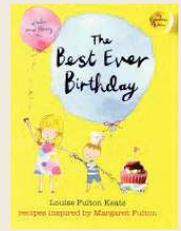




Best Ever Birthday



A beautiful children's book that's also a cook book is the latest offering from Louise Fulton Keats.

The Best Ever Birthday features a fun story, whimsical illustrations and more than 25 recipes inspired by Louise's grandmother, Margaret Fulton.

The main characters – Lulu and Harry – brainstorm ideas for everything from an outer space birthday party to a teddy bears' picnic – developing menus along the way. As Louise tells Food Bytes, she loved being able to tap into her "inner kid," and says working on the book was like having all her Christmases come at once!

FB: What is your all-time favourite party food?

LFK: Because I grew up in a culinary household, there would always be some more sophisticated offerings at my parties such as gougères (cheese puffs made from choux pastry), piroshki (little Russian buns made from yeast dough filled with bacon and onion), or blini served with smoked salmon. But, like any kid, I still loved the old favourites like fairy bread and

cupcakes and my parents always made sure these were on the menu too. I think it's pretty hard to beat a home-made sausage roll and so I've included my favourite recipe in the book – I'm yet to meet a child or adult who doesn't love them.

FB: What is your favourite party drink?

LFK: These days it's champagne, but when I was a kid, pink lemonades were the ultimate. For my son's birthday this year, I made an apple, strawberry and pomegranate frappe that all the children loved and I was secretly thrilled at all the goodness it offered.

FB: Do you have some advice on how to prepare a great birthday party for kids?

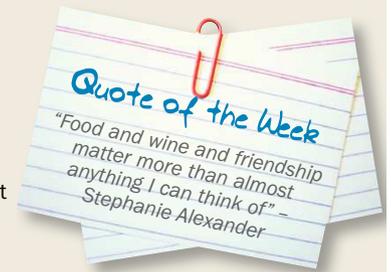
LFK: As with any party, the secret is in choosing dishes that are manageable and can be made in advance to save you all that last-minute stress. Make mini quiches, sausage rolls, cheese scrolls and pies a few days before and freeze them so they'll be ready to pop straight into the oven as guests arrive. Biscuits, meringues and cupcakes can also be made ahead of time – just take care when storing them (meringues, in particular, don't like humidity).

When choosing the menu, I also try to balance out the sweetness with some healthier offerings, just so my friends don't have to wrestle with cranky, sugar-overdosed children later that night. Fruit sticks – perhaps with a chocolate-dipped strawberry or marshmallow on the

end to make sure they're eaten – are a great choice.

Rice paper rolls are another favourite, they always look so pretty and parents love them too. Even home-made pizza can be on the healthier side and, if you're feeling patient, you might even like to let your little guests get involved in topping them. That always seems to generate major excitement in my household.

As for the birthday cake, I do think it's so lovely to have a home-made one, even if you don't have a clue about baking. A perfect shop-bought cake doesn't come close to the charm of one of Mum or Dad's lovingly-made creations, even if it's falling over. Use a packet cake mix if you're feeling overwhelmed, and freeze or refrigerate the cake to make the decorating much easier. There is so much pressure these days on kids to have the perfect party that they may not appreciate your flawed attempts, but this can be a little lesson for them in accepting imperfection and valuing the tender loving care that goes in to something home-made.



Food bytes

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