

## So Garam Masala is a spice...*not* a yoga position

I think it's safe to say that when I signed up to do Pilates at Body Nuture last year there was no anticipation that the session schedule would be inclusive of Indian cookery. There was most definitely no mention of it on the leaflet. But there again, over the year I've come to expect a little more of the unexpected from Body Nuture.

Perhaps it's not so far removed from the spirit and philosophy that runs through the little studio that is tucked away off the main road in a converted chapel in Egerton. Body Nuture is not *just* about 'exercise'. You can go to your local gym for a guaranteed safe sweat. Entering Body Nuture on the other hand and outcomes may be less tangible, a little less predictable, not quite as straightforward.

So, on a blustery blue sky September afternoon 10 of us 'Body Nuture Girls' met at Rosie's house on Wigan road. We'd all abandoned the usual weekend Saturday duties to observe Rosie who would demonstrate how to throw together an authentic Indian curry in less time than it takes to put out the Pilates equipment and not a jar of Sharwood's curry paste in sight. Of course we didn't all know each other since we go to different classes. I do that annoying thing where you recognise people only by virtue of the colour of their yoga pants or their pilates top – take them out of the studio, put them in someone's front room with real clothes and I can't think what to say – or who they are. I'm not sure if any of us really knew what to expect on arrival. There really is something quite daunting about putting yourself into someone else's kitchen with nine other ladies - particularly when your knowledge of spices is limited to the ingredients of Christmas mulled wine. Who knew you can vary your Garam Masala with extra bay leaves and star anise? Indeed who knew star anise was, star-shaped?

We stood with our notebooks, backs against the kitchen cabinets eager to listen to Rosie as she shared her culinary secrets interspersed with family tales and stories from India and at the same time wondering if you were the only person who had never (never ever) made a curry 'from scratch'. It took me back to days of chemistry lessons where we'd gather round the fume cupboard to watch Mrs. Fairweather 'demo' some experiment in goggles. Needless to say unlike the chemistry lesson we weren't raising our hands in turn or wearing goggles and the chatter and chunnerings belied our own culinary uncertainties but we were very much like 'pupils': How do you spell that? What temperature do you bake the coriander? How much water? How much ginger? Can you freeze tomato puree? (Is this a silly question?) I never did find out how to spell the spice beginning with 'A'; it remained in my notes the 'Yellow-tin spice'.

Thankfully we weren't given any tasks to see if we'd been taking it all in – rolling out individual chapattis was task enough. By the time we'd watched Rosie cook a kidney bean curry, a chicken curry and a daal – the September sun was streaming through the skylight and you began to get some understanding as to why food - with all its preparation and

eating – is so important in keeping families and people together. Saturday duties, new terms, fading suntans and holiday drained bank balances – magicked away in 90 minutes.

My daughter goes to India in November, I've never been and like many of us parents would love to go but will have to make do for now with experiencing the country and its culture vicariously through her photos and travel blogs. But last Saturday I did get a little glimpse for myself in Rosie's Wigan Road kitchen that took me to an India beyond the chaotic images often seen on the news. Deep smells and unspellable spices, sizzling goods and ambers in a pan flecked with reds and greens: a soundtrack of laughter and chatter round a table as we shared food and company.

So, I've diaried in the new terms meetings, I've planned my Pilates sessions, I've taken the Winter coats to the dry cleaners and I've made mental notes-to-self about work-life balance: stay away from X-Factor (at least until the last 4!); walk the dog (very) early in the morning; shop online; learn to love wheatgrass powder. In a world where efficiency usually means the need to know precisely what tomorrow looks like I'm grateful to Body Nuture for injecting a little bit of uncertainty into the week ....an element of surprise. For not selling out to what you see is (only) what you get.

If you love the idea of Harry Potter's Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  or occasionally wish you could push beyond the coats at the back of your wardrobe and step out into a Narnia-like land then Body Nuture may be for you. Yes, for sure, it is about Pilates and Yoga (my back has never been stronger); yes, it has programmes and packages, workshops and websites but there is that occasional something else, that you can't plan for – or anticipate. That makes you stop. Heaven knows what my daal will taste like and my notes are a jumble: but a bit like a good gig when you can't recall all the song titles but you know it put a great big smile on your face and you can still feel the beat days later – so Saturday afternoon did what most of the stuff on my wall planner cannot do. It unexpectedly took me somewhere else and left me with the warm feeling that I will return.