. Has that always been the case?

Sarah 32:38

Kind of. I'm a bit sort of a mother hen. I'm maternal but have never wanted kids. But I'm maternal. I'm always the one who says: 'Text me when you get in', and checking everybody's alright. And you know, and I think especially last year, it's really important to just keep an eye on people. And then you know, it's lovely when you get a message from somebody just saying: 'Just checking in to see you're okay?'.

And we all need to do that a bit more because we know everybody has... their life is different, you know. And temporary, though it may be – hopefully – it's very different. And it's really important to just check in on people. Because there's so many different ways to communicate now. Like back in the old days, you'd have to ring their landline and ask their mam if they were in, and write them a letter, and take it to the post box. And now, you can text while you're having a bath, while you're on the loo, whatever it is. And just a quick: 'How are you?'. Yeah. That can absolutely lift somebody. That somebody just wants to know how they are that day. And that's, you know, Twitter is exactly the same on Christmas Day. And just a really lovely way of bringing people together. Plus isn't the worst bit, the best way of entertaining, and to have people round, is to not have people around, and just have them on your phone? So you can just sit braless all day if you like.

Alison 33:56

And of course then they can all chat to each other while you go off and have your Christmas dinner.

Sarah 34:01

Well exactly. Because I always start it off, and then after a while, they don't need me anymore. And I do check in and I do chat to people still. But people are finding each other without me. And that is the moment then I think: 'Alright, we're off. We're rolling. Good'. And I still do chip in and sometimes people will say: 'Oh, I'm not really on my own because I've got my cat', and, I go: 'Oh, show us a picture of your cat'. And then everybody will send a picture of their cat. And then there's 400 pictures of people with their cats. And it is just an incredible online community. And there are people who it's helped them a couple years ago. So now they come back and they're like: 'Oh, I've got a partner now', or 'I'm with my kids this year and I'm alright but I'm going to jump in for an hour and see if I can cheer some other people up'. It is humanity at its very, very best I think.

Jimi 34:59

I think we wanted to talk a little bit as well about what you cook at home and what your store cupboard essentials are? Is there something that is always in the house even if it's a type of biscuit?

Sarah 35:10

We've got a biscuit tin. This is really random and I don't think I've ever told anybody this, but a good few years ago. Lovely Alison, who is – Do you remember Betty Boo? The incredible singer from the 90s? Lovely Alison came to my show in Bristol and gave me, to say thank you for the tickets, just a little gift which often happens. And it was a tin of shortbread biscuits in a little tin with a cat on. And because it's a great size tin, because it's not massive, so things don't go stale, it's good – keeping it turning over size – we have kept it ever since. We've had that biscuit tin for probably six or seven years. And it's the Betty Boo biscuit tin. It has always been the Betty Boo biscuit tin. Store cupboard wise, something we seem to rattle through a lot is vinegar, which is very random. And often my husband will go: 'Oh, we've got no rice vinegar, so just put normal vinegar in'. So we rattle through the malt vinegar quite a lot.

Jimi 36:06

Vinegars are a useful thing to have in.

Sarah 36:09

It's a really useful thing to have in. And I think another thing that I... this is not something that other people eat, I don't think – it's Bovril. And we don't drink Bovril, I have it on toast. And I think it's a thing that we used to have as kids. You'd have butter on your toast, always sliced white bread, always. And then you'd have a little bit of Bovril on. And I say to people now – because they have Marmite – which I suppose is a version of that, and I don't like Marmite. And I still have Bovril on my toast. And so there's always Bovril in and I think most people find that odd.

Jimi 36:39

Do you know where that comes from?

Sarah 36:42

From my mam.

Jimi 36:44

Do you know where she got it from?

Sarah 36:48

I don't know. Because my mam used to like drinking a cup of Bovril as well. She just liked the general taste. But I think it was always... it's kind of the opposite of jam, isn't it? If you're, not in a sweet mood, have a bit of Bovril on your toast?

Alison 37:01

Would you take a jar of Bovril with you on tour?

Sarah 37:03

No, I tend not to take food on tour. I have home comforts. Well, I suppose I say that, we do have... I always have a thing where if we get to the venue and there's a massive traffic jam, or whatever – and we normally get to venues really early to set up. But say we don't and there's traffic, whatever, we get there for half an hour before the show. I think I can do anything on a banana, a chunky KitKat and a can of coke. I think I can do anything. I could scale a mountain on those things because it's fast sugar, it's slow sugar. It's caffeine, I mean, we always have fruit because the tendency is always just to pick a chocolate and biscuits and things. But sometimes you just want a couple of satsumas or a big pile of grapes. And we try to have fruit constantly in the sort of tour kit that we take place to place. And sometimes it'll be nice because we'll get to a venue, like we'll get to a hotel at one in the morning, or whatever, and we'll just rifle through the tour kit to take things back up to our rooms. And you'll just see like four satsumas and a chunky KitKat, or you know, Twirl or something, going back up to the venue. Because sometimes you're so tired, you don't want to start looking for food late, or order room service that is, you know, overpriced and very slow to come. So sometimes you just want a bag of grapes, and you know, a cup of tea before bed.

Alison 38:18

I was going to ask at the end of the tour, is there a meal that you always like craving to come back to?

Sarah 38:23

Well we do what we call maximum home days, which is when... because on tour, you're not on tour for the whole time. You have days off. And on those days off, we'll have like... often a roast, a really good home cooked meal, we'll put the fire on, even if it's June, because it's just something about making it maximum home days. At the end of the tour. It's just having the time and the space to actually try new recipes or to, you know, think... to plan a bit more. Because normally, you buy things and you think we've got to get that on Tuesday because that's the only day that I'm at home. Where when you have this wide expanse of time, there's a lot more sort of fluidity to your plans. And, so yeah, we do experiment a bit more, I suppose. My husband is, like I say, does a lot of the cooking and he's discovered in 2020 that he could make the most incredible roast potatoes. For years, we've had Auntie Bessies frozen roasties... I don't know why I'm whispering it's a podcast. [Jimi Laughs] Because he always says: 'I can't do them better than that. Why would I try? It's a lot of faff, let's not bother'. And then he discovered they're actually quite easy. And I said: You know we can never now...'. Sometimes I think you feel intimidated though by something that you think, maybe it's an upbringing thing of just thinking: 'Oh, I can't try that, that's not, you know, like, I would never try a soufflé, it's not my place to try a soufflé, but I bet if I followed the instructions, and I had a good oven, I bet I could make a soufflé'. But there's something that you just find, somethings that you find quite intimidating, I suppose. We had friends coming round, a good long time ago, and I made pavlova, which feels like something that like: 'What are you thinking? This is not your place to make a pavlova'. And I made a pavlova. And it was immense. It was giant. And I put passion fruit on the top, which makes everything even better. But I remember distinctly that it wasn't white. It had a kind of, sort of, creamy brownie tinge, and I'd done it slow and I'd done it on a low temperature. So I did what any normal person does. I asked Nigella Lawson. [Laughs] And I took a photo of it. And I sent it to her publicly on Twitter. And I said: Does this look alright?'. And because she is the most glorious woman, she said: 'I think it looks fine, how does it taste?'. And I thought: 'Oh, she's a good chef'. And I said: 'It tastes amazing'. And she was like: 'There you go. That's all you need. It doesn't matter. If it doesn't look perfect. It doesn't matter.'

Jimi 40:54

This is amazing. You've got Nigel Slater leaping, like bouncing to your rescue. And then you've got Nigella giving you tips. It's incredible.

Sarah 41:04

Because I did Jamie Oliver's programme, the Jamie and Jimmy's one, the one where they say... they were so good, because they say – when you're preparing to do the show, they say: 'What is the best meal you've ever had? And we're going to try and teach you how to make that. We're going to find the recipe'. And I said: 'You know what, I live often on microwave meals.' And they said, rather than go: 'Oh, no, no'. They were so smart. And they said: 'What's your favourite microwave meal then, and we're going to teach you how to make that but better'. And it was a sausage pasta. And he showed me how to make this. And I've made it so many times since. And of course, it's better than the microwave meal. It doesn't take three minutes, it takes hours. But it is beautiful. And I regularly do it now. And that's the sort of thing that when I'm not working so intensively, and I'm not away from home, I like to start in the afternoon. Like I say, not chopping an onion at 8pm. It's not happening. That's time to ring out and get something delivered. But if I can start in the afternoon and prepare something. Because I think when I first moved in, when we first moved into this house, a friend of mine said: 'Ooh, you should get one of those boiling water taps'. And I said: 'No, the rule of this house is everything is slow'. I didn't want the

immediacy and that's why I've got a mixer, it's your countertop mixer, but I rarely use it. I'll use it for like meringue or something where I have to do a lot of whisking, but I'm not going to use it to make a cake – because I want the time. I think that's the luxury of cooking for me and baking, is the actual time to enjoy the process. It's not just a means to an end. It's really enjoying the whole thing from start to finish.

Alison 42:43

So all the pictures of the cakes you've made on Instagram, you've beaten the sugar and butter together from scratch with a spoon.

Sarah 42:49

Yeah.

Alison 42:50

Wow, I'm impressed.

Sarah 42:52

It's because well, if I'm making a cake, I'm not dashing from here to there. If I'm dashing, from here to there, I'm going to have a chocolate digestive, that's going to be mine. That's going to be what I'm having. But if I've got time, see I'm not, you know, I can see how those mixes and all of the convenience stuff is much easier. You know, if you're a mam, and you've got to do a birthday cake, and you've got to pick the kids up from the school. And that's that one's doing that, and that one's an extra lesson in French, and all of these things. And you've still got to make a cake, get the mixer on. But if I'm enjoying the process of making the cake, and I've got some music on in the kitchen, and I'm having a lovely time. Yeah, I'll do that. The only annoying thing I find is... how do I never remember to get the butter out an hour before? And I am cutting it so small with a knife to get it even remotely beatable. I never remember.

Alison 43:42

I often put it in the oven, I've got an oven that you can get down to 30 degrees. As you turn it on, cut it up small and put it down low, and try not to get it melting.

Sarah 43:53

That's true. I remember Jo Brand when she did *Bake Off* and she just sat on it. She just sat on a bar of butter. And I was like... I mean that also works.

Alison 44:06

That's a bit dangerous.

Jimi 44:07

Sarah, you are about to embark on tour later on this year, very excitingly, Bobby Dazzler. What sorts of things do you do when you finish? Like what's the kind of big ritual that you have? Maybe or the thing you have to tick off?

Sarah 44:23

One of the things to sort of signify the end of the tour is I buy a really big milk. Because you know, like a family of four will just automatically buy a giant milk for their fridge. I just think there's not enough days in the week. I'm only home a day and a half. There's not that many bowls of cereal and the cups of tea I can rattle through. So I buy a really big milk. And a friend of mine I once told her that and she said: 'I think it's really sad'. And I was like: Why are you sad? I drink milk but when I'm away, I just can't buy milk when I'm away'. But yeah, it's almost like the final journey from wherever the last place is, I think it's Tunbridge Wells on this one. That's a long drive back from Tunbridge Wells. So on the way back, I'll buy a really big milk and that signifies some time at home. But I'm very much looking forward to being on tour. It's really... it's so part of your makeup as a comedian and, if without an audience, I'm not sure if you can even call yourself a comedian. So I can't wait to get out and to just make people laugh and cheer them up. I think we all need a bit of that.

Jimi 45:26

Oh, well, absolutely. And you've cheered us up no end and I'm sure the people listening.

Sarah 45:32

It's been an absolute pleasure.

Jimi 45:33

Oh, it's been a pleasure. Our end as well. Thank you so much, Sarah, for your time. And you know, I feel like I want to go and buy big milk now as well, just to signify being at home and the joys of being at home.

Sarah 45:47

Absolutely. Thank you very much for having me.

Jimi 45:55

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