

Dear young person,

Do you like picnics? I am guessing you do. What's not to like in my opinion!

I absolutely love picnics; indoors, outdoors... even in my own back garden. There is just something wonderful about food taken from a basket or bag, laid out on a cloth on the grass, the ground or on a picnic bench. I think it's probably because all the food on offer is not your every day 'normal food'. It's special because most often you can eat it with your fingers; no need for cutlery or even plates and ... best of all there's not much washing up. I think my love of picnics comes from many years ago when just a child. My mum was the Picnic Queen!

I lived with my family on the west coast of Scotland when I was a child and so we went to the beach often. It was a lovely sandy beach with rolling sand dunes and lots of little coves and rock pools to explore. My brother and I spent hours exploring them with our bucket and spades and paddling in the shallows. However the best bit was when the HRH the Picnic Queen arrived around teatime.

She liked to lay out the picnic cloth and arrange the goodies on it herself without any help from us as she knew we would be scoffing before my dad arrived from work! When called, we would rush up to the chosen picnic spot and get ourselves comfy. We made ourselves 'sand chairs', basically a hole in the sand to sit in. we weren't allowed to move until we had finished.... otherwise we would get sand in our sandwiches... not nice at all I can tell you.

My dad got a new job and the family moved to Blackheath in 1970. We couldn't be further from the sea so the beach picnics stopped. Everything was so strange and unfamiliar in London. I wasn't very happy for a time. I missed my grandparents, my friends, the sea and my comfy little way of life in Scotland.

One day I came out of school and there was my mum, the Picnic Queen, waiting for me and in her hand was ... the picnic basket. I hadn't seen it for a while. "Come on, we're off for a picnic," she said. We walked what I thought was quite a distance to a lovely old house with big gardens and had our picnic - sitting on grass instead of sand.

The following week there was my mum again with the picnic basket and this time we walked to the woods and had our picnic sitting on some fallen tree trunks next to a tall tower. I was to learn later that these picnic places were Eltham Palace and the woods next to Severndroog Castle on Shooters Hill. It became our little family custom over the years to have regular Wednesday picnics at various spots around Eltham, Jack Woods, Oxleas Meadows, Shrewsbury Park, Well Hall Pleasaunce and Avery Hill Park.

I think back on all the thoughtful things my mum did for us as a family – this was very simple act to keep alive what we enjoyed doing together and it helped me to begin to enjoy life in London and especially in Eltham where I now live. It was a big change moving from Scotland but change that my mum helped me deal with. I can't imagine myself anywhere else now! Thank you mum!

Thank you for reading my little memory of the Picnic Queen.

Laura

