

A dishy book with a feast for the eyes and the mind

aspiring authors and popular artist conspire on cookbook for charities

Morag Lindsay - Press & Journal 18.08.11

Take 16 aspiring authors and one of Scotland's most popular contemporary artists. Mix well, then drizzle with a dash of tried-and-tested dishes. Add a good dollop of support for a range of charities, then sit back and savour. That is the recipe for a new cookbook that aims to be a feast for the eyes and the mind as well as the stomach.

Life of Pie has been produced by members of the Write on the Green writers' workshop in Aberdeenshire. They have based new works of fiction, poems and memoirs on their favourite dinner-party menus.



The subjects range from first love to a perfect 60th birthday tea party and from foraging for food to serving up dishes fit for a king, and are all beautifully illustrated with more than 100 new paintings by Udney artist Catriona Millar. It is the third book to merge her distinctive artworks with favourite recipes in aid of local charities – but the first to add a literary flavour to the mix.

Like the others – *Fun With Spinach* and *The Handsome Chip* – all proceeds from **Life of Pie** will go to a range of good causes, including VSA, the Camphill movement, Aberdeen City Mission and Aberdeen Performing Arts.

The Write on the Green workshops are led by Roddy Phillips, Press and Journal columnist and arts critic and creative director of Aberdeen-based advertising, marketing and design firm The Agency, which has sponsored all three books.

He said **Life of Pie** was the best yet and praised the enthusiasm of the 16 contributors, who travel from as far as Braemar, Stonehaven and Turriff for the twice-weekly writing sessions in the old Jamie Fleeman cottage at Udney Green, run by Tolquhon Gallery, near Tarves.

They include teachers, a vet, a racial equality officer, a human resources manager, a humanist celebrant, several artists and a former editor of the BBC Radio 4 Today programme.

Mr Phillips, who started the group at the encouragement of Ms Millar, his wife, said it had been a joy to help them find their voices.

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“I really had no idea the group would be so popular – we have people coming from all over the north-east – or that there was so much untapped talent out there. The other thing I wasn’t prepared for was how emotionally bonding it would be.”

“When you encourage people to write about their lives, you are asking them to combine their memories and their imagination, and often that means bringing up things they haven’t spoken to anyone else about or even thought about in years.”

“That makes for tears and laughter and some really good friendships.

“Bring in food – the way it affects our senses like taste and smell and the role it plays in all our relationships with families and loved ones – and you have got the makings of something very special.”

Businesswoman Fran Howard, from Maryculter, contributed a story about a 1970s dinner party with a twist and is thrilled to see her work in print – complete with failsafe recipes of the era.

“It was very easy for me,” she said. “I love food and I love cooking.

“I didn’t go into the writers workshop thinking I would ever see my work published. It’s enough to spend time with an amazing group of people and relax with something which is completely different from my day job.”

Ms Millar has been named one of the top five most collectible artists in Scotland and her paintings have been sold throughout Europe, the Far East and the US.

