

Brits Sunday Lunch

by Fredrica Duke



When I would visit my friend Lisa in London in the early 80's, I would sometimes see my bi-country friend Allan. He lived here in L.A. and also London where he was a television producer. His flat was in the Holland Park/Notting Hill area, but I love the name *Ladbroke Grove* so much that I want to say he lived there. I love all the names of the streets and villages in Great Britain.

On occasion, he took me along for a Sunday lunch he had been invited to. Allan would say, "This bloke wants me to come round, would you fancy joining us?" Once there, I was in awe of the carefree, unkempt, unfazed style of the host, hostess and everyone really.

When I entertain, I'm stressed out, dressed up, have too much food and am just generally overwhelmed by it all. Whereas, these folks looked like they stayed up too late (not a touch of makeup on the women) and hardly gave a thought to the guests they were now entertaining in their home. This was the antithesis of the Martha Stewart entertaining regime.

The houses weren't straightened up, nor the tables set. Drinks went around first. Drinks seemed much more important than food. Then slowly (sometimes hours had passed), and oh-so casually, the women would find their way to the kitchen and start hunting for leftovers. WHAT? They invited people over without even the forethought of what food they might serve. It was baffling.

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Then suddenly, from the refrigerator they would pull out a partially eaten baked potato, and other seemingly random items that might be thrown into the mix; an old cucumber here, a bit of a tomato there. The women were like highly evolved ants or bees, each with her specific job to do. Finally, a very satisfying, thrown together, science experiment of a meal would be presented. It was outstanding. Unforgettable really, which is why I'm writing about it all these years later.



Here I am applauding them in 2013 — though I don't quite remember who they were. Some were famous and on various BBC series, so I was aware of them. But unlike notable actors here, they are very low key and not all, "Look at me I'm a celebrity," about it. I am in awe of superior intelligence and wit, and this group was so quick and articulate. I especially like the self-deprecation common among accomplished Brits. Many Americans tend to inflate themselves, and to me there is nothing better than understatement.

I would like to thank my old friend Allan (who I now haven't seen in ages) for these memories, and share with you a *brilliant* and oh-so easy recipe for a sandwich he once put together in his L.A. home on one of those lazy, don't-go-to-the-market, nothing-in-the-fridge Sundays.

Sometimes I was in charge of feeding his cat, Lucky. He never actually had to give me a key to his Laurel Canyon home because he had a cat door that was big enough for little me to climb through. And I did. I went to visit him one time after he arrived in Los Angeles and we were

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both hungry. VERY hungry. Cranky-hungry, and you know how that feels.

Allan walked to his refrigerator and looked inside. Mind you, he had been gone for weeks, there was nothing in there. Just as he was about to call his favorite market on Sunset Boulevard that delivered, Chalet Gourmet, which he pronounced with a British-accented *Chalet*, he pulled out a sorry-looking cucumber. He found some eggs, and put a few in boiling water. There were just a few slices of rye bread that he toasted to bring back to life. Then he set to work. The condiment he used was Grey Poupon mustard. He sliced the cucumber thin and on one side of the bread placed the slices. Then he chopped up the hard boiled eggs which were now at room temperature and put the egg on the cucumber, and placed the other piece of rye bread on top and voila, brilliance!!!!

One of the most unforgettable sandwiches of my life. Simple, but so magically produced from a few random items, that I've never forgotten it. The memory of that cucumber & egg sandwich on a cold, lazy Sunday so long ago has sustained me for years.

Fredrica Duke shares how she discovered her love of food while growing up in Los Angeles on her blog [Channeling the Food Critic in Me](#) .