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DINNER WITH JOSEPHINE MURRAY FROM RAIN STARTS PLAY

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Josephine Murray lives in Malvern (UK) with her husband Ken and their 2-year-old daughter Kirstie. Josephine has just launched the charming kids? webshop, rain starts play, which sells British and European clothes, toys and nursery furnishings all made as locally and ethically as possible. Here is her dinnertime story:

During the week Kirstie and I eat by ourselves because my husband gets home from work too late to eat with us. We try to eat about 6pm, any later and Ken might arrive home when we?re still there at 7pm, so he can bring new energy to what can sometimes be a bit of a battle of wills! Kirstie will not touch some foods, like rice and carrots, others she will eat one day - but not another. Our staple dinners are cauliflower cheese or fishfingers with potatoes and vegetables, sphagetti bolognaise and tomato and red lentil dhal with naan breads ? which Kirstie loves even though it?s really spicy. We don?t eat puddings very often ?if we do it?s icecream - but if she?s still hungry (or won?t eat her dinner) she has blueberries or a banana.

I love cooking and get a bit frustrated at not being able to make meals Ken and I like because Kirstie won?t eat them ? and I don?t have the energy to make two separate meals. Sometimes I rebel and make something like Jamie Oliver?s butternut squash risotto and give Kirstie a dippy egg with toast soldiers, which she loves. This works fine if she?s had a good lunch; on nursery days she has a cooked organic lunch and of course at nursery she?ll eat things she won?t eat at home!

Weekday breakfasts and lunches are more relaxed than dinners because Kirstie and I are not yet tired. Our dining room window has a view of the back garden and fields beyond where horses graze and play, so we can watch them while we eat. Now the weather?s warmer we eat at our picnic table. You can hear the stream at the end of the garden and see the beautiful Malvern hills. I love weekend meals because we?re all together. Either my husband cooks, sometimes lemon roast chicken with roast potatoes and vegetables, or I make something a bit more special than usual.

I did a Cordon Bleu cookery course at Tante Marie Culinary Academy a few years ago which was an incredible experience. I would love to have the time to make my own bread and pasta and do the more involved dishes I learned on the course ? especially the puddings - strudel pastry from scratch! However there are actually quite a few dishes in my course recipe file that fit with being a busy working Mum. Boeuf Stroganoff has become one of our staples as both Ken and Kirstie love it. I?m vegetarian and must admit that when they have meat or fish I usually end up having a veggie burger ? today?s was slightly burnt! Sometimes I make a nut or bean loaf and have a couple of slices of that.

When we eat out as a family it?ll be the tearoom on a visit to a National Trust property, or lunch at the Great Malvern Deli, or Cameron & Swan Café Deli in Ledbury. When we first moved in to our new house a month ago we had take-away fish

and chips which Kirstie loved! She loves picnics and eating from food stalls too. We?re planning to go abroad with her for the first time this year and I know she?ll be in heaven with all the sights and smells of continental food markets. She?s already a fan of croissants and olives!

Boeuf Stroganoff: (Reproduced with permission from Tante Marie Culinary Academy)

This is really quick and easy to make. It makes enough for about 5-6 adults. I serve it with mashed potato ? this time I did it with Jersey Royals because they were in season - and vegetables. I just serve it in the casserole dish.

- ***454g fillet of beef or rump steak (I use topside)***
- ***75g butter***
- ***2 onions, finely sliced (I chop them, for Kirstie)***
- ***175g mushrooms, sliced***
- ***1tsp plain flour***
- ***Salt and black pepper***
- ***150ml soured cream***
- ***2tbsp brandy***
- ***1tsp finely chopped parsley (can be omitted)***

Cut the beef into strips 5mm wide and toss in the flour.
Melt half the butter in a flameproof casserole, add the onions and cook gently until they are tender and golden brown. Add the mushrooms and cook for 3-4 minutes.
Remove the onions and mushrooms from the casserole with a draining spoon and keep on one side. Add the remaining butter to the pan and when it is hot, add the strips of beef and fry briskly for 3-4 minutes.
Return the onions and mushrooms to the pan, add the warmed brandy and ?flame? it. Add salt and pepper and the soured cream. Cook for 2-3 minutes. Pour into the serving dish and sprinkle with parsley. Serve at once.

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