

DAILY LIFE 1

Kitchen Show: One Dozen Kitchen Actions Made Public

Reprinted from the *Kitchen Show* booklet, available to attendees of the performance.

Opposite page: *Kitchen Show* (1991).

LIFT, North London.

'Action No. 13: Showing all the marks whilst standing on a cake stand placed on a coffee table:

No. 1 When I welcome people into my kitchen, I always offer them a hot drink straight away – 'Coffee? Tea?' I don't like them to sit there with nothing. It makes me feel anxious.

People often say – 'Oh, I'll have one, but only if you're making one' – or – 'I'll have whatever you're having!' How exasperating! Of course I'll have a cup of tea with them and I only like tea. What if they'd really like coffee?

I prefer a clear precise response, for example: – 'Coffee – a touch of milk, one and a half sugars, please.'

Then I can try my hardest to get it right, adding intuition and flair to attempt perfection. I always do the milking and sugaring myself. With family or friends I try to remember what they have as it's embarrassing to forget. I stir the sugar in very quickly so as not to waste time. It's hard to get the drinks just so.

Action No. 1 Stirring milk or sugar into a hot drink.

Mark No. 1 To bandage my fingers into the right shape with elastoplast.

No. 2 I think about all sorts of things while I cook. My mind wanders through recent events and conversations. Sometimes I'm stunned by the beauty of what I'm cooking, the changing colours and shapes, the picture in the pan.

The way my friend cooks has influenced me a lot. She's Slovenian and



I'm impressed by her kitchen techniques – well, almost intimidated really! She seems so thorough and competent and she always prepares such delicious, nourishing and complete meals. Slovenians are probably more generous than us.

I was very struck by the way in which she always rests the spoon she's cooking with on top of the pan lid while the pan is simmering for a long time. I thought that this was a curious Middle European habit but I was puzzled to notice that her mother did not do the same thing, so, eventually, I asked her what it meant. She explained that a woman had once said to her, when she'd left the spoon standing in the pot – 'Oh, you don't want to cook the spoon, do you?' Ever since then she's put the spoon on top of the pan.

I try and do it whenever I remember to for friendship's sake but secretly I wonder what's so wrong with cooking the spoon!

Action No. 2 Resting a wooden spoon on top of a saucepan.

Mark No. 2 To fix a wooden spoon into the hair on top of my head with a blue hair toggle.

No. 3 When I get angry in my kitchen, I feel the need to do something violent in order to release the tension. I find that throwing something is better than hitting someone.

Once I tried throwing a wine bottle on the floor – but it made an awful dent. Another time I threw an old glass tumbler carefully into the corner of the room but it took ages to clear up and could have been dangerous. When I hurled an electric typewriter on the floor it was very expensive to repair.

I think that the best throwing action is to take a ripe pear and hurl it against a cupboard door. It's a good idea to have a practice, just to make sure that you're going to get it right. I have a run-in of about 10 feet and I use an action similar to the one I tried to learn when I was young – that of bowling a cricket ball overarm. Underarm would be 'sissy' of course.

I hurl the pear at the opposite wall so that it explodes *blam/splat* and I SHOUT at the top of my voice just at the moment of hurling.

I choose a cupboard door to throw against because it's painted with vinyl silk and the pear washes off more easily than from a vinyl matt wall. When I clear up the mess, I check inside the cupboard for little bits of pear. I don't like to see them when they get all brown and dried on.

Action No. 3 Throwing a ripe pear against a cupboard door.

Mark No. 3 To put a pear in the top pocket of my overall – all ready for the next occasion.

No. 4 One of the most soothing things that I do in my kitchen is to rinse and prepare vegetables under fresh cool running water from the tap. I know you shouldn't waste water but this is one of my luxuries. In fact, nowadays, I put the plug in the sink, so that I can use the water for something else whenever possible. I don't feel so guilty that way. I like the

carrots best of all because of the colour and because they are so simple and satisfying to peel.

I know that one should remove as little of the skin as possible because the *goodness*, the *vitamins*, are just under the skin apparently. However, I can never leave a carrot unpeeled – it just wouldn't look right to me.

I have a very skilled technique for peeling them. I hold the carrot in the palm of my hand and I peel from the centre of the carrot towards myself and then turn it round and peel the other half – so quickly, neatly and lovingly under the running water. I watch the splashes and drops of water flying out as they catch the light. It's best when the sun is shining. I turn my hands so that the water pours over my wrists and palms – cleansing and cooling.

The whole experience is overwhelming – the noise of the water gushing out, the sparkles of light from the drops of water, the colour of the carrots, the sensation on my hands. I am shot through with joy.

Action No. 4 Rinsing and peeling carrots under water running from the tap.

Mark No. 4 To splash water from the running tap all over my face and chest – so that I'm drenched.

No. 5 I feel so lucky to have a lovely garden leading straight out from my kitchen but I only manage to get out there occasionally to hang out the washing, tidy up or to look after the plants. It's a treat just to gaze out of the window when the weather's fine, especially in the springtime.

My husband always cuts the grass. It looks so smooth, green and cropped – so lush.

We have three black cats. I admire the way they wander around – nonchalantly striking poses in the kitchen or garden. One of the most thrilling sights is to see a cat bounding across the lawn. It's usually George, the youngest, the most confident one, who does this. He's so graceful. He moves so swiftly and elegantly from one side of the garden to the other. The jet black of his coat against the green grass is breathtaking.

I always feel the urge to copy him. It thrills me to think of being so wild and free. I bend down on all fours and lope across the grass. I really envy him because I'm so clumsy compared to him.

Action No. 5 Pretending to be a cat bounding across the lawn.

Mark No. 5 To fix a shiny black plastic bin bag from my shoulders, with two pegs, like a cape.

No. 6 I buy one particular brand of margarine because it looks so beautiful when you first open the tub.

I get so excited as I ease off the lid – will it be perfect or not? The margarine is obviously piped into the tub with a huge nozzle. The undulations in the surface are smooth and voluptuous. But the best bit is the little pointed nipple in the centre. It's such a wonderful shape, so exquisite. I gaze at it lovingly just for a moment and try to fix that moment

of beauty in my memory. The milky yellow colour is so soothing to look at. I've said it before and I'll say it again – it's moments like this that make it all worthwhile.

Action No. 6 Opening a new tub of margarine to see its unsullied perfection.

Mark No. 6 To smooth some of the margarine carefully onto my cheeks using the tip of my finger.

No. 7

I like to have little tastes, all the time, of as many different things as possible, it keeps me stimulated I think. I call them 'taste sensations'. I think, 'Oh, I must have a taste sensation of that cake mixture' – or 'that biscuit' – or 'that bit of butter'.

Sometimes I think that it's like grazing – moving from one little bit of nourishment to another. Perhaps it's not the stimulation I need but to be constantly fed – to keep a continuous supply of sustenance in order to maintain my blood sugar level.

I never eat a whole biscuit, say, or a whole slice of cake. I just have little broken pieces, little edges and dippings. I was surprised when discussing this action with my friend that she said that I sometimes put the tiny piece of food into my mouth and suck it from between my fingers slowly. I was shocked and embarrassed that she'd observed my actions so minutely.

Sometimes I make stupid, and possibly unhygienic, mistakes. The other day I picked up what I thought was a crumb of cake only to discover that I was chewing a small piece of masking tape!

I chose the mark for this action because of something that happened when I was little. We went to visit a friend of my mother's who had just had a baby. My mother went upstairs to see her friend and the baby in the bedroom. I went up too but they were embarrassed and annoyed at my interruption because she was breastfeeding. I saw the woman's nipple. It looked bright red like a cherry. I thought she'd put lipstick on it.

Action No. 7 Picking up small pieces of food between my thumb and forefinger and popping them into my mouth.

Mark No. 7 To put bright red lipstick on my puckered lips.

No. 8 I try very hard to say the Lord's Prayer every day but I'm hopelessly disorganised about it. I know that I should have a regular structure to my day but I never manage to achieve it.

Consequently I say the Lord's Prayer whenever it pops into my mind – at any time of day or night. When I happen to be in the car, I obviously can't shut my eyes and I just try and move my lips very indistinctly so as not to embarrass anyone. I always feel a bit embarrassed about it, you see. Or at least I'm not embarrassed but I think other people will be if they know what I'm doing. I'd rather not explain it at all but it's such an important action that I have to include it.

When I say the Lord's Prayer in the kitchen, I usually just rest my head in my hands with my elbows on the work surface – sort of bending over. But *really*, of course, one should kneel down to pray. I show this action, in my kitchen, by kneeling on the patio with my face pressed against the window – so that people can clearly see my lips moving.

Action No. 8 Saying the Lord's Prayer while kneeling on the patio.

Mark No. 8 To put on gardening knee pads to protect my knees.

No. 9 I do love to listen to music while I work. Sometimes I have the radio on but it can interrupt my train of thought too much and so I choose music to suit my mood.

My choice is a bit limited really. I don't know a lot about serious music and I'm always forgetting what things are called. I've always found opera very hard to cope with. I went to the opera once when I was at college and I had to *crawl* out on my hands and knees because it made me laugh so much.

I had a breakthrough when I heard that wonderful tune that Pavarotti did for the World Cup. I bought his LP and now I listen to that all the time. It always makes me want to dance. I get carried away and sprinkle spinach leaves or other foodstuffs around me as I dance.

Action No. 9 Dancing when inspired by operatic music.

Mark No. 9 To pin a large spinach leaf to the lapel of my overall with a safety pin.

No. 10 There are certain areas of the kitchen which have become repositories for certain types of possessions. I am very skilled at organising large quantities of objects belonging to our family as I'm in charge of them all. I move them from one place to another in a ceaseless attempt to maintain order – shifting, sifting, keeping track.

I find that the best way to do this is to designate storage areas as goals or targets for each category of possession. Then I know where to aim them and where to find them in the end.

To save time I often throw things in the direction of their goal. People sometimes interpret this as an aggressive action but it's not, it's practical.

These storage areas can become very cluttered so they have to be tidied. Sometimes I start this task but haven't the time to complete it. I take the drawer out but have to put it away again before I've finished. It's so frustrating but I have to remember that every action is ultimately contributing to order.

Action No. 10 Pulling a drawer right out so as to tidy the contents.

Mark No. 10 To hang some cutlery round my neck with a piece of string.

No. 11 From time to time, in my kitchen, I am overcome with weariness. I feel that I can scarcely move another step.

If I'm lucky then I can have a rest. I often have one after lunch – which

is when I used to have a rest as a child. Sometimes I manage to get time for a nap when my children come home from school. I like to curl up on the sofa with a pillow forced into shape under my head. I put on the radio or TV. They always send me straight off to sleep. If I'm on my own I might feel cold and so I use my big black overcoat as a cover. If my children are with me then they sit and watch TV and keep me warm.

The telephone very often wakes me up. It's always a shock.

Action No. 11 Lying down with my head resting on a pillow so as to take a short nap.

Mark No. 11 To stuff a pillow in place, under my overall.

No. 12 This action is the most significant as it ties all the others together. I roam about my kitchen, sometimes in a state of euphoria, completing only parts of a whole range of tasks – never necessarily seeing one task through from start to finish but having a 'stab' at it and then roaming on to the next.

There is a great deal of skill and versatility attached to this action. It is like keeping a set of juggler's balls in the air. I might, for example, sweep some spilled flour and spinach into the corner of the room to be picked up later with a dustpan and brush – answer the telephone and, while I'm talking, sort out some notices on the board – throw the bits of paper towards the bin under the sink – put away some cassettes – get a warm, damp J-cloth, blue, like the sky – wipe some bits of pear off a cupboard door – pick up the bits of paper on the floor and put them in the bin – rinse the J-cloth – put on the kettle, etc. etc. etc.

This ceaseless swirling kitchen action is like gliding through the sky.

Action No. 12 Roaming around the kitchen from task to task.

Mark No. 12 To tuck two new blue J-cloths in between the sides of my heels and my slippers so that they fly out behind.

No. 13 This is my 13th action – to make my Baker's dozen.

I put the cake stand on a coffee table so that I can be seen better. That's a high enough pedestal for me as I suffer from vertigo and I might find standing on the kitchen table too frightening.

The cake stand is a very strong professional one that I bought years ago. I wouldn't advise posing on an ordinary one as it might break.

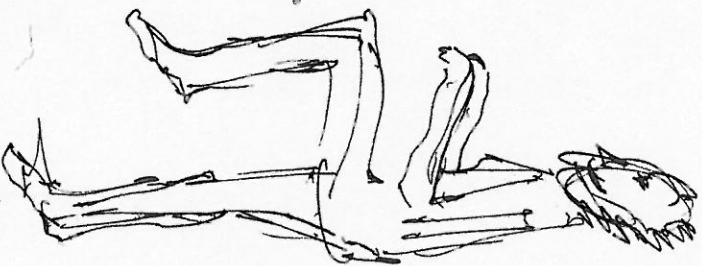
I stand with one foot on the cake stand and revolve round slowly so that all the marks can be noted and remembered. It's the image they all make together that matters most.

Action No. 13 Showing all the marks whilst standing on a cake stand placed on a coffee table.

Mark No. 13 To show this image to the public.

Opposite: Drawing in sketch book (1990). Paper, ink.

6.12.87
[Oh... talking, talking, talking, talking,
round about we go....]



[Flapping about the room
hot, hot, hot, hot, hot...]