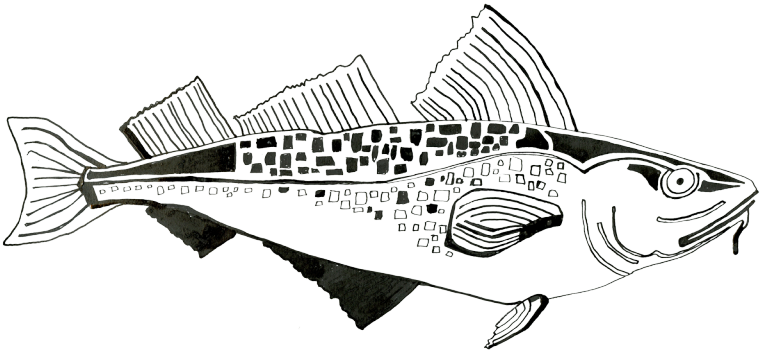
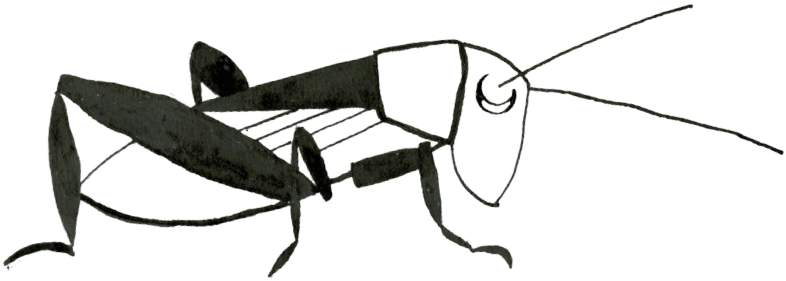


memories kitchen

a project by On The Record CIC

in collaboration with Simon Wroe
& Brixton People's Kitchen



inspiration

The inspiration for memories kitchen came from speaking to dozens of people from all over the world about their food memories.

Recurring themes, techniques and ingredients are revealed in this menu booklet.

We didn't have space to quote everybody in this booklet, but we are grateful to all the wonderful individuals who shared their memories.

On the Record and volunteers spoke to people from:

Myatt's Fields South TRA · Larkhall Park Community Garden · Loughborough Food Farm · Myatt's Fields Lunch Club · Loughborough Estate over-60s club · Incredible Edible Lambeth · Oval House Theatre · Stockwell Good Neighbours · Vida Walsh Centre · Myatt's Field Park · Minet Library · Brixton food bank · Holland Grove · Cloisters · St John the Divine Older People's Lunch Club · Age Concern Lambeth · the Mulberry Centre · Father Nature · We Care Childcare · Vassall and Coldharbour Forum · South London Cares.

Thank you to our funders The London Community Foundation (in partnership with NHS Lambeth and Lambeth Council).

Thank you to the community leaders who helped promote our project, especially:
Lucy Williams · Victoria Sherwin · Sarah Hoyle · John Denny · Lovemore Bosha · Rosa Friend.

starter

smoked haddock soup / smoky aubergine soup (v.) served with fresh seeded bread

(see p. 8-13)

Questions:

What did you eat as a child?

What dishes seemed 'exotic' to you as a child?

main course

oxtail ragu with gratin/ sweet potato & cassava gratin with cashew & coriander pesto (v.) served with fresh greens & hot pepper sauce

(see p. 14-17)

Questions:

Are there any foods from your childhood that are now overlooked or forgotten?

Who did the cooking and who helped in the kitchen when you were a child?

dessert

coconut macaroons made with condensed milk & garnished with glacé cherries. unsweetened chewy mango

(see p.18-21)

Question:

Have you ever picked, foraged for or grown your own food?

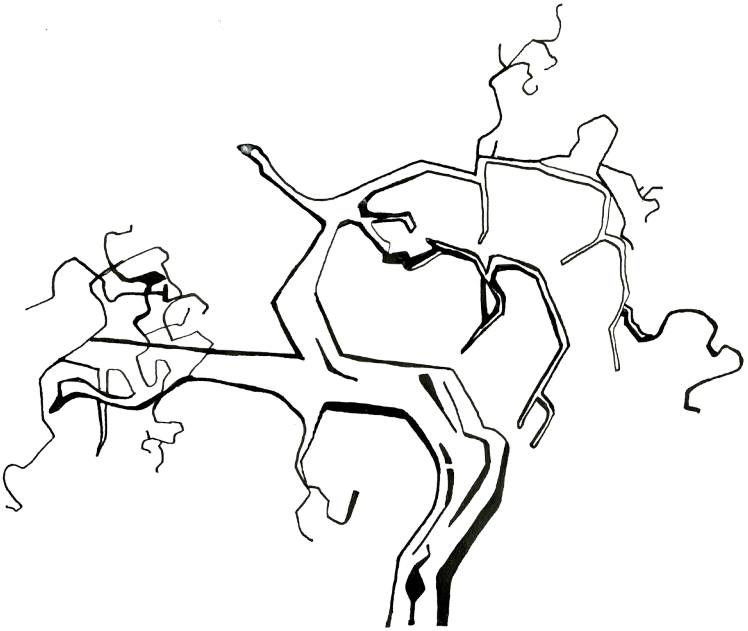
drink

hot hibiscus & honey

(see p.22-23)

Question:

What edible ingredients are used as medicine in your culture?



smoke and fires

open fires, smoked fish, charred aubergines, buttered crumpets toasted on the crackling hearth, burned bangers.

Velma Harry, born in Jamaica:

“There was nothing growing when I came to England, just branches, because I came in the middle of winter and all the leaves had gone. I thought they were old dried trees and what we did in Jamaica was to chop wood to make fire to do our cooking and so on. And I said to my mum, ‘That would be great for my granny because she could use all the dry trees to make fire.’ All this firewood and nobody’s using it, that’s what it looked like to me at the time.”

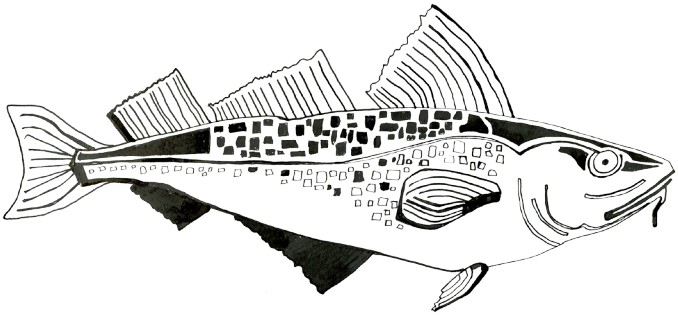
Zena Maddison, born in London:

"When we went to Yeovil as evacuees, the foster parents weren't very nice at all. The woman got on well with my mother, because her husband died when my mother was staying there. My mother was very kind to her – got her through that.

But when my sister and I went there (my mother had gone to London at this point) we weren't treated as part of the family. We had to eat our meals in a little scullery between the kitchen and the dining room, and it was very dark and cold.

There was a miserable little fire, and I didn't like the food. I can tell you, I can remember to this day what we had. We had two pieces of bread and dripping for breakfast. Two sausages, burnt, and boiled potatoes with the fat thrown over them. And for tea we had two slices of bread and dripping again. On Sundays we got a piece of cake. But my little brother couldn't eat that, he was only two and a half and it made him bilious.

So my sister and I used to save our pocket money and buy him apples and buns on the way to and from school. He survived on that. And my sister and I couldn't look at a sausage for years after that."



fish and fishing boats

salted, smoked, soused, baked, steamed, gefilte, fried, wrapped in newspaper, disguised with tomato sauce, screamed by fish wives, hurled at the ceiling by an irate father, eaten by the sea or by the side of the road.

Joan Hunt, born in Coldharbour Lane:

"We used to have cookery classes at school. And our teacher decided that for about six classes we would cook herrings in different ways - souse them, bake them, do everything with them. And my mother, who loved herrings, was quite excited by this. So she decided, just the week before the War, that she would give my father herrings every day. Well when it got to about Thursday, my father came home and when she put his plate of herrings down, he took one look, picked the plate up, put his hand underneath it and whooshed it right up to the ceiling, and the herrings stuck on the ceiling. Then the bodies dropped down, but the skin stayed on the ceiling, and of course, being wartime, nobody was into decorating or whatever. The skin stayed on the ceiling until we moved from the house, I think."

Billy Cummins, born in County Wexford:

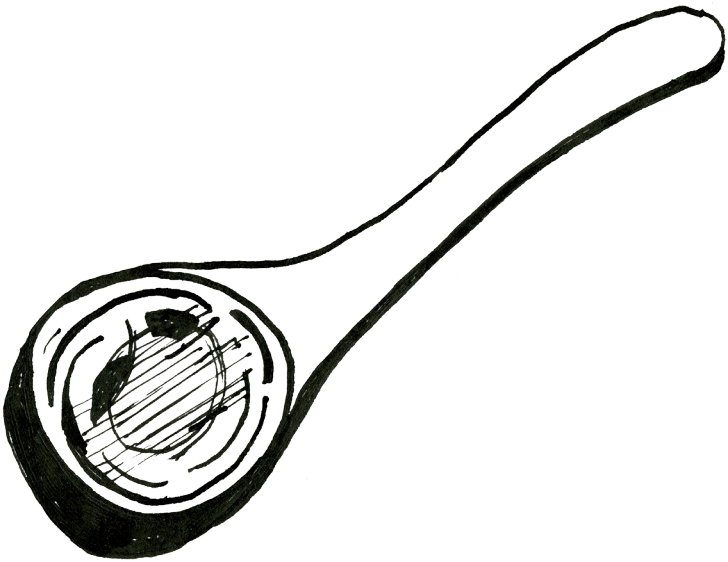
“We didn’t have a fridge in those days and to preserve things you used old-fashioned methods. And we might get a whole box of herrings, there was 120 or something in a box, from the local fishermen. We would salt the herrings and, because we were woodworkers, the sawdust from the circular saw was used to smoke them. It used to just smoulder and provide the smoke inside a small, say twenty-gallon, drum.”

Sylvie Kone, born in Brittany:

“My mum was a farmer. My dad was a fisherman. So we had lots of beach, and lots of green, and lots of farm land. We used to play between the cow and the sand! We used to build a boat in the trees, which was quite strange, but I suppose it makes sense now. We used to put little pieces of wood in the trees, and then we’d play, ‘I’m the captain of the boat.’”

Lucy Williams, remembering Manchester:

“Fish n’ chips is the best memory. It was a Friday dish. Friday you’re not supposed to cook so you just get takeaways. A lot of people used to get chips, it was the ‘in’ thing. I used to think, ‘Why are they putting fish n’ chips in newspaper?’ It would taste good, funnily enough, but then they banned it ‘cause of the ink. It was never the same again, fish n’ chips! Then there was some discussion about how it would be good to put the fish n’ chips in an inner lining and then have newspaper on the outside. Eating it out of the newspaper was probably good for you anyway! All that knowledge! I call it a memory dish ‘cause I will always remember the newspaper.”



soup

hearty, ever-present, thickened with dumplings or kneidlach or egusi seed, borscht spreading a mask of steam across your face.

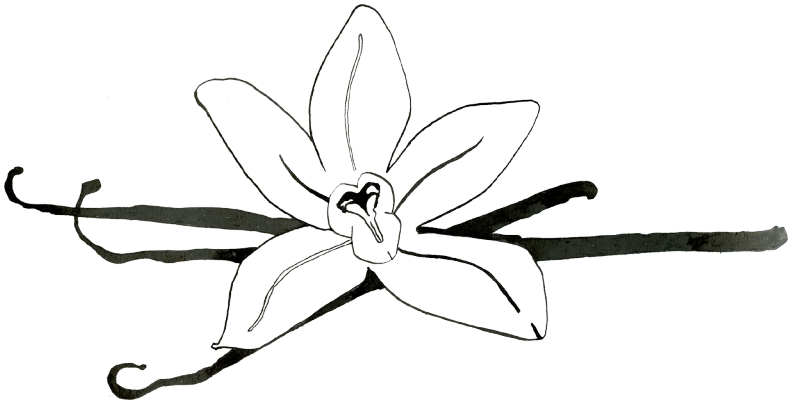
Roberta Anderson, born in Scotland:

“Money was very tight and in Scotland it was all home-made foods, and lots of soup, hearty soups. Like the other ladies, out picking the blackberries and the raspberries. A fare amount of haggis in amongst it all. I still eat similar food and my children are forced to as well. It’s, ‘Oh not soup again, mum!’”

Zena Maddison, born in London:

“My grandfather was a shoemaker in Poland. But he was also the learned man of the village, because Jewish families – the boys were taught to read and write, the girls weren’t in the early days. He was quite bright, and he used to write letters for everybody in the village. Or he’d go to see a lawyer with them. My grandfather and his brother came to England for a holiday, and they were so amazed by the freedom that we have here, because in Poland you didn’t have that, the Russians were the lords and masters. And also there were pogroms there, which were very alarming. Anyway, so having seen what it was like to live in an actual free country, he couldn’t rest until he saved up enough money to bring his family to England.

My grandmother was known to be a very good cook. In Poland the Russians asked her to cook for them. And she made typical Jewish food, they had soup with kneidlach, which was kind of little dumplings. They’re made with flour and chicken fat – it’s little balls, and she would boil them up and put them in the soup.”



seeded bread with butter

soft or crunchy, freshly baked aroma, feelings of home,
poppy seed bite, plaited challah, impossible pretzel logic.

Lila Morris, raised in a Jewish family in Manchester:

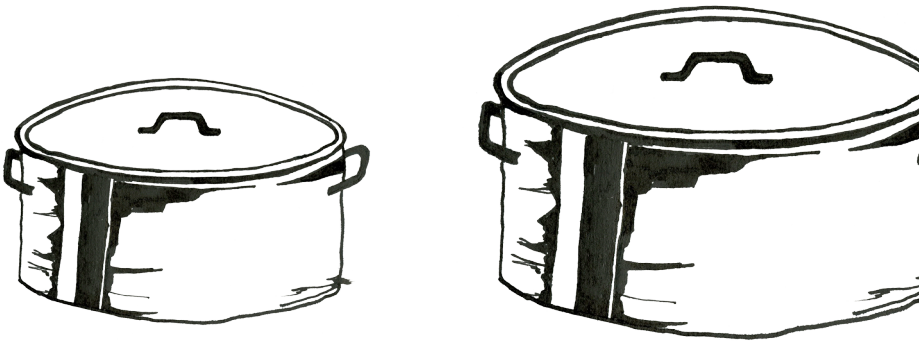
“I used to love butter. Well, I still love butter! And one of the things my father used to do, believe it or not, he’d get a lump of butter – a ball of butter! - and roll it in sugar and give it me! I was about two and a half, three.”

Spiridiona Waltier, born in Malta:

"My dad was a lot of fun, he used to give us piggybacks in the hall running around. He had a bakery in Malta. He used to bake his bread on wood-fired, natural tiles. Father made two kinds, soft and crunchy, because people preferred different kinds. The ones that were near the flame would be crunchy. The hot bread comes out and all it needs is a knob of butter or some olive oil. Oh, the smell of baking bread, people used to know he'd opened the oven, they'd come flocking! Because these bakery ovens are wood-fired, some people prefer to take a dish to be cooked in there rather than in their home cooker, because it gets more tasty, the heat gets through the meat better. But it happened that some people would mix their dishes up, they'd take someone else's roast home, and then their family would cause a riot! 'You didn't bring our food!'"

Jacquie Kemish-Hunt:

"I went to Germany, to a seaside area twenty miles from Hamburg when I was sixteen. My mum's sister had a bed and breakfast there, so I stayed with her for six weeks during the summer. We would go to cafés in the afternoons. There was beautiful cream cake, and pistachio nuts and chocolate ice cream served in these beautiful glass dishes. England's nothing like it! In France, Denmark, Holland, they present food. There was also artisan bread - sourdough, rye, I would go to the bakery every day and get sliced bread. The nearest things English people had then were French sticks!"

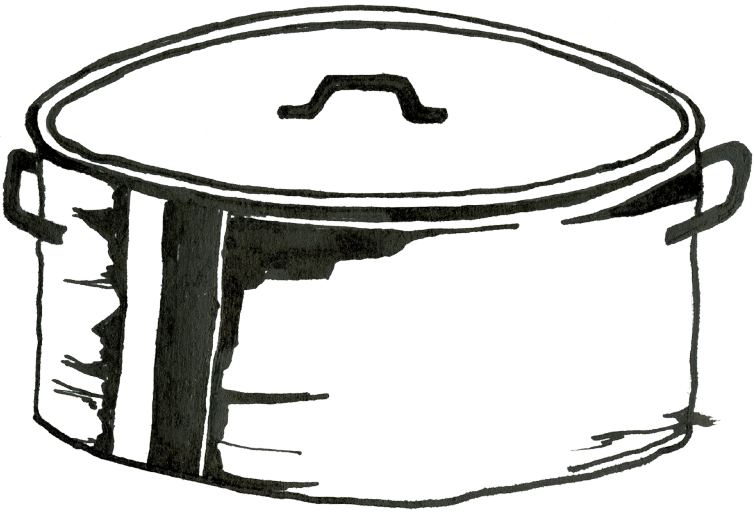


big pot of oxtail stew

seasoned and slowly braised, Dutch pots bubbling up, grandmother grinding peppers between two stones, smells of bay, thyme and onion filling the kitchen, tasting better if you helped peel the carrots.

Tola Aleshe, born in Nigeria:

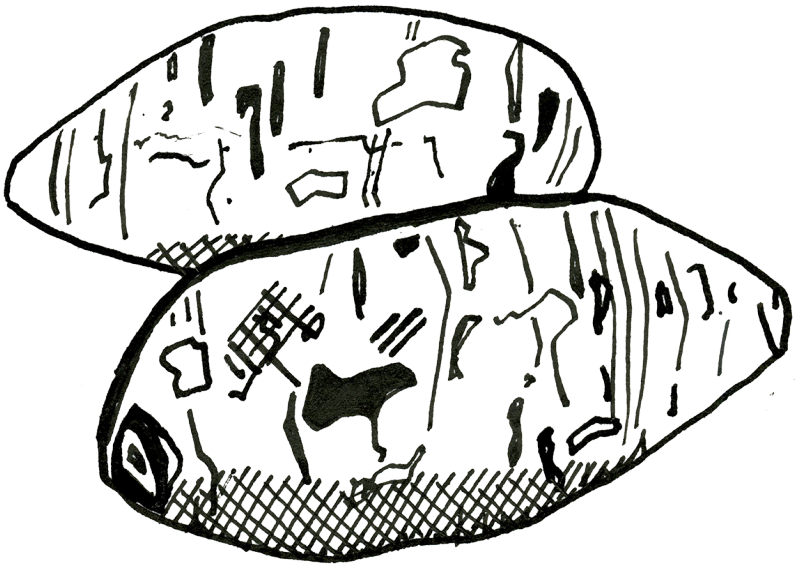
“We use liquidisers to grind our peppers, tomatoes to make our stews, but I distinctly remember my grandmother actually used two stones and rubbed them together. I don’t know whether it’s the method she used, but hers always tasted so much nicer than us using machinery to do ours. It was the same stew with the same ingredients and what have you, but I think it was the way she just cooked it very slowly, took her time. And it was like, ‘I’m going to grandma’s for lunch’ and mum’s like, ‘What’s your grandma giving you that I’m not giving you at home?’ And I was like, ‘I don’t know what it is but hers tastes so much better.’ Grandma’s stews were to die for.”



Shanita on her Dutch pot:

"It's a round base and it's the heavy weight that you need to produce the good food, I feel. So my Dutch pot is from Jamaica. I've had my Dutch pot for nine years. You do look after it, you know. You can't put it in the dishwasher so that's disappointing, I have to clean it up properly. When you're cooking your food in a Dutch pot and the oil's in the bottom and you're browning your oxtail, chicken, curry goat or whatever (sometimes I even cook spaghetti Bolognese in it), you stand back and observe and you can see your meat bubbling up, to me that feels good...

The culture behind Jamaican food, we all get together, we all enjoy, we all eat until our belly is full and I did love that. So what I try to do now in my life when I'm cooking on a Sunday, as they say, 'Food is running,' I do invite people round, family and friends and they do come to eat. 'Cause food is a way, I believe, to someone's soul."



sweet potato and cassava

waxed for protection, source of heat, served in communal bowls, reminiscent of Lancashire hot pot or shepherd's pie when baked with milk.

Elizabeth Smith, born in Nigeria:

"I just realise it now, because we ate carbohydrate more, we had excessive heat, but people were not just sitting. People were moving about, the exercise was farming, carrying things, natural ways of doing things. So whatever you eat, you just exercise it off. That was when I was young. So now people don't exercise as much, they eat more processed food, they end up with diabetes. We grew a lot of African vegetables, cassava, yam, we grow corn,

we grow squash, pumpkin. A lot of leaf vegetables like cabbage and spinaches. We ate more of that than meat because meat was expensive... We didn't miss meat, in place of meat we ate peas and beans. So we getting enough protein from those things... When I was little things were still African way. We eat from a communal bowl so you have to make sure your hand is clean. When we finish eating food, all the little children would sit down on a mat and one elderly person would sit on the chair and the elderly person would just tell us a story. Most things were not documented, it was from father to son, mother to daughter. It was something to look forward to when you finish eating food."

Judy Joseph, born in Trinidad to Grenadian parents:

"It was 1999 and I spent six months with my aunt in Grenada and they all thought I was, yes, anglicised. People were surprised that I do know my roots. One of my aunt's friends grew yams and cassava and bananas, and on Saturday mornings he would go and dig up cassava and other 'provisions' because he donated them to a local home for the elderly. I said to him, 'I'd love to see the land and how cassava grows.' I was so excited about digging up food myself, so excited to get fresh things. I left the cassava in the outhouse for a couple of days, and when I came back to cook it, it was all soft. I went to my aunt and said, 'Why has the cassava gone like this?' If I hadn't dug it up myself, I would think someone had given me stale ones. I started thinking, 'I never have this problem in England.' My aunt said, 'If you notice, the cassava in England has candle-like wax over it, that's for protection, it lasts much longer.' I was really upset because I love cassava and I dug it up with my own hands. I can still almost taste the disappointment."

coconut

shaken from tall trees by a strong man, cutlass-cracked, slurped through a straw, 'pon the head to remedy fever, thickened with condensed milk, topped with a glacé cherry by baby boomers.

Isalene Harrison, born in Barbados:

"When the coconut trees are quite tall, my grandmother used to let them dry and when they dry they drop. When they drop she just take a cutlass and she just cut that shell open, she get the coconut inside. She would grate it and she would make coco bread, she'd make sugar cake, she'd make coconut oil. When you have a headache, a fever, we have a type of tree, you pick some of its leaves, you warm those leaves and you put on those leaves this coconut oil. They put it on your head and then tie your head, and it just draws the sickness out. Your headache goes, your pain goes.

Eugenie Spencer, born in Jamaica:

"But you can't do that here!"

Isalene Harrison:

"If people see you with leaves 'pon your head and your head tied up, they think you crazy. We living in the modern world now. But at home, you got pain, any type of pain, they got the remedy for it. The only thing they could not give is life."

mangos & other fruit

plucked fresh from trees by children's hands, cautionary tale of black heart man, the longing for home fruits, bottled or dried in diaspora.

Jennifer Reeson, grew up in Battersea:

"Party food - sometimes we'd have tinned peaches and pears and pour carnation milk over. Yeah, and fruit cocktail. There was only a couple of little grapes and you used to fight your brother and sister for the grapes. Might be one or two little cherries in there as well but they were more like glacé cherries."

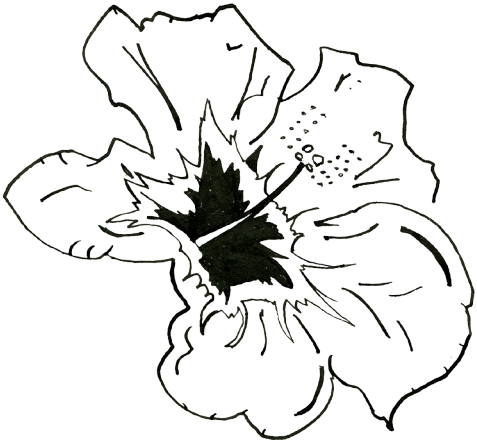
Tuffking, born in the UK to Grenadian parents:

"My father used to bring me mango juice. I used to cry, you know, and he used to give me mango juice to make me quiet!

On Sundays, me and my mother used to have a chicken. We used to sit down at the table and we used to take the wish bone and take a little finger and say, 'Make a wish.' And we used to break the wish bone. And we used to play cards and she used to do some good impersonations – make me laugh. But she died a long time ago. I can't remember what I used to wish for."

Velma Harry, born in Jamaica:

"All the fruit we have from the West Indies in Brixton market we had on our land and we were free to eat as much as we like. Sometimes we eat fruit all day. It was an adventure but we didn't realise it at the time. We'd be gone for the whole day visiting our friends, house to house, and our parents don't worry about us because they know we're safe. And we just explore the hills and other people's gardens... We didn't have a post office in the village. And we used to have to go to the post office and collect the letters. Our parents told us, 'If you loiter or stay long, the black heart man will take you away.' Black heart man would take us away and scare the life out of us, and use us to make medicine. So we had to go and get back quickly. Sometimes when I eat mangos it reminds me of that."



natural remedies

hibiscus a.k.a. karkade and honey, carrot punch with condensed milk and nutmeg, milky pobs, porridge and paps, hot ginger and lemon, refreshing mauby fizz, picking bush for medicine, oh and don't dismiss the dirt.

Eugenie Spencer, born in Jamaica:

"My mum, she don't take you to a doctor, she don't have the money when you're a little child. She know so many bush! If you are having flu, bad flu, she will go in the bush and pick five or six different bushes and boil it in a pot, throw it in a wash pan, put a piece of board over it and sit you on it, cover you over it with a cloth. And it's hot! And you say, 'Oh it hot it hot! I want to come off!' 'Stay there,' she says, 'and you will sweat! Sweat out all the fever.' And she put you to bed... Next day you run out to play again.

Isalene Harrison, born in Barbados:

“We’ve got a drink made from mauby bark. And when the bark dry you boil it, you put cinnamon, you put cloves, you may put a bay leaf into it and you let it boil. You add water, you add sugar and essence and you make a drink… It’s really nice with ice, but it’s bitter so you have to add sugar. Mauby bark. If you go to Baldwins in East Street, I’m sure you’ll get it there. And you know another thing what they sell in Baldwins, and this is true - from every country in the world, they sell dirt. It comes in a block and if you are ill you ask for this dirt from whatever country you’re from, you eat it and you’re better. You never heard of that?”

Lovemore Bosha, born in Zimbabwe:

“What I’ve heard about the dirt is - you know molehills? If you go to any area that you’ve never been to before, you’ve got to eat the dirt from the molehill to give your body the immunity.”

Crispin Swayne, born in the UK:

“Even ordinary loam soil contains natural antidepressants. It’s called mycobacterium vaccae, which stimulates serotonin uptake.”

memories kitchen

The London Community Foundation

BRIXTON PEOPLE'S KITCHEN

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