
MARLENA'S PARSLEY SALAD

Among the thousand and one stories lived with Marlena Spieler, here is an episode which, I believe, defines what she represents for so many people around the world: a unique blend of humour, erudition and generosity.

The scene takes place at the London Book Fair, in 2009. A chef scheduled to give a cooking demonstration at our Cookbook Corner fails to arrive on time. The public is waiting, sitting in front of the show kitchen.

Marlena: What a shame! People are there, we can't let them down. Can I do something? Would you like me to replace the chef on stage?

Edouard: Thank you Marlena, but the chef brings his own products. There's nothing in the back kitchen for you to make a recipe in front of an audience.

Marlena: Don't worry, we'll find something in the fridge!

There was nothing. Except a bunch of parsley.

Marlena: Wonderful!

"Dear friends, thank you for being with us today. Yes, I know, and I'm sorry for you: I'm not the person on the program. In these exceptional and unforeseen circumstances, you all deserve something special. Here, just for you, is my favourite recipe. I've never written it down in a book. It's too technical and probably impossible to make at home.

I'm talking about parsley salad.

Take a bunch of parsley. Finely chop the leaves. Set aside. Cut the stems at an angle. Like this. Be careful to keep them uniform. Now add this mixture to the finely chopped leaves.

Here comes the first unexpected ingredient. It may seem surprising, but it's parsley. I mince it, which gives it a totally different flavour. Blend another handful of parsley and add to the parsley. From now on, you have to be very quick so as not to lose any of the flavour: mix the parsley with the parsley, serve immediately and, for the finishing touch, add a little parsley for a green touch."

In front of her, a huge roar of laughter echoed throughout the book fair at Earl's Court. Everybody knew it was the best cooking show ever. All the seriousness of gastronomy had just vanished. This unique author, published and admired in so many countries, always researching history and anthropology, so precise and erudite about so many of the world's culinary heritages, had just improvised a magnificent joke with a bunch of parsley as her sole prop. Just because she cared for everyone.

"And here's my parsley salad. Thank you so much. I love you."

We love you Marlena.

Edouard Cointreau
Paris, July 8th, 2023