

## Frozen in Time

Brian was up early on Christmas morning - not, as years ago, because excited children had woken him early, but because he had to get the turkey on so that it would be roasted in time for lunch. The children were grown up and had families of their own. Now it was just Karen and himself. At lunch today, however, they would be joined by their children and grandchildren. There were fourteen of them to cook for; but Brian was not worried: he had done it before.

He and Karen had gone to the Vigil Mass on Christmas Eve and now he had an uninterrupted morning to get things done. The vegetables had been prepared: potatoes peeled, carrots, parsnips and sprouts all seen to; the stuffing had been prepared yesterday and the Christmas pudding had been made way back at the end of October. He would select a large one and put it on to steam again in good time. He had even remembered his two vegan grandchildren: John's daughter and one of Peter's sons; his Christmas puddings had been vegetarian-friendly ever since his daughter had become vegetarian while at university. It had been only a small step to make these puddings vegan-friendly and up the fruit content. He had even prepared vegan stuffing made with Quorn 'sausage meat', kale, cranberries, and various nuts and spices. This was not, of course, for the turkey but to stuff a large butternut squash. But that could wait for later.

Brian was feeling pleased as he went to turn on the main oven, set the temperature and let it warm up so that he could put the turkey in. Thank heaven, he thought, for these self-basting ones. The turkey was all thoroughly defrosted and waiting in a large baking tin. All he had to do was to stuff it as he waited for the oven to reach the correct temperature, cover the tin with foil and then, when the oven was ready, put it in. 'I don't know why people make so much fuss,' he thought as he glanced at his 'time-table' list after stuffing the bird, 'it's just a question of good preparation and timing.'

'Yikes!' he went, as he suddenly caught sight of dried fruit in basin that smelt of the brandy they had soaked up. 'That's for my special Christmas ice cream. I meant to mix that and put it in the freezer before we went to Mass last evening. Oh dear! I'd better get the turkey on; we must get *that* done. Fortunately the ice cream is a simple recipe; the turkey takes ages to roast and there are a good few hours before lunch. With a bit of luck it might be frozen in time.'

So when the oven reached the required temperature, he put the turkey in and then turned his attention to his ice cream. It was a simple evaporated and condensed milk recipe; he would not have to bother with carefully making a custard with egg yolks and cream, taking care not to let the mixture curdle, and letting the mixture cool before freezing it. The ingredients he was using could not curdle and were not heated. He whipped up the evaporated milk until it was fluffy, stirred in the condensed milk and added the dried fruit that had been soaked in brandy as well as one or two Christmassy flavourings; then he gave it all a final stir and put the mixture into the freezer. 'There', he sighed to himself, 'a good thing this it won't need any more stirring like the traditional recipes do. I can just leave it and hope it gets frozen in time!'

At last Brian could relax a little. He made himself a coffee and, as he sipped it, he looked through his timetable. It all seemed right. He had not forgotten the soup. Last year's soup had been more complicated and quite rich with eggs and double cream; the problem was that it had been a *beer* soup. Brian had thought it would be interesting and add a little more alcohol and spice to the Christmas meal. How wrong he had been! It had gone down like a lead balloon. This year it would be a simple and straightforward potato and leak soup; even his two vegan grandchildren might have some. Looking at his timetable, he felt pleased with himself: 'It's just a matter of

planning and timing,' he mused. But there was just a little niggle at the back of his mind: 'except for that ice cream - I hope it gets frozen in time!'

'Ah,' Brian thought, 'I'd better take Karen her cup of tea before things start to get busy.' So he put the kettle on and brewed his wife a cuppa. Then he took it in to her as she was just beginning to stir.

"Merry Christmas, Karen!" He said as he drew back the bedroom curtains.

"Merry Christmas," mumbled Karen as Brian put her tea next to her. "I suppose you've been seeing to the turkey. Are you sure you don't want me to help you? There's such a lot to do."

"No, no," he answered. "It's all under control. It's just a question of planning and timing," adding in his mind the mental reservation 'apart from my Christmas ice cream - I hope it's frozen in time.' Brian was much happier getting on with things on his own; he had found having someone else in the kitchen usually confused things and upset his timetable.

He added "You'll have enough to do, Karen, getting the room ready and laying up the table before the horde arrives later this morning."

"That's true," she agreed. "But it will be nice seeing them all and watching the excitement of the grandchildren as the pile of presents under the tree gets larger and larger."

"Yes," he agreed, "it certainly will be. It wouldn't be Christmas without all the jollity and noise. I'd better get back to the kitchen and let you get up."

"Thank you," said Karen, as she sat up and began sipping her tea while it was still hot.

So Brian returned to the kitchen and to his time table. It all ran smoothly; after all, he had had several years of practice. The potatoes and parsnips were put onto roast at the appropriate times; ever since his daughter had become vegetarian many years ago he had roasted them with vegetable oil. He was doing the same this year; even his two vegan grandchildren should be happy with them. Things were going according to plan, though every now and again he wondered about that ice cream and occasionally took a peek. 'I hope it gets frozen in time,' he kept thinking.

He even had time to make himself and Karen a coffee before the family began to arrive.

I will not, dear readers, bore you with all the details of Brian's work in the kitchen. I will just say that it all went according to plan, despite the 'Will it be frozen in time?' niggle that occasionally interrupted his thoughts. He heard the families arrive and popped his head around the kitchen door to wish them all a 'Merry Christmas' to be greeted with cries of 'Merry Christmas, Granddad!' from excited grandchildren. He also took the opportunity on one occasion to return to the kitchen with a glass of beer. 'It may not improve soup', he thought, 'but it does improve my cooking.'

At last all was ready – except maybe the ice cream. Brian came in to join the others and announced soup was ready. There were one or two jokes about last year's soup: "It's not cider this time, is it, Granddad?" "Nah, I bet it's whisky!" "Granddad wouldn't waste his whisky on soup" said another. 'Quite right', thought Brian, 'he wouldn't.'

"It's all right, it's all right," said Brian, "it's good old potato and leek and it's also vegan friendly."

“Thank you, Granddad,” said two appreciative grandchildren.

The soup this year was much appreciated and the main course was a success; the turkey was just right, as was the stuffed squash. The vegetables were all fine and the cranberry and other sauces were successful. There was, of course, great merriment as crackers were pulled and the usual groans as the jokes inside were read.

Eventually all the main course plates, dishes and so forth were cleared away and it was time for pudding. Brian brought in the Christmas pudding with brandy burning on it. Then he brought in the brandy sauce, a shop-bought chocolate *buche-de-Noël* for those who did not like Christmas pudding and, of course, the ice cream he had made which, he was relieved to find, had frozen in time.

Time went by, the puddings were dealt with; the ice cream was all gone. Brian suspected its popularity was due to the brandy soaked up by the fruit since, unlike the Christmas pudding, this had not been heated and the alcohol had been retained. His two vegan grandchildren were disappointed they could not try it and asked him to make a vegan-friendly one next year. He promised he would do his best to do so, thinking ‘And that one will certainly be frozen in time’.

When everything was cleared, it was time for the opening of presents and all the excitement that that prompted. But eventually in late afternoon, things subsided; some of the grown ups looked decidedly somnolent. Then one of the grandchildren suddenly cried out: “Look what’s coming on telly in a few minutes. It’s ‘Frozen in Time’.” “Great,” said one, “Cool” said another. “Can we watch it, Granddad?”

“Certainly,” said Brian, turning on the television and finding the channel.

There, dear readers, we leave them with some of the grown-ups dozing off and everyone else watching “Frozen in Time.”