

Waste: reading

Recently I was invited to a friend's house for supper – and had a meal like I've never had before!

Ben, the host, had also invited his fiancée Marina, and another work colleague called Alistair. We were all, including Marina, a little surprised by the invitation. It's not that Ben is unsociable, or a bad cook, but he's very frugal. No, not mean, it's just that he never spends more than he has to. He's never been wasteful or bought anything compulsively. Money has been hard earned and so should be spent wisely.



I remember one time we got a pay rise. The money was backdated a few months and so we were paid more money than normal one month. I went out and bought a microwave oven. Alistair decided to splash out on a new coat. And Ben? Did he take Marina out for a celebratory meal? Buy a small present for her? A little something for himself perhaps? Nothing. Ben says he is against consumerism. Why buy something he already has, or doesn't really need? Better to keep the money for something important rather than spend it frivolously.

Last year Ben told us about **Buy Nothing Day**. The organisers of the event want everyone to try and not buy anything at all for one whole Saturday before Christmas. They say that it is challenging to last 24 hours without spending any money, especially this time of the year. The idea is that people think more about why they buy the things they do. "20 percent of the world's population is consuming more than 80 percent of the world's natural resources." Ben explained.

So how come he was inviting us round for a meal? Had he changed? Was this a new, extravagant Ben?! Had he bought something special for his friends, or were we going to eat beans on toast? He greeted us at the door with a grin, and as we entered the smells of cooking wafted in from the kitchen. "We thought we might be getting baked beans," said Alistair, "but you've really cooked us something!"

Ben ushered us into his dining room where a laid table was waiting for us. He was still smiling in a strange way. "Nothing but the best for my friends!" said Ben. We all sat down and looked nervously at each other – what was he up to? "I hope," said Marina, "that he turns out to be a good cook!"

Ben returned with a tray and four bowls of steaming soup. We sniffed – it smelled OK! We took a small spoonful – it tasted OK! It wasn't quite clear what kind of soup it was so we

asked. "It's a mixture of carrots, potatoes and tomatoes.", replied Ben. "And some wild mint from the garden." We finished the soup and Ben took four empty bowls back to the kitchen. Not bad.

The next course was also a little strange in that we didn't quite know what it was again. There wasn't any meat or fish we could see. "It's just another mixture of things," answered Ben patiently. "This time I've fried together some peppers, mushrooms, courgettes and lots of onions." There was some bread too, but it was a little stale.

As we ate we chatted about work, other friends and what film we'd like to see later that evening. Eventually the subject turned back to what we were eating. "Was there a recipe for this," asked Marina, "or did you make it up?" Ben put his fork down. "What I cooked depended on what I could find." Marina was surprised. "But you can find anything in British supermarkets these days." "But there's less choice in what you can find *outside* supermarkets." He replied.

We all stared at him in amazement. "What do you mean *outside* supermarkets?" asked Alistair.

Seeing that we had all finished the food Ben decided that it was time to spill the beans, as it were. He had read recently that an enormous amount of food was thrown away every day. Apparently supermarkets throw away 5 per cent of their food. And street markets too – what they can't sell they leave on the side of the road because they only want to sell fresh food. So Ben decided to see if this was true or not. He went to look inside his local supermarket bins. There he found packet food that was slightly out of date, bags full of sandwiches and loaves of bread. From the street market there were boxes of discarded carrots, potatoes, peppers and some brown but edible bananas. "And many other things too.", said Ben.

We were all shocked. "You mean, all this food you found in the street?", I asked. Yes, that was the case. Ben said he can afford not to eat free food so would not do this regularly. "Because there are many people homeless and poor people who need the food, but the amount of food thrown away is enough to feed millions of people."

So Ben had successfully provided a decent meal for his friends, and made us aware of the how much food is wasted everyday. But what was for dessert?