

Govt must act on sea killers

At my age it's unusual to have something new happen to you, but recently it did. I stopped at the *Daily News* cooking page and read both articles.

One told how to make slow-bake fig and caramelised red onion skillet bread, and the other was on stopping big cuts of meat drying out on the barbecue. The bread one had a tantalising photo, so next thing I was announcing to the household I'd be making it...soon.

Big deal. Welcome to the modern world, Jim, in which it's hardly earth-breaking news that a man is interested in cooking. But it's not about the size of the deal; it's about how your life changes sometimes, how your comfortable patterns can be disrupted, often for the better.

This change came about by accident. Literally. Not mine, Lin's. But before we go into that, let me brief you about my erratic relationship with kitchens. I was a child of my times. Dad worked, Mum cooked, we ate. I lingered at home for far too long. My brief sorties into the world beyond ended not in the flattening life endured by friends but back home with the sustenance of Mum's cooking.

She did her best to educate me, but the only dish that stuck (literally) was savoury mince, sometimes with a mashed spud topping if I felt brave. My mince was boiled beyond flavour, which was provided by half a bottle of Worcester Sauce.

It was probably no accident I married a wonderful cook. The problem for me came after long dinner parties when I would be confronted with a kitchen awash with the detritus of culinary creativity, requiring an hour or two of labour into the wee small hours. Fair enough.

In my second attempt at marital bliss, I was determined not to be a food liability. Luckily, I had been working for *NZ Woman's Weekly* not long before. One day, food guru Tui Flower asked if I could get someone to write a feature about her flash new test kitchen.

We made a deal: "You teach me to cook, Tui, and I'll write the story myself". She didn't do the teaching, as it happened, and instead I was enrolled in cooking classes, joining a bunch of students (all women) for a 10-week course. It was wonderful. I still have the recipes. Lin delights in showing people one on which I note tutor advice to "flirt with the butcher for the best cuts". I still make the honey and walnut tart.

Friends who came to dinner were intrigued by the fact it was me doing the cooking - or more precisely their wives were. While husbands tried to ignore this unwelcome phenomenon, wives drifted into the kitchen to watch. The legend grew - but not exactly as I hoped, after one lot laughed out loud at the sight of me using a builder's rule to measure the exact lengths of something I was cutting up.

Anyway, that all changed when Lin retired and we kind of fell back into traditional roles. I worked, she cooked, we ate; until recently, when she ended up in hospital with an infected broken toe. Now I'm cooking again, with one side effect being I'm on the road to becoming a fully trained supermarket shopper.

The corollary of that is I've become much more aware of the plastic problem. Couple that with a recent assignment to write about zero waste and you have a thoroughly alarmed citizen. I was already aware from house renovating that nothing comes loose from building supply outlets any more, even when they assemble your purchases in a cardboard box. Now I'm fully cognisant of the fact plasticisation of food packaging is beyond belief.

Some manufacturers are putting their stuff in recyclable containers, but many aren't, and telling the difference is a nightmare. While supermarkets are to be commended for agreeing to do away with the worst blight - the carrier plastic bag - by year's end, you can't help thinking that's only a small beginning.

JT column for March 17 2018 – little ocean killers

Until the government gets tough and insists all food and hardware companies use recyclable packaging - as some European countries have done - we're not going to beat this awful plague. The recent sight of round-the-world yacht race crews helping clean up an Auckland beach was another reminder that the final repository for many of those convenient little plastic containers is the ocean. They're killing it.