

LIFE ON A PLATE

SEASON 3, EPISODE 8: DOLLY ALDERTON

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SPEAKERS

Dolly Alderton, Jimi Famurewa, Alison Oakervee

Jimi 00:06

Hello and welcome to the third season of Life on a Plate, the podcast from Waitrose, in which we talk to some very special people about food, what it means to them, and the role it has played in their life. We ask about food memories and favourite recipes, must have ingredients, and the dishes that represent comfort, celebration, or adventure – and find out a lot more about our guests in the process.

Alison 00:36

Hey Jimi, how are you doing?

Jimi 00:38

Hello, I am very good, Alison. How are you?

Alison 00:41

I'm really well, thank you. I'm really enjoying this summer. And just having a chance to eat outdoors and just having a little bit of a laid back vibe.

Jimi 00:49

Yeah, embracing that nice summer mode, and getting to see people, and cooking. I noticed you haven't sent me anything this week and I'm sort of trying to be cool about it. It's absolutely fine. Like, you know, I've not come to rely on your packages in the quite desperate way. But what I really want to know is what you've been cooking. What sort of things have you been craving and doing in the kitchen?

Alison 01:13

At the moment I've been really craving and cooking lots of British seasonal veg – because it's just at its peak at the moment. And so I thought I'd tell you about it – and rather than waste time me posting it to you – you can go out and get it yourself so that it is freshest.

Jimi 01:31

Sending me out to get it myself. I liked that you dressed that up as a bonus.

Alison 01:34

That way you can have it straight away, rather than have it stuck in the post.

Jimi 01:37

I've grown accustomed to these deliveries and now you're yanking it away from me, Alison. No, it's all right. I think I can stretch to venturing out. So what sort of things are you talking about?

Alison 01:48

New potatoes are still great, with butter. There's some really great peppers for salads and there's juicy cherry tomatoes. But my current favourite is sweetcorn. British sweetcorn is just juicy and succulent.

Jimi 02:03

We are enormous sweetcorn fans... corn-on-the-cob fans in this house. You know steamed, boiled, drenched in butter. There's just nothing better than it – like that sweet freshness. It's amazing.

Alison 02:14

There's so many things you can do with sweetcorn. It's so versatile. And it's at its peak right now. The Waitrose Essential corn is actually grown in West Sussex, and that's one of the sunniest places in the UK. And it's the sunshine that's needed to ripen the corn. So yeah, it's great. It's delicious. The secret to it is cooking it as soon as possible – as soon as you get it home, because the natural sugars start to diminish. And, you know, it's just not as sweet. So, the sweetest it will be is when you get it straight home.

Jimi 02:46

One thing that I keep seeing a lot of as well, is people doing corn ribs, which seems to be something that has been in the restaurant world. It has just been in the ether for the last couple of years – really popular. Generally slathered in a chilli butter and deep fried. I'm almost embarrassed to say this, but I don't know how you turn corn into corn ribs. Is it something that's easy, like have you done it?

Alison 03:13

Do you know what, they're really easy and they just look really effective. So you do need a really sharp knife – heavy sharp knife – and a good chopping board, and then cut the corn through the centre, in half. So you have two long halves. And then cut each of the long halves in either two, or three, thinner halves – and as they cook they curl and you can deep fry them, or just bake them in the oven with lots of marinade, and flavoured butter – and things like that. They are delicious.

Jimi 03:42

Well, while we are talking about the various joys of eating, it seems like the perfect time to move on to our guest on this week's podcast. And it is author, *Sunday Times* columnist, and podcaster Dolly Alderton. She is somebody who absolutely nails and glories in the visceral sensory pleasures of food. It's a huge part of her most recent book *Ghosts*. She had recipes throughout her breakout bestseller, *everything I know about love*, and she is somebody that from the moment we started talking to her, it was just clear that we were... she was one of us, basically. And we loved having such deep, interesting conversations about food and how it's shaped her life.

Alison 04:32

We talked about food from her childhood – whether it's her mum's roast chicken, or little jam tarts, vinegar on chips – and how she used to immerse herself as a kid in cookery books.

Jimi 04:45

Yeah, it's clearly a huge part of her life and food is always there. And she talks about constantly thinking about it. And so it was even more interesting to hear her talk about what lockdown, and the past year, and pandemic, has done to her relationship with food and to cooking. And she said that it was the first time that she felt slightly disengaged from it. And she was eating out of packets.

Alison 05:14

I mean, I certainly related to that. Because she was cooking on her own for most of lockdown. And you know, that repetition, I could certainly sympathise. The other thing I could really empathise with was her love of pickles, and how she could quite happily clear a jar of cornichons in an afternoon. I can relate to that love of vinegar on your tongue.

Jimi 05:36

I was really fascinated. I always love hearing what people crave, or what they eat when they're writing and – people's comforts in their foods are always fascinating. And there was just so much to dig into with her. She is very funny. She's very fascinating about food. And she is just going absolutely stratospheric, and from strength to strength. So it was great to catch her and great to hear about what she's got coming up. She was a joy. Here she is. Here is our conversation with Dolly Alderton.

Dolly Alderton, how are you doing? Thank you so much for joining us.

Dolly Alderton 06:20

Oh, thank you so much for having me. I am a little bit late to the recording because I realised I was going to be talking about food for the next-however-long, and it was... I know that when I talk about food, it makes my stomach grumble, so I had to quickly wolf down some poached eggs.

Jimi 06:37

[Jimi laughs] Because that is something that we find on this show, I think. Alison and I – we have to hurriedly eat something because it just gets too agonising. We're just torturing ourselves.

Dolly Alderton 06:47

Yeah, I'm so bad. I'm basically like... I'm basically just always hungry, all the time. So any discussion about food, any vivid discussion about food, I have the most reactive stomach.

Jimi 06:59

Well, you're in the perfect place for that. And you're among friends. And we were going to start with food and its presence, not just in your life, it sounds like – but in your writing as well. And it's evident in *Ghosts*, your debut novel, your most recent book, which was a huge hit. And importantly for us, your lead character, your main character, Nina, is a food writer. So where did that decision come from? Was it wish fulfilment?

Dolly Alderton 07:26

Yes, first and foremost, the reason was one of the big themes of the book is about memory. And obviously, food and taste and appetite is massively interlinked with memory and obviously the two main strands of the narrative is about her trying to hold on to a man she's in love with, who is kind of unknowable – and a lot of how she ends up feeling close to him in the book is by drawing on memories. Obviously, so much of memory in the initial stage of courtship is about eating together and drinking together. And then the other strand is about her dad who has dementia. And when I was doing research on dementia, and the type of dementia that that character had, something that I found really interesting is how much taste is manifested in symptoms in terms of having a completely different palate is something that happens a lot with dementia sufferers suddenly. And the other thing that happens is they suddenly start craving childhood food, childhood dishes. And I think that says so much about how important those early years of life are, so anyway – it all linked in with memory. And then of course, I just like writing about food. She's quite a sensual person. She's quite in her body and quite present – that felt like a good job for someone like that. And also, it is a nod to *Heartburn*, which is my favourite book with Nora Ephron. And *Heartburn* was obviously about a certain type of heartbreak. My book's about the same type of heartbreak. So I thought there was a nice parallel there between both of those protagonists being food writers.

Jimi 09:07

You clearly did a lot of research. But in terms of the actual practicalities of a food writer, did you have friends that are food writers that you could call upon? Obviously, Alison and I could broadly be described as food writers. But we've just got pages of notes and clarifications, and we'll quiz you with the decisions that you've made, and that'll just be most of our conversation. [Alison laughs]

Alison 09:27

Well, both of us were saying that most people don't even know that food writers exist. You know, they just think you're a chef or a cook. So how did you do your research?

Dolly Alderton 09:35

Well, I'm really lucky. My editor Juliet Annan publishes cookbooks. So she had her beady eye on all mechanics and the details because obviously... like when you're writing, I'm having this when I'm in my script as well, because I'm writing a TV show at the moment – when you're... I think because I always want to get to the fun juicy bit of the story. Those details of the logistics of how someone's day-to-day life works, I find so boring. [Jimi and Alison laugh] I would much prefer to be like: 'Nina is a food writer, she licks jam off her fingers, and then she finishes the day of work.' Like that. I'm like, that's fine. Fine by me. But I'm very aware that for most people, that's not enough. So I'm very lucky that I had Juliet to really help me flesh out this. And it's obviously very low in the mix of the story, it's a book about relationships, but just to make it feel... pump it up as much as possible to make it feel vaguely realistic.

Jimi 10:38

I really want to return to that idea of food writers and people possibly seeing themselves in the book and conflating fiction and reality. But you mentioned childhood and food memories. And that's a big part of

Ghosts as well. And it would be remiss to not ask you about what your childhood food memories were and what did it look like growing up?

Dolly Alderton 11:02

It's weird with food memory, I think it's such an ancient part of our brain. I remember hearing A. A. Gill, say that it's the part of our brain that apparently we share with lizards. So I kind of have lizard memory, I have sort of non-narrative memory of food when I was really little. It's kind of just bursts of colour, and images, and temperature – rather than this is what we used to eat. There was a pub around the corner from the flat that I grew up in that my dad used to take me to on a Saturday, and it would be like, hot, vinegary, salty chips while he read the paper. And that kind of burning the roof of my mouth. Which is my favourite thing. And those fluorescent jam tarts that are in a row – one that's bright red, one that's bright yellow. And then like the bow pasta – with peas, or ham, or cream, or just like, soft, chewy – just these kind of small memories that I have. And then as I get older, the main thing that I remember is roast chicken was the thing that my mum made over and over again. So that's kind of my adolescent memories.

Jimi 12:15

At what point do you start getting interested in cooking as well and joining in? It sounds like – I think you mentioned it a little bit in your first book – *everything I know about love* – cooking alongside your mum, and your mum being this incredible innate natural cook. And she's got Italian-Canadian heritage, which seems like an interesting mix. Did that manifest in the way that she cooked?

Dolly Alderton 12:38

She was very experimental with food and she was always very keen to show me and my brother the world through food. So, I remember every Sunday we would have lunch, and she would theme it. She would do a different... there would be a Canadian lunch; and we'd have North American food; and then there would be a Chinese lunch and we'd all have fortune cookies; and then there would be a Spanish lunch and there would be flamenco music playing. I think that she was... we didn't travel really a lot. Ever. As a family. We were a classic 2.4 suburban family that treated themselves to Spain or France... maybe Spain or France every summer. And then Devon at Easter. So they're not... it's weird, my mum is not... I've got such an appetite for travel in a way that my mum and dad just don't really have. But I think she was always quite obsessed with the idea of not raising myopic North London children who don't have any sort of horizontal understanding or vision of the world. So the way that she did it was often through these little feasts we would have. Which I think is just so lovely.

Alison 13:59

So would she have been researching through books to have got the recipes for that? Because if she's not travelled where is she getting the inspiration from?

Dolly Alderton 14:05

And also this was pre-internet mostly, I suppose. She has a huge collection of cookbooks. And she's also a recipe collector. She has one of those cook files and a cook scrapbook. So, any time when she... that period of the 80s where everyone was 'entertaining' – I think was the verb my mum used to use.

She would have lunch somewhere, have dinner somewhere. Call the next day, get the recipe. So I've got all these borrowed recipes from family friends and people that she's met along the way.

Jimi 14:40

At what point do you start staking a claim on the kitchen in your own way, and your own sort of taste, and your interest in food? I know that for me, 'chefs on TV' was a huge thing. And that was the exposure to that world. And was it the same for you?

Dolly Alderton 14:57

Yes, that was a huge part. Who was your go to? Who was the person that first excited you?

Jimi 15:01

Well, I remember Gary Rhodes weirdly. I remember him being quite a big one – pre Jamie, but obviously it was all Jamie really.

Dolly Alderton 15:09

I hope this doesn't sound too cruel. There's a line in my TV show that we've been deliberating whether we leave in or not, because we thought it was a little bit mean. Obviously Jimi, I think you're very complex, and fascinating and charming individual, so I promise this is not me reducing this phrase. [Jimi laughs] There's like a real basic bro in the show and he says... he does a dinner party and he's really stressed out by it. And he says... he's cooking from *15 Minute Meals*, and he says: 'Oh, Jamie Oliver, the patron saint for all heterosexual men.' [All laugh] You've just confirmed it, so I have to leave it in.

Jimi 15:50

I've just completely confirmed that you've got to keep it in. No, you're absolutely right. There's an entire type and kind of man that is like: 'Oh, that was the Big Bang moment for us – Jamie ripping up herbs with his hands.' And you're absolutely right. I'm going to own the cliché. But did you have someone in that kind of frame?

Dolly Alderton 16:12

Yes, my mum. My mum is obsessed with Delia in a way that I think I can't really understand, that I think is like, something of her generation. Delia is sacrosanct. Like there's a relationship that she has with Delia, I think. And it's not one of huge stimulation, or even huge inspiration, but it's one of immense trust. And I definitely saw that with my mum – like Delia was her friend, she looked over the household. At Christmas we needed just one book. It's the same book we use now. And rather adorably – because I just was obsessed with my mum – like all little girls are, I think I just became obsessed with Delia by default. In the front of the Christmas recipe book – in my seven year old wobbly handwriting – it says: 'this book is for mummy, only grills' – because I didn't know how to spell 'girls'. Which obviously says quite a lot about my own gender standards. [All laugh] But yeah, Delia was really... I remember the first thing I made with my mum was when I was very little. It was Christmas treats for the class – baking – we made Delia shortbread and dusted it with castor sugar, and cut them into shapes and angels. It is the best shortbread recipe ever. And you know, some people, they just have no interest in cooking or food, so it shouldn't be foisted upon them. But I loved it. And I've always been really interested in it. And

I've always found it really creative. And if you're... if I had children, if they showed that kind of interest, I would embed those recipes into their little minds really early on because it is like accumulation of language I think – and then it means you can speak it for the rest of your life. And you know, age 21 when I was doing work experience – at magazines – and at the end of my placement, I would come in and bring Delia shortbread dusted with castor sugar. So there's this weird connection that I have to Delia Smith just because I think she was so important to my mum.

Alison 18:16

What about now? What could we see you go to for inspiration when you're cooking? If Delia was the foundation?

Dolly Alderton 18:22

Yes, that's exactly it, Alison – she's the foundation. I very rarely will go to her now for new stuff. Like every time I do a Christmas lunch, or whatever, I'll go to... now the books I turn to the most are The River Café books.

Alison 18:36

That kind of easy, simple, Mediterranean.

Dolly Alderton 18:40

Yes, and also now that I'm not in my 20s, or a student – and I have a little bit more money for ingredients – *The River Café* book is a great book because it's basically about presenting really fresh, quality, seasonal ingredients – in a way that doesn't feel alienating, or scary to me anymore. That's like part of the joy in the process of cooking for people, and cooking for myself. So I love those books. As you said, I love the simplicity of them. I obviously go back to Nigel Slater over and over again. Meera Sodha I love – I'm always cooking from Meera Sodha.

Alison 19:13

Do you use those type of recipes when you're cooking for yourself? Or do you just save them for cooking for friends?

Dolly Alderton 19:18

Do you know, I was thinking about food this morning when I was thinking about this podcast, and you caught me at the strangest moment of my life in terms of my relationship to cooking. But I'd be interested to hear how it's affected you guys – because I always prided myself in the fact that I've lived on my own for quite a while now. And even when I lived with girls, I always made meals an occasion, and I always liked making a batch of something. And then on a Sunday, eating it throughout the week, or... I'm someone who has a very vested interest in their own pleasure compulsion. So if I suddenly start thinking about, I don't know, moussaka at three o'clock. It will be in my head for four hours. It will be all I will think about. And then I will go to the Middle Eastern shop and get every... I have to do it. And I've always been like that. And it's really like I just follow my appetite. And something just happened to me in lockdown, where I just don't cook anymore – not for myself. If I have people around, I will. But the day-to-day – I basically don't... normally I would do a weekly shop. I go to my local grocers – fruit and veg guy – every couple of days. I go to the cheese shop, I do. It was really a part of

my week. And I basically have eaten out of packets for a year! I'm not letting myself feel too weird about it, because I can't. I do think it will come back. But I think, basically, what happened was, I was so isolated, particularly in that first lockdown, that every time I would cook and use the utensils, and then wash up, and then put them in the rack, it would somehow make me engage in this idea of how every meal takes you closer to death. Not to be too... [All laugh] There was something about the routines of it that felt really existentially, like gave me vertigo of: 'Oh, there's that plate, four hours-time I'll be using it again, and then I'll wash it up, and then I'll put the plate back on the thing. And then... and just the routines of it felt so unpleasurable that I just had to abandon cooking.

Jimi 21:30

I'm totally with you. I think even having a wife, and two kids in the family, when we're all together – and it was the rhythms and the routines of it, did become almost suffocating in some ways. And the improvisational joy of: 'Oh I'm going to cook tonight because... and then I'm going to go to a restaurant the other night' – like that was stripped away. So it was like: 'Wow – it's just this.' But that's really interesting to hear that it did that to you. You mentioned cooking for friends there. And obviously we're in a time now where we can have people over. That feels like something that you've always really loved, and you write about it, and talk about it in your first book – and restaurants. And it feels like even throughout what you call your roaring 20s – and that quite messy time of life – dating columnist and that vision of you – you were always keeping that groundedness of I'm going to cook, have people around.

Dolly Alderton 22:29

Yes, I mean, my biggest fear – honestly – is falling in love with a man who likes to cook. [All laugh] I can't think of anything worse because I'm such a kitchen control freak. It is how I express my love. And I'm just really lucky in my group of friends that it's... because there are lots of great cooks in my group of friends, but they just know how much joy it brings me. So they've kind of let me become the cooking megalomaniac.

Jimi 22:57

Oh, that's interesting about men. So I was going to ask about that. And obviously, you've been a dating columnist. And I think I read in *Vogue* actually – though, this is not directly related to dating – but you are called the unofficial doyen of the female millennial experience. So...

Dolly Alderton 23:13

Which puts absolutely no pressure on me! [All laugh]

Jimi 23:17

Once a sort of ego stroke, and just terrifying pressure, but it does point to the fact that you are someone that people look to – or have looked to – for advice, or observations around the ways in which that generation interact. And I wondered in terms of food – like in dating – there are all these rules you hear about things you shouldn't order, or eat, on a first date. Is it important to you that a man is interested in food, but not necessarily so interested that he takes over the kitchen?

Dolly Alderton 23:49

Yeah, so I have very, very specific ideas [all laugh]. Which is probably why I'm still single. So I would love someone who loves food, that loves being cooked for, and isn't controlling in the kitchen. I have been on so many dates with men who obviously have what probably would be seen as... because I basically think we have such a rich language for female disordered eating, and we don't so much with men. And I feel I've been on so many dates with men who were, you know, not drinking because it's leg day at 6am the next day, or like, oh, they're only eating sweet potato and dry chicken breasts for a month while they're 'shredding' and getting ready for Iron Man or whatever. [Alison laughs]

Jimi 24:39

You're absolutely right. And no one talks about this really – or that much?

Dolly Alderton 24:43

No, and that is, you know, if you're being *that* limited with your food and you're cutting off that part of your brain that responds to food in a pleasurable way – that is a problem. And I don't like this idea about rules about what you should or shouldn't eat, because I think any sort of denial or self-flagellation, I just find it really unfair.

Jimi 25:08

And you've written as well about your own experience with that. You write really movingly, really hilariously in the first book about your relationship with that growing up – and the things that family would say, and people passing judgment on your body, and what you're eating. And then going through that strange process of getting to this point of understanding with it.

Dolly Alderton 25:28

Totally, and I must say, as well, as someone who's been through all that stuff, in a really quite horrific way, I have nothing but sympathy and compassion for people who are still in the thick of it. Because people who are so ruled by those ideas of discipline, or people who are suffering from an eating disorder, you know, there's nothing they want more than to be able to just drink a bottle of wine and wolf carbs down. It's really embarrassing when you're suffering with that stuff. So I have massive compassion for it. But I just think, in terms of the rules of what people should or shouldn't be eating on dates, I think if someone is... I personally don't like seeing a prissy eater.

Alison 26:14

You want to see them enjoying their food.

Dolly Alderton 26:16

Yes, exactly. And so how someone finds pleasure and responds to food is similarly how they will respond to loads of other sensory things. So there's nothing I love more than being around – and find sexier – than being around a man or a woman, who can just really relish their food and really enjoy that appetite.

Jimi 26:36

We've talked about your first book a little bit, and it was obviously a huge bestseller, incredibly successful. And those quotes like that doyen one came out of that – what was that like for you?

Because obviously, it was such an incredible moment. And you were being – rightly – congratulated on a really, really impressive book. We had Candice Carty Williams on the show who's brilliant, and she was talking about how noisy it was – how did you kind of deal with that noise?

Dolly Alderton 27:10

Candice and I have sent many an Instagram dm to each other in the dead of night, when we're both suffering from insomnia. It was very, very strange. And it was very, very wonderful. So it was a duality of things – it was life changing and freeing in so many ways. And it was terrifying and stultifying in so many ways. And it made me... I can't stress enough how much more it has given to my life and taken away from it. And I'm so fortunate. I'm so happy that the last few years has happened. I'm so glad that I wrote that book – I'm so glad that it was received the way it was received. To be totally honest, I wrote it four years ago, and it was published three years ago, I'm still trying to make sense of it. And I think I will maybe be able to understand all of it better and what the pros were, and what the cons were, and the effect that it had on me. And the way that it changed me overwhelmingly for the better – and the things that I then had to navigate. I think I probably won't be able to know that for quite a while. You know, I remember listening to an interview with Elizabeth Gilbert, who wrote *Eat, Pray, Love*. And obviously, when you're talking about that book, you're talking about stratospheric-in-a-way-I-can't-even-fathom success, but she said... I'm kind of thinking of this quite a lot at the moment, because we're just in the middle of casting the TV adaptation of that memoir. The interviewer said to her: 'How did it feel to see Julia Roberts play you? What was it like to be on location? What was it like to be on set? What was it like to see real painful moments and conversations, and intimate moments, and emotional internal moments being made manifest and externalised on this enormous budget with hundreds and hundreds of crew and people responsible for it?' And she said: 'I don't think I've got my head around it. And I don't think I'll ever get my head around it.' And I think sometimes things happen. And you're like, I wonder if – you can answer this Jimi – but I wonder if having kids is a bit like this. Sometimes I look at my friends' babies and I'll think about the fact that I saw the moment that their mum and dad met in a bar. And I can't quite get my head around how that has all happened. And I don't know, maybe the answer is just to... you never really can make sense of those huge life changing moments.

Jimi 29:44

There's a yearning for a neat bow of understanding isn't there? But I think it's quite a liberating thing that you probably won't know – like, it will never come really that you'll completely know – and certainly when you're so close to something. It was a memoir, it was your own life, and it was interspersed with recipes which seems like a nod to Nora Ephron as well – was that where that came from?

Dolly Alderton 30:10

Yes. So the recipes are one of the things that anger my one-star Amazon reviewers the most. [Jimi laughs] Because it was literally a recipe for a fried egg sandwich. [Alison and Jimi laugh] And I do understand why it might just feel so incongruous to people. Or just like, why is this woman – who is so clearly not a cook or a chef – telling us what we should be eating? It was actually my agent's idea. And it was because every story that I was writing in the book – she was the one who noticed food seemed to be... there was some sort of dish, or some sort of meal that was in there. So she was like: 'I think you should start including recipes.' And then, really, there's a reason why with the cover of my first book that it ended up... it's lots of words with scribbles on them. Because it is about a young woman trying to

make sense of the world. Like she's processing her thoughts as she's writing it. And that was what was happening when I was writing it. I was 28. And I was writing the end of it – the end of it was about being 28. The last chapter of the book is about me moving into this flat on my own. I was literally moving. And I was writing that chapter with boxes around – it was in real time. And I think that there's something about that scribbling of thoughts – and someone opening a diary, that felt like these recipes and these scraps of... felt like it just added to that atmosphere. That it was about intimacy and proximity with the memoirist I think those books. So it just felt like it was bringing people closer in.

Jimi 31:56

So we need to talk about food a little bit more. And I want to talk about the kind of cooking that you do when you're not in lockdown and forced packets mode that you've been in for a while. What kind of things are you drawn to? Is it still that River Café, very simple, Italian inflected stuff that you normally go back to?

Dolly Alderton 32:19

Yes, I normally go back to a piece of grilled fish and salads and vegetables. I love pasta, so I'm always trying out new pasta. And then as I've got older, I really like day to day food that feels really nourishing – and it's so tasty. More and more I'm cooking Vietnamese food and Thai food. But then equally I also just love a fish finger sandwich. And I love a baked potato with so much butter and Marmite on it. And I suppose, as I said, because I'm someone who follows exactly what it is – within reason. What I normally do, is I normally have one thing that I become obsessed with – and then I cook it every day for two weeks, and then I can't eat it again. For a year.

Alison 33:07

What about when you are writing? Do you have any snacks or anything like that, that keeps you going?

Dolly Alderton 33:12

Yes, there are things that I always have in my fridge and in my cupboard – particularly when I'm on a deadline because I can't... as well as drinking endless cups of tea. I have to... basically anytime I'm anxious, I have to be stuffing something in my gob. So, I love any kind of smoked or salted nut. Particularly smoked almonds. I get those big packs of those – ah, it's so good. I love anything vinegary. So I have a whole pickle shelf in my fridge. And I can eat a jar cornichons in one sitting and regularly do. I love pickled walnuts. My mouth is literally watering. [Jimi and Alison laugh]

Alison 33:53

It's actually the products rather... like I was expecting you say there was always in your cupboard – was going to be a bottle of malt vinegar, or something like that.

Dolly Alderton 33:59

No, pickled products. It does something to me. It wakes up my brain and makes me feel satisfied in a way that no other flavour or texture can. Like anything pickled. I hate to say pickled onions. I can sit on a deadline stuffing those in my mouth. I just love anything sour, vinegary is great for me.

Alison 34:26

You say you love travel – when you go abroad, when we are able to go abroad again – how do you go about holidays? Does food play a big part of it?

Dolly Alderton 34:33

Food is such an important part of how I see a place and it's how I access all my memories normally. Most of my memories of being in a new place. And it's why I do so much travelling on my own. Because there are so many friends that I have – who I adore – but who just don't have the same commitment to seeking out... I remember when the last huge trip I did was to Vietnam, and I needed to go and find... I couldn't just find a bánh mì when we were in Wuyan, I had to go find *the* bánh mì that Anthony Bourdain said was the best bánh mì, even though it was only – you know, cost 99p – and we were going to have it with a beer sitting on the side of the road. I don't care. I have to go find it. And it's like, I just need – once again, I'm sounding like the most unrelaxed person.

Jimi 35:27

No, I'm laughing because I feel like we're probably the same.

Alison 35:30

I think I'm the same. There are some friends I can't go on holiday with because they just don't care about foods as much – or don't understand.

Jimi 35:40

They're like: 'This place looks fine.' And you're like: 'Absolutely not!'

Dolly Alderton 35:38

There's nothing that upsets me more than being in a new exciting place when you only have three meals a day. And you're only there for a limited time. And making a poor choice with a meal – it really bums me out.

Alison 35:55

So do you do research before you go?

Dolly Alderton 35:58

Yes, I do research before I go. And then I'll always want to do... and again, this is just the joy of travelling when you're a little bit older that you can spend a bit of money in a way that you don't when you're younger. I want to try this stuff that everyone is eating. And I also want to go to a nice restaurant and see what the high-end dining is in that place. And then also what the street food is, and what lunch is like there for those people, and what everyday food is. And then what will normally happen is I will become completely obsessed with one thing – think about it on the plane home. And then make it. So like in Porto – Porto was maybe the best meal of my life. I had turbot and the restaurant was so weird. It was right in the fish market area of Porto. It is the most beautiful city and we literally sat in this industrial estate. But we were told this is where you can get the freshest, best fish – straight out of the sea. And we get a piece of fish and they serve it's so simply – with just green salad and boiled potatoes. But it was so good. And then I came home and I became – and since have become – so obsessed with turbot. I love turbot so much. If there is turbot on a menu I force everyone to order it.

Alison 37:25

And what about plans for the future when we're able to properly go travelling again? Have you got anywhere on your list that you're hoping to go and eat?

Dolly Alderton 37:33

Yes, like any basic millennial women I'm obviously yearning for Paris. Paris is my favourite city in the world. And my favourite places to eat are in Paris. There's a restaurant called Chez Janou in the Marais. And truly the minute... because Kings Cross is down the road from my flat – the minute I'm allowed, I'll just go there for a day and I'll just go to Chez Janou and just sit there and have... they do this salt cod, mashed potato thing, which is so good. And they do an amazing ratatouille. And then they've got this really famous chocolate mousse. I'm just like... the Parisian bistro food is delicious. I can't wait to eat that again.

Alison 38:20

Let's do Kitchen Grill – quickfire, 10 questions. Tea or coffee?

Dolly Alderton 38:25

Oh, I can't choose. I have two coffees in the morning. I'm so specific about the one skinny latte, one oatmeal flat white, and then I drink... [Laughing] I sound like a nightmare in this podcast I realise with incredibly exacting rules. It's Yorkshire tea. And it's a very specific colour that I like to call thick amber. And I've had many rows with people who don't understand what it is when I say that. Basically I like tea to be both strong and milky.

Jimi 38:58

Strong and milky paradox. I'm with you.

Dolly Alderton 39:04

But why don't people understand? You leave the bag in for ages. Then put in a big chunk of milk.

Jimi 39:10

Yes, it's always wild when you get to somebody's house and you remember that they make bad tea. Or somebody agrees I'll make your tea and there's a weird sort of Cold War of: 'Oh no, I'll make it.' [Laughing] It's just like, this is going to be a horrible waste of tea.

Alison 39:28

Yeah, that's not nice. Mash or chips?

Dolly Alderton 39:33

Oh my [laughs]. I'm so passionate about potatoes. I just can't – it's like *Sophie's Choice*. Mash, I think. It has to be mash. I'm obsessed with mashed potato. And it needs to be – obviously the potato needs to be there to hold the butter together. Yup, that's basically just a bowl of butter.

Alison 39:55

Lovely. Baguette or sourdough?

Dolly Alderton 39:58

Baguette – a nice warm baguette slathered with butter. I do love sourdough. And I like that it doesn't bloat you and I like the craft of it, or whatever. But you know, sometimes you just need a baguette.

Alison 40:17

I think I know the answer to this: butter or olive oil?

Dolly Alderton 40:20

Butter. I'm obsessed with butter. Like absolutely obsessed with butter. I remember reading an article by the food writer, Lauren Bravo, and it was the first time that I had seen my truth reflected. [Jimi laughs] Which is, she said when she's cooking – when she's using really good butter with salt crystals in – she will slice a teeny tiny, really thin razor thin slice to eat as a little snack.

Alison 40:43

I don't think you're alone in that. It's so lovely. Fruit or veg?

Dolly Alderton 40:48

Veg. I'm obsessed with vegetables. I feel like I didn't really know how to cook vegetables for such a long time. And now. Now I do mainly... we just use a lot of butter and salt.

Alison 41:00

Do you have a favourite one?

Dolly Alderton 41:02

Ooh, I love courgette. I love cauliflower. No. Tomatoes. Tomatoes are fruit, aren't they?

Jimi 41:10

Yes, I mean, I feel like it's a grey area. They could be both. Officially fruit but I'd say, yeah...

Dolly Alderton 41:17

Tomato salad I think it's like maybe my favourite thing in the whole world.

Alison 41:23

Got to have a generous bit of salt on the top.

Jimi 41:24

Oh, big time. The one at Quo Vadis, I know that one.

Dolly Alderton 41:30

So good. So good.

Alison 41:34

Spicy or mild?

Dolly Alderton 41:35

Spicy. I love heat. As well as my vinegar shelf. I have a hot sauce shelf.

Alison 41:42

Nice! Restaurant meal or a sofa supper?

Dolly Alderton 41:45

Restaurant meal. I kind of never want to eat on the sofa ever again. [Both laugh] I'm literally acting like Michael Winner who apparently famously used to have his three meals out a day. Even on the walk home from work at the moment, I'm like: 'Ooh, I might go into Pret for my dinner!' [Both laugh]

Alison 42:03

Cheese or pudding?

Dolly Alderton 42:04

Cheese. I don't really have a sweet tooth. I love cheese.

Alison 42:13

High Tech or wooden spoon?

Dolly Alderton 42:14

Wooden spoon. Basically every kitchen gadget I've ever bought I end up throwing away in frustration.

Jimi 42:22

I think sometimes it's like the washing of it as well and the faff.

Dolly Alderton 42:27

It is the washing of it. You're so right.

Jimi 42:30

It's like, yeurgh, I can't face it.

Dolly Alderton 42:34

What trauma we live with. [Laughing]

Jimi 42:37

It's a really hard life.

Alison 42:41

Recipe or freestyling?

Dolly Alderton 42:43

Oh, a mix between the both I think which is why I am the world's worst baker. And so that is the absolute opposite of what baking requires.

Alison 42:52

But then if you've not got a sweet tooth, you've not got the motivation to really crack baking, and baking cakes, and that kind of thing.

Dolly Alderton 42:59

Exactly. I mess up every single thing that I bake because I get too impatient. Like the number of cake sponges that I have iced while it's still piping hot. [Jimi and Alison laugh] Just to see the icing dribble down the side of it. I'm just too much of a child to bake – I can't deal with it.

Jimi 43:18

The rigor of baking I sort of appreciate from afar but can't replicate.

Alison 43:24

But you know you've cracked Delia's shortbread.

Dolly Alderton 43:29

Exactly. That's all you need.

Alison 43:30

That's all you need. That is the Kitchen Grill.

Jimi 43:32

There you go. You've been grilled.

Dolly Alderton 43:33

I've been grilled.

Jimi 43:34

It's great to hear you talk about food, and pleasure, and memory, and travel in that way that Alison and I can definitely relate to. And this has been so much fun – and so interesting as well. So, thank you very much for joining us, Dolly.

Dolly Alderton 43:55

Thank you so much. I've loved talking to both of you. And I hope next time we can be in a restaurant maybe.

Jimi 44:05

You've been listening to Life on a Plate from Waitrose. I'm Jimi Famurewa, thank you to my co-host Alison Oakervee, and our guest, Dolly Alderton. If you've enjoyed this conversation, you can find lots

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