

**A  
TASTE  
OF  
LIFE**

Caribbean cookbook from  
a care home in South London

Introduction	3
Breadfruit	5
Ackee and Saltfish	7
Cho-Cho and Rice	9
Pineapple juice	11
Sorrel Drink	13
Fried Plantain	15

This book is dedicated to all those who participated in the project. Unfortunately, it is not possible to credit anyone by name due to the restrictions the ethical approval we received for the project placed on confidentiality. All names have been changed except my own.

# Introduction

In 2014 I facilitated a ten week Reminiscence Arts project in a care home. I worked with a Jamaican resident named John and Gloria, a member of care staff, also of Caribbean origin. John was living with dementia but still remembered and enjoyed sharing stories and recipes about Jamaican food. Together they taught me how to make some of their favourite dishes. This book documents what I learnt.

Each week John and Gloria taught me a new recipe. I cooked them at home returning the following week with samples for them to taste. They would give me their verdict and tips on how I could improve them. On John's advice I sourced all the ingredients from Brixton Market where he used to shop. The Market was local to me but many of the ingredients were unfamiliar. I remember on one of my weekly trips to Brixton Market trying to identify a breadfruit armed only with their description of it and an image I'd downloaded from the internet. Other ingredients were familiar but I learnt new ways of using them. For example, boiling the skin of a pineapple to make a refreshing drink.

Two other residents in the care home, Mary and Pearl, joined us for the final five sessions of the project. Like me they were unfamiliar with Caribbean food. We held, smelt and looked closely at each ingredient. Mary asked lots of questions about the taste and use of the ingredients showing a particular interest in the ackee. Pearl used to be very involved in her local community and clearly still enjoyed being in company. Now suffering with advanced dementia she struggled to find words and form sentences and socialising had become a challenge. In the sessions, however, she often became animated smiling, laughing and occasionally contributing to the conversation.

Hearing our discussions and seeing the food other care staff and one of the cleaners, all of Caribbean origin, came over to join us and share their stories, recipes and cooking tips. The food enabled residents and care staff to relate to each other beyond the cared for / carer relationship and for knowledge, opinions and stories to be shared.

John eloquently captured the role food plays in our lives when he described the ackee and saltfish as 'a taste of life'. Nearly a year after the project ended I continue to make the recipes for friends and family and to shop in Brixton Market with a little more knowledge of the produce. Ackee and saltfish is a firm favourite and has become a regular meal in our house. I hope you will enjoy these recipes as much as I have.

Jayne Lloyd



½ breadfruit cubed  
400 ml tin coconut milk  
½ onion finely chopped

**Gloria's tip**

*You can tell a breadfruit is ripe when the skin is slightly brown and the flesh has turned from almost white to a yellowy cream colour.*

**Pearl's verdict**

*'ummmm' and a big smile*

# breadfruit

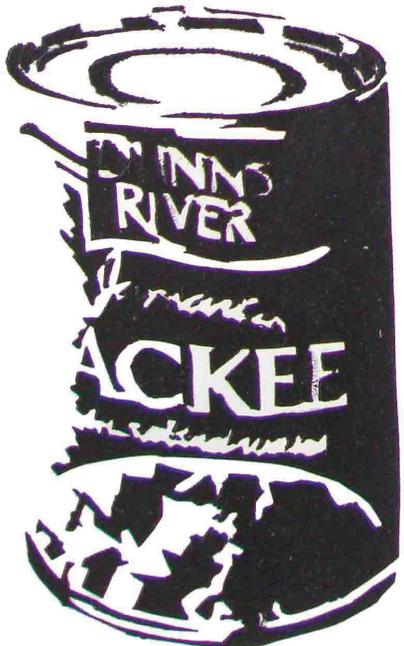
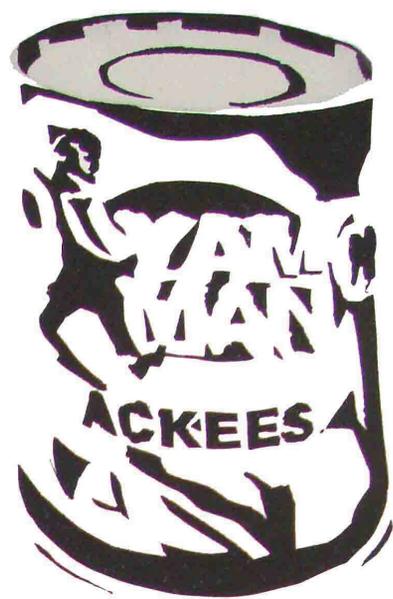
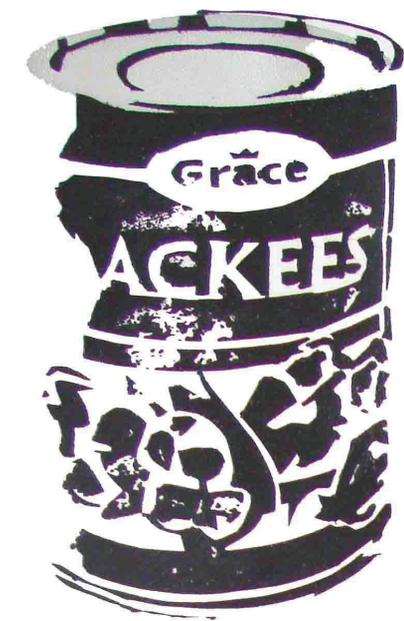
*Serves 4*

**Breadfruit is a fruit that grows on trees in the Caribbean. It has a doughy texture and can be eaten instead of rice or bread with dishes like ackee and saltfish. John suggested roasting the breadfruit but I didn't have an oven at the time so this is Gloria's recipe for cooking breadfruit in coconut milk on a hob.**

Place all ingredients in a pan.

Bring to boil.

Cover pan and simmer until the breadfruit is a soft doughy texture.



# ackee and saltfish

*Serves 4*

5540 g / 1 tin ackee  
300 g / 1 pack salt fish  
2-3 tomatoes chopped  
½ red or yellow pepper chopped  
½ onion cubed  
2 cloves garlic chopped  
½ scotch bonnet chilli chopped  
2 tsp vegetable oil

This dish was a firm favourite with the group and is a recipe I continue to cook at home. It did, however, cause some debate between John and Gloria over the amount of tomatoes that should be added. I'm with John on this, I like to add lots of tomatoes to sweeten the salty fish. However, the argument for using less tomatoes is that it allows the taste of the ackee to come through.

Ackee is intrinsically linked to John's Jamaican roots. He proudly told us how it only grows in Jamaica and is a national symbol. In England you can only buy it in tins. This is because parts of the plant are poisonous and prepared incorrectly can cause sickness.

The taste and texture of ackee is hard to describe. Mary often asked if it was like rice or a nut and John described it as greasy. The closest thing I could find to compare it to is avocado, although it really is like nothing I've tasted before.

## **John's tip**

*Add black pepper and more tomatoes and serve yam and banana plantain on the side.*

## **John's verdict**

*You could go into business.*

## **My tip**

*Try adding a sprig of rosemary to enhance the flavour*

To prepare the saltfish boil for 20 minutes in a pan of water to remove some of the salt. If you have bought a thick piece of saltfish soak in cold water for 12-24 hours prior to boiling.

Heat the oil in a large saucepan. Add the garlic, onion and scotch bonnet. Cook gently until the onions become translucent.

Add the tomatoes and pepper. Simmer until tomatoes begin to soften.

Drain the salt fish and stir in.

Drain the ackee and add to the pan.

Stir in gently being careful not to break up the ackee pieces.

Cook on a low heat for a further 10-15 minutes.

Serve hot with rice or bread.



# cho-cho and rice

*Serves 4*

2 cups white rice  
1 cho-cho  
2 tsp vegetable oil or butter

**This recipe came about on a hot June day. I had brought fruit to the session as a refreshing snack including what I thought was a guava. On seeing the ‘guava’ Gloria explained that it was actually a savoury fruit called cho-cho that went well with rice. She shared this recipe with the group.**

## **Tip from a member of care staff**

*If your rice sticks together add a knob of butter or margarine to the warm rice.*

To cook the rice measure 2 cups of rice to 1 cup of cold water.

Place in a pan and bring to the boil.

Cover the pan and simmer for 15-20 minutes until the rice has absorbed all the water.

Pour oil or butter into a frying pan and heat. Add cho-cho and fry until soft and beginning to turn translucent.

Add rice and fry over a gentle heat. Stir until ingredients are thoroughly combined.



# pineapple juice

skin of 1 pineapple

1 finger of ginger (optional)

## John's tip

*The skin of the pineapple can be dried before making the juice.*

*John used to add ginger that he had grown.*

I had just finished cutting a pineapple into slices for us to eat. As I was about to throw the skin away Gloria stopped me and explained how to make juice from the skin. John also recalled making a drink from the skin of pineapples and suggested adding ginger.

Cut the skin off the pineapple.

Place in a pan with 1/2 litre water.

Add ginger (optional).

Bring to the boil.

Reduce heat and simmer for 30 minutes.

Remove from the heat and allow to cool until lukewarm.

Strain liquid through a sieve. Push the pineapple skin against the sieve with a spoon to extract the maximum amount of pulp and flavour.



# sorrel drink

2 cups of dried sorrel  
2 litres of water  
sugar to taste

## **Mary's verdict**

*It tastes peppery and has an unusual taste but you get use to it.*

## **John's verdict**

*It needs a splash of rum. It should be drunk in the garden with rum.*

Sorrel drink is made from a type of hibiscus. It has dark red flowers and is very different in appearance to the hibiscus plants commonly found in England. It is also no relation to English sorrel. I used dried hibiscus flowers that I bought a bag of in Brixton Market. John and Gloria told me that you can also buy fresh sorrel to make the drink from.

Bring a pan of water to the boil. Add the sorrel and remove from the heat. Cover and leave to stand for about 45 mins. Strain liquid through a sieve into a container. Add sugar and stir until sweet.



# fried plantain

*Serves 4*

2 plantain halved and quartered  
1 tsp all spice (optional)  
1 tsp brown sugar (optional)  
1 tsp vegetable oil or butter

## **Gloria's tip**

*Plantain with a few brown spots on the skin are the ripest and taste the sweetest*

Plantain is a great accompaniment to most dishes in the place of or in addition to rice. I often eat it with ackee and saltfish. I made two batches for the group, one with added sugar and spices and the other fried with no added ingredients. I like plantain best when it is slightly over ripe and goes really gooey and sweet when it is cooked.

Heat oil or butter in a frying pan.

Place plantain in pan.

Sprinkle all spice and brown sugar over (optional).

Once browned turn and cook the other side.

Serve hot as a side dish or on their own as a snack or dessert.

This cookbook was made as part Jayne Lloyd's PhD research into Reminiscence Arts and Dementia - Impact on Quality of Life (*RADIQL*). *RADIQL* was a project created by Age Exchange Theatre Trust and funded by Guy's and St. Thomas' Charity.