

Nigel Slater: Eating Together review - the magical world of dumplings

Kachori, pierogi, ravioli - for Nigel, food is about so much more than sustenance: it's about friendship, memories and expressing identity

Sam Wollaston

Tuesday 2 June 2015 06.59 BST

Nigel Slater is going on a tour of the world, and he's not even leaving the country. A celebration of multi-culinary Britain, called *Nigel Slater: Eating Together* (BBC1), like a raised middle finger to another Nigel - Farage - though I'm pretty sure Nigel Slater doesn't do raised fingers, unless it's to stuff something. It's a tour with a theme, and in this first leg the theme is dumplings.

Starting with Great British ones, which aren't even proper dumplings, if you're of the school that says a dumpling should be a parcel of something. The laziest, fattest dumplings of all then, just big globs of pig-fat dough, wrapping nothing, just lying around lazily in Nigel's stew, getting even fatter as they soak up the heat and the juices. The dumpling equivalent of a Brit on holiday, basically.

To Gujarat next - that's Gujarat in rural Lincolnshire - where a lady called Nita makes neater dumplings. Pea kachori, specifically. "I think some people are slightly put off by the idea that this is going to take a very very long time, but in fact once you actually start cooking it is amazingly quick," says Nigel, about Indian food in general. What! Nita's kachoris involve blitzing peas with ginger and chilli for the filling, then making a dough and rolling it out, wrapping one in the other to make beautiful little parcels which are then fried ... and that's just for a tasty, crunchy snack.

I think Nigel's idea of amazingly quick is a bit different from mine, but then for him, food is about so much more than sustenance. It's about friendship and memories, expressing and preserving identity and a lot more besides. Nita's family came to Lincolnshire from Gujarat via Uganda, which they had to leave quickly in 1972. It's not just peas and ginger in those kachoris, there are tears, persecution and terror; painful memories too - Idi Amin had his own (bloody) hand in the recipe. The nice bit of the story is how welcome Nita and her family were made to feel when they arrived in Lincolnshire. Another (now pea and gingery) finger up to the other Nigel, then.

Next up, a more recent arrival, former ballroom dancer Rafael from Poland, who shows Nigel how to make pierogi. Again it's "so simple". Of course it is, Nigel. The good news is that you can get ready-made pierogi in the polski sklep that you'll now have up the road. And even if Nigel's show hasn't quite convinced you (me) of the simplicity of making your own, he might have given you the confidence to go in. Oh, and you can get sauerkraut there, too. There's identity preserved for you, in a packet.

And so to Bedford, for Italian pierogi, aka ravioli. Made by a nice lady called Liz, part of Bedford's 20% Italian community. They came, after the war, to make bricks. And ravioli. Mmm.

These days you can get all your Italian, and Polish, and Indian ingredients, but back in the day these people had to rely on parcels from the old country. More parcels you see, it's all about parcels. When we Brits move abroad, to Dubai mainly, we just have big balls of dough posted to us. I imagine.