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Jamie and Giorgio sent food parcels in my hour of need

Founder of St John and champion of 'nose-to-tail-eating' Fergus Henderson thought Parkinson's would end his career but now he's back with a new book

PICTURE a young David Hockney played by Harry Enfield in agreeable-chap mode, and you pretty much have the measure of Fergus Henderson. The 43-year-old chef-patron of St John in Smithfield is the man who reawakened the world's interest in offal, pigs' heads and squirrel, and he has just brought out a new cookbook, *Beyond Nose to Tail*, where he and pastry chef Justin Piers Gellatly delve into the areas of puddings and breads, as well as providing a few more clues about what to do with those leftover trotters and sheets of back fat.

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some ways I'm glad I got it when I did: imagine working all your life, saving up for retirement and old-age bliss, and then getting Parkinson's. That must be a real kick in the teeth. At least I won't be making plans for a life without it." He can't now recall whether he went straight back to work, or home to Covent Garden and his wife Margot — also a chef and the mother of his three children — on the day of the diagnosis. But he suspects he may have broken the news to her over lunch that day. "It wasn't the best news, obviously, and in a way it was harder for her. I know I've got it and what that feels like, and I can tell her I feel fine, but she hasn't got it and has to imagine it." Lunch, he suggests, ordering us more wine, is a great way of coping with anything the world throws at you.

Despite his good cheer, though, the disease worsened. "I was a flapping windmill," he says. "My arm would go all over the place. Especially at evening dinner parties, for some reason. I'd knock people's wine glasses over, bang into

ladies' breasts. People would pretend not to notice, which was very kind. The weird thing was, I'd tell them I'd got Parkinson's, and they'd say 'Oh, I'm so sorry, as if they had given it to me.' At night, he would feel his muscles tense up as if in anticipation of hard work. "It was like an itch you couldn't scratch," he says.

Henderson says his older children, Hector, now 13, and Owen, 11, (the third, Frances, was conceived a year after the diagnosis, in 1999) were unfazed by the disease. "Children are extraordinary in the way they accept things," he says. "When I flapped they just went, 'Oh, dad's flapping', and when I stopped they accepted that too. And I was never very good at throwing balls or things like that anyway."

He and Margot avoided gloomy speculation about the future. "Occasionally she'd say, 'No way am I gonna push you round in a bloody wheelchair,'" he recalls, "but that was love talk, in a strange kind of a way I don't see much point in dark moments. They don't help anybody."

But as the daytime spasms worsened, Henderson realised he would have to quit his kitchen. It must have been gutting for a man who has built his career and his life around food since he abandoned his early plan to follow in his eminent parent's footsteps and become an

architect. "It was a tricky moment, very sad, when I handed over to my then-head chef Ed," is all he will say. "But I was terrified of a hot pan going in the wrong place. And I could still go in every day to check the food and supervise the menu, though if I sat down to lunch I'd often sweep the tablecloth off the table."

Having initially resisted taking medication ("it felt like giving in"), he went onto Pergolide, which has since been withdrawn, then started on a course of three different types of dopamine pills, designed to inhibit the neural impulses the brain sends to the muscles. Although he was fortunate not to have any side effects — "I kept trying to have hallucinations" — the drugs only partially allayed the spasms.

THEN, out of the blue in 2003, Professor Niall Quinn at Queen's Square suggested that Henderson should go forward for deep brain stimulation. The treatment, first developed by Professor Marwan Hariz in 2002, is not a cure for Parkinson's but can be highly effective in treating the symptoms. It is an expensive process jointly funded by the NHS and the Parkinson's Appeal.

In a four-hour operation (the first ones took 13 hours), a hole is drilled in the skull and an electrode, from which three wires extend, is implanted into the brain. The operation is performed under local anaesthetic so the patient can tell the team whether the wires are causing nausea or giddiness; once in place, the current feeding the wires from a battery implanted under the skin of the patient's chest is regulated to ensure it is effectively countering the spasmodic impulses.

"The first time I was put forward for it it didn't happen, so I had a year to think whether I really wanted the operation," Henderson says. "Initially it felt like a big intervention. You know, normally your body works miraculously under its skin and it feels strange to be adding wires and batteries to that. But I realised medication is an intervention, and so is this." He points at his wine glass.

"So I was ready when it came about. They bolt this metal frame to your head, and you can't move, so you realise at that point that you might as well relax and enjoy it. You are awake, but in a strange place, because of the local anaesthetic, so you can tell them if you feel a bit woozy when the wires go in. I remember squeezing a nurse's hand, which was very reassuring. There's no pain, but you can hear this sound, gnnrrrrrrrr, as they are drilling into your skull. Then they start scraping, eek, eek, as they try and twist the wires into your brain. It's like being at



'My arm would go all over the place. I'd knock people's wine glasses over and bang into ladies' breasts'

gusto. The medics initially told him not to give up anything that relaxed him or gave him pleasure, and although he stopped drinking wine for a month before the operation, because it thins the blood, he has not had any pious homilies about re-embracing alcohol or nicotine: "Parkinson's doctors don't care that much about your liver and lungs."

The tremor in his hand may not even be due to Parkinson's, but to a recent fracture of his left collarbone, sustained when he fell down a valley in Gloucestershire a month ago. It's been slow to heal because the sling interfered with the wires running over his other collarbone, but as usual he looks on the bright side: "Think how much longer it would take to heal if my arm was still flailing all over the place."

ONE thing he has not done is venture back into the kitchen at St John as an active cook. "I'd been away for a year and a half and felt I had lost momentum," he says. "Chris, the new head chef, and the team are so much younger than me and so much more able, so I thought I should leave them to it. It's a bit like when a gun-slinger hangs up his guns: it's difficult to strap them on again."

There is, indeed, a gun-shy element to this: a fear that one rogue spasm will send boiling oil over a sous chef, that Henderson can't entirely trust his limbs ever again. On the surface, though, he claims to have no fear of his symptoms returning. As long as the machinery is in place, the improvement in his condition should continue indefinitely. "It is obscene how contented I am," he insists.

He cooks at home, supervises the menu and the cooking at St John and its sister restaurant Bread and Wine, and works on another book he promised Bloomsbury years ago (the one remaining symptom of his Parkinson's, he says, is that his once-beautiful handwriting is now terrible). And he is planning a party.

Henderson is friends with many artists who live and/or work near Smithfield and treat St John as their local canteen. Twenty-four of them — including Peter Blake, Antony Gormley, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Gary Hume, Mark Quinn and Sam Taylor-Wood — have donated works to an exhibition called Meeting of Minds. The works will be on show at Christie's during the Frieze Art Fair from October 11-16, and on the last day will be auctioned in aid of the Parkinson's Appeal for deep brain stimulation. The chances of this event drawing a glamorous and high-spending crowd are enhanced by the fact that Henderson will host, and cook for, a party for all involved after the auction back at St John.

"I've not been very good about reading about Parkinson's or meeting other people with it," he says. "It's terrible, but I actually don't even really know how this" — he points at his head — "works. I don't really want to join anything, and sharing my experience with the group is not my style."

"But the Parkinson's Appeal funded my operation, and you can't imagine how good my life has turned out thanks to DBS. We're going to have a really good party. Let the w-hay abound!"

● For further details of the appeal go to www.parkinsonsappeal.com. *Beyond Nose to Tail* by Fergus Henderson and Justin Piers Gellatly (£17.99) is published by Bloomsbury.



This happy brood: Fergus Henderson with his wife Margot and children (left to right) Hector 13, Frances, eight, and Owen, 11

the dentist only a hundred times more intense. The metal sounds reverberate around your head because the equipment is clamped to you. So your mind works overtime, thinking, 'What does that sound mean, what does that sound mean?'

The battery was installed two days later: this, weirdly, is apparently the more dangerous part of the operation, as the body may reject the device.

Henderson's wife Margot says that when he came out of theatre he gave her a shattering meaningful look. All Henderson can remember is that he felt pain-free, noticed an almost immediate improvement in his control of his arm,

and couldn't wait to tuck into the sushi that Margot and his sister Annabel had brought with them. He was sustained during his two-week convalescence by chefs such as Giorgio Locatelli and Jamie Oliver, who sent food parcels, and by friends who came and played Scrabble with him, and let him get away with nonsensical seven-letter words.

"That was the morphine," he says. "Morphine and sushi got me through." Sounds like a great restaurant concept, I say, and he agrees, before worrying that he is sounding too flippant. This is typical of Henderson. Later, he tells me that, at a party in 2006 to celebrate two

Offaly good: Fergus in the kitchen at St John with a signature dish of roast bone marrow and parsley salad

FIVE OF THE HOTTEST YOUNG LONDON CHEFS

OLIVER ROWE, OWNER AND HEAD CHEF AT KONSTAM

Rowe, 34, has family roots in King's Cross but learned his trade in Italy, France and Greece. After four years at award-winning Clerkenwell restaurant Moro, his dedication to using the freshest of locally sourced ingredients saw him become the focus of BBC2's *The Urban Chef* series last year.

BRETT GRAHAM, HEAD CHEF, THE LEDBURY

The 27-year-old Australian was asked to head the Ledbury's kitchen while chefing at The Square in Bruton Street. He was awarded a Michelin star nine months after the restaurant's opening in 2005 for his characteristic rich, but not heavy dishes — from terrine of lobster and leek to lasagne of rabbit with morels.

SIAN REES, HEAD CHEF AT GALVIN BISTROT DE LUXE

Originally from Cambridgeshire, 30-year-old Rees left catering college at 17 and joined Claridge's as a commis chef under John Williams. Having worked at Orrey and L'Escargot, she is now at Galvin Bistrot de Luxe creating a modern takes on classic French brasserie dishes.

AGNAR SVERRISSON, CHEF DIRECTOR AT TEXTURE

Icelandic-born Sverrisson has worked at Pétur and Raymond Blanc's Le Manoir aux Quat' Saisons. The 32-year-old is launching Texture — a collaboration with sommelier Xavier Rousset that will serve dishes such as smoked tuna tartar with seaweed and iced Parmesan with olive oil and balsamic ice cream.

ADAM BYATT, HEAD CHEF AT TRINITY

Since starting his career as a 16-year-old at Claridge's, Byatt, now 34, has progressed to running Pimlico's highly acclaimed Thyme restaurant and is now head chef at Trinity in Clapham. His signature dishes range from saffron citrus lobster to an array of freshly-made lollipops for dessert.