

cover feature

The lucky kitchen

All lucky folk will recall the smells and tastes of their grandmother's kitchen – as does Louise Fulton Keats, **Karen Hardy** writes

Louise Fulton Keats has many fond memories of growing up in her grandmother's kitchen. There were coddled eggs for breakfast, pikelets every Sunday, afternoon-tea tables laden with cupcakes and scones and pavlovas. The kitchen was a welcoming place, a sanctuary of sorts, full of delicious smells, activity and love.

It was also the kitchen of Margaret Fulton, Australia's original domestic goddess. For many generations, Fulton was the woman who changed the way we looked at food in this country. For Fulton Keats, she was grandma.

Fulton Keats had her first child, Harry, last year, and says she began thinking about the importance of grandmothers – her own mother, Suzanne Gibb, also a food writer, took to the role like she was made for it.

"I was blown away by how wonderful my mum and my grandmum Margaret were in their roles as grandma and great grandma," Fulton Keats says.

"It had me thinking about my own childhood and how wonderful Margaret was to me when I was a little thing. She was just brilliant and wonderful. I want-

ed the book to be a tribute to her and to grandmothers everywhere and to the role that they play in nurturing children through food."

My Grandma's Kitchen, the story of Lulu and Harry and the fun they have in their grandma's kitchen, is part children's book, part cookbook, part picture book.

With beautiful illustrations and design by Melbourne's Michelle Mackintosh, there are also 30 recipes from Fulton herself.

"The one question I'm most often asked is what was it like growing up in Margaret Fulton's kitchen," Fulton Keats says.

"She's been one of those dream grandmas really. She's never been one of those grey-hair-in-a-bun, knitting grandmas, although she's recently taken up knitting. She's never been that stereotypical grandma.

"She was far too cheeky, naughty and good fun, and always up for laugh, she was a real party girl. I wanted to get that message across and thought it was high time I wrote a book about it."

Fulton Keats and her sister

Kate grew up a few doors down from their grandma in Balmain where Fulton still lives. Fulton Keats hasn't moved far from home and still lives a few streets away from grandma's kitchen.

Fulton Keats is one of the lucky ones, in that the extended family is playing an important role in her son Harry's life. Both Gibb and Fulton dote on Harry.

"So many mums of my age group have gone back to work and are relying on their mothers and mothers-in-law to look after their children," she says.

"I'm hearing people say that 'if it wasn't for my mother, my children would know nothing about food because I'm not around. I'm at work, I'm not around to teach them myself.'

"Grandmothers have such an important role. It's kind of what prompted me to write the book I guess. They're playing such a large role in raising children today and I wanted to recognise that."

Fulton Keats is a lawyer, but there is definitely food in her blood. Before she finished her law degree she studied at Le Cordon Bleu cookery school.

"It was an amazing, extraordinary experience that taught me how difficult food is," she says.

“They have such exacting standards at Le Cordon Bleu. When I started there I thought I knew nothing about food, I hadn’t had any formal training but I realised how much I did know just from watching grandma and mum.

“The other students there were real beginners and they’d never been around anyone foodie at all. I realised although I thought I didn’t know much, I knew quite a bit.

“Now when it comes to cooking a recipe I’ll think, ‘Have I seen grandma cook this? Have I seen mum cook this?’ and that will be the first image to come into my head when I start cooking. I can almost pull up any dish visually in my head because I’ve seen them all done. It’s like carrying around a visual encyclopedia in my head.”

Fulton Keats has gone on to study child nutrition and is writing a baby and toddler cookbook, with Harry as her “little guinea pig”.

“He has a very varied diet, he had a mushroom risotto the other night, and he loves lamb shanks, he gets quinoa for breakfast with chia seeds.”

Fulton Keats believes children need to learn about food from an early age.

“Cooking is such an important life skill,” she says. “If you can cook, you can eat well for your entire life and if we can teach children to cook well they’ll eat well. Teaching a child to cook is the most wonderful gift you can give them really. If you do send a child off into the world as an adult without that skill there’s every chance they will eat poorly.

“That’s one thing that grandma and mum instilled in both Kate and I.”

As a parent, she now realises how hard it is to involve children in the kitchen, but says we should persevere.

“Let’s face it, they do make a mess and ruin your precious

ingredients, but I was always allowed to do it and I was always encouraged,” she says.

“I was never told no, you’re not allowed to do it. I was never told, you don’t know what you’re doing, step aside, I’ll do it. I was always given a role, I was always allowed to make mistakes.

“So many parents are time poor, they can’t be bothered, they don’t want the waste, they don’t want the mess, they won’t let their children get in there and get their hands dirty.

“You only learn through making mistakes. Even if your child does ruin it, or you have to rescue lumpy crepe batter, it’s so important to give them a go because they’re never going to learn independence.” Fulton Keats admits, somewhat sheepishly, there’s another reason she studied at Le Cordon Bleu.

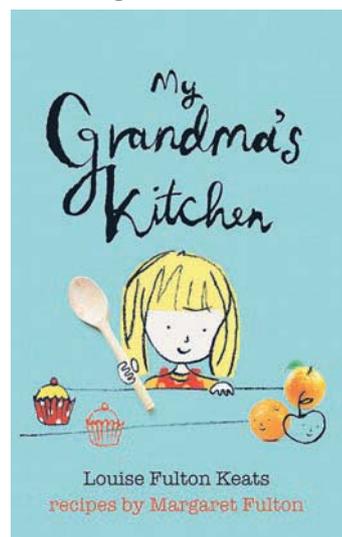
“When I left home and I went, jeppers, I’m used to having a fridge full of food, I’m used to having the best possible meals delivered to my dinner table every night.

“I grew up with mum and grandma being in the magazine world and having food photographers coming to our house to photograph food and I’d just be there on stand by ready to eat it.

“I refused to give up on the standard of food I’d been enjoying all my life.”

Lulu might have grown up and moved out of grandma’s kitchen but she didn’t want to go too far.

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>> *My Grandma's Kitchen*, by Louise Fulton Keats. Recipes by Margaret Fulton. Illustrations by Michelle Mackintosh. Hardie Grant Books, April 2011, \$29.95.



Roast chicken with lemon herb stuffing

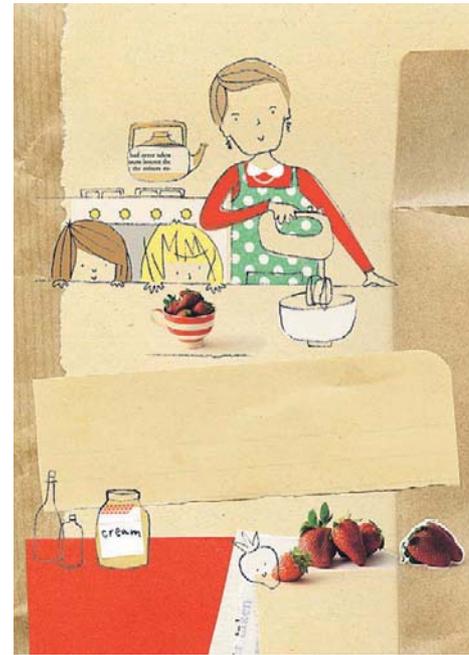
Serves 4

- 1 x 1.8kg free-range chicken**
- 20 g butter, melted**
- 6 medium-large potatoes (desiree or similar variety)**
- 2 tbsp olive oil**
- Lemon herb stuffing
- 1 ½ cups fresh breadcrumbs**
- 1 celery stalk, finely diced**
- 2 spring onions, finely sliced**
- ¼ cup finely chopped parsley**
- finely grated rind of 1 lemon**
- 1 egg, lightly beaten**
- 30g butter, melted**

Preheat the oven to 180C. Mix the stuffing ingredients in a bowl. Remove the fat from inside the chicken, rinse inside and out with water and pat dry with paper towel. Fill the chicken cavity with

stuffing and tie the legs together with kitchen string. Place the chicken on a rack in a roasting pan. Add enough water to reach 2cm up the side of the pan (the water should not touch the chicken). Brush the chicken with the butter and roast for 80-90 minutes, basting occasionally, until cooked through (if you pierce the thigh with a skewer, the juices should be clear, not red or pink). If the water evaporates while the chicken is roasting, add a little more.

Meanwhile, peel and quarter the potatoes. Pat dry with paper towel and put in a large roasting pan. Drizzle with the oil and cook for 45 minutes, or until tender and golden brown. Allow the chicken to rest for 10 minutes, then carve and serve with the stuffing, potatoes and your favourite green vegetable.



Eggs in ramekins

Serves 2

- 1 tsp olive oil**
- 1 rasher free-range bacon, rind removed and diced**
- 1 tbsp finely chopped parsley or chives**
- 1 spring onion, finely sliced**
- 2 eggs**
- 5g butter**
- buttered toast fingers, to**

serve

Heat the oil in a small frying pan over medium heat and saute the bacon for a few minutes, or until golden brown. Grease two small ramekins and divide the bacon, herbs and spring onion between them. Place the ramekins in a saucepan or deep frying pan and add enough water to reach halfway up the sides of the dishes. Crack an egg into each ramekin and top with a dot of butter. Cover and cook over low heat for five to seven minutes, or until the eggs have set. Serve with buttered toast fingers.



Margaret Fulton and granddaughter Louise Fulton Keats: When I left home and I went, jeeppers, I'm used to having a fridge full of food. Left, illustrations from *My Grandma's Kitchen*.