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LIFE FOOD

FOOD HEROES

Big cook, little cook

Nick Coffler tells Victoria Prever how he found a new career as a cookery writer with the help of a toddler called Archie

NONE is more surprised than Nick Coffler that he is a published cookery writer.

A career in food was not ever on Coffler's horizon. After school (Watford Grammar), he spent 10 years in Lille. It was there that he learned about cooking and eating fresh food. "French family life revolves around eating together," he says, although he adds that his Jewish heritage was also "one of being around the table".

He returned to the UK and founded a business importing bottled water. This went well for seven years, until the recession and environmental backlash against spring water meant "the business was chewed up overnight".

Stuck at home with his two-year old son, Archie, he searched for something to do. "Actually, I was really happy," he says, "as I got to spend more time with Archie than many dads manage with their children." After a while, to "keep me sane", he started his blog, *My Daddy Cooks*. It showed videos of him and Archie cooking together at home.

Food has always been important to Coffler. "My mum's a great cook," he says "and so was my grandma." In a blog entry last July, he proclaimed that "for me, food is family and family is food". The entry listed some of his favourite comfort foods, cooked by his grandmothers and mother: "cigerashed' potatoes (fried onions and mashed potatoes); kichels; wonderful chopped liver; melting, slow-cooked beef brisket, and wonderful chicken soup".

He and wife Jo wanted Archie to have a good relationship with food. They got off to a shaky start when he was diagnosed with a dairy allergy, after a severe reaction to cream cheese. The silver lining was a referral to a paediatrician whose advice was that there is nothing a baby cannot eat, except honey, which can give babies botulism. "You can even cook with something

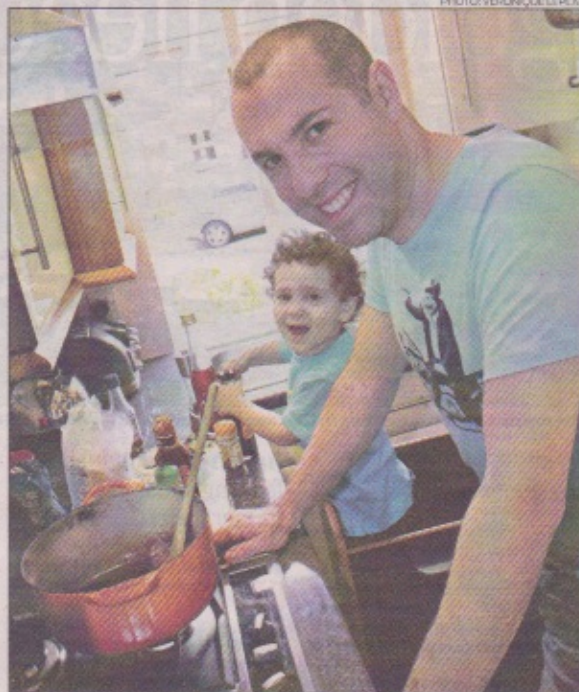


PHOTO: VERONIQUE LEPLAT

The Cofflers at work in the kitchen: "For me, food is family," says Nick

like soy sauce, which is salty, because you are unlikely to use it several times a day, every day".

The Cofflers chose baby-led weaning, which involves giving a baby pretty well all the food you are eating yourself. Purees and mashes are used minimally. At their extended family Friday night dinners, Archie was given everything to gnaw or suck on – challah, strips of roast chicken, chunks of roast potato, softly cooked vegetables.

Young Archie's journey into the kitchen to cook with Daddy was a natural progression. In the videos, he stands in his "fun pod" at the kitchen counter assisting or just doing his own thing with random ingredients, while Coffler leads the way through whatever he is cooking that day. Videos are uncut. In one, Archie storms out, and in another, accidentally smashes the

camera. Coffler is not afraid to show things going horribly wrong.

He admits things do get messy cooking with a toddler. "Parents need to get over any mess inhibitions," he laughs, "but unless you've got velvet worktops and shag-pile carpets in your kitchen, it's generally a room designed to be easy to clean."

The success of the blog has led to a book – *My Daddy Cooks*, a selection of family friendly recipes, was published last year. Coffler also presents *Nick Coffler's Weekend Kitchen* on BBC Three Counties radio. A way of dealing with what could have been the worst year of his life has launched him into a whole new career.

www.mydaddycooks.com
My Daddy Cooks is published by Hodder and Stoughton, at £16.99