Hello. I'm Daniel Brint. Welcome to the Upper Street TODAY language talk, a weekly podcast about English language, expressions, idioms and any other topics of interest inspired by TODAY's subject.

Next Sunday March 3rd is ***Soup it Forward*** day. The simple premise of this day is to make soup and share it with, or give it to someone who could enjoy and appreciate it. An elderly neighbour, for example, or someone who is homeless. Or a friend whose been having a tough time recently. The idea of 'forward' relates to the concept of 'paying something forward,' the idea that when you help someone, you will be helped in the future. Or, to use a well-known expression with a positive spin, 'what goes around comes around.'

We'd prefer not to think about it, but a day could come when a bowl of soup, freely given as a gesture of kindness, could mean a lot to us.

But why soup? Why not sandwich, a salad or a sausage? To help me get some ideas on the subject I have been asking my students over the last couple of weeks to tell me about their favourite soups. The overwhelming majority chose cocido soup, which is the broth of cocido madrileño, usually with pasta noodles added. There were some variations, Ana told me about a Christmas soup in Valencia where she is from, made with meatballs and friend bread and egg, and Violeta recalls the joy of alphabet noodles as you could play at making words at the same time.

The fictional detective, Pepe Carvahlo, complains in one of his books that a city having only one dish cannot be considered cultivated when it comes to food. Madrileños might retort that's completely untrue. There are actually two dishes in Madrid, if you include callos, or tripe. But cocido was the clear winner in my research.

However, if I ask this question to people in other countries, the answer would be different. Chicken soup, Borscht, tomato soup, fish soup are all contenders. Chi told me that in Taiwan soup is eaten at every meal. Only one person was seriously anti-soup but even Cristina recognized that soup creates associations of childhood and family. Ana, who has, for most of her life not been keen on soup, told me that she has, recently, begun to enjoy them, and we speculated about the warming effects of this dish as you get older.

But one thing came through very clearly. The emotional connections of soup. Soup is (by and large) a winter dish, it is warming and comforting, it often harkens back to childhood and the distinctive flavours of the family kitchen. No two soups are the same and the one your mother, grandmother or grandfather makes or made, is the taste of home. It is interesting that nobody chose the cold soups – those Spanish dishes worthy of the gods – gazpacho and salmorejo. It makes me wonder if the warmth of soup is something so central to our emotional memories that cold soup just doesn't cut the mustard, if you will excuse my mixed metaphors. Enrique mentioned his special liking for a hot, sweet, almond soup typical at Christmas but nobody referred to it's cold cousin, *ajo blanco*. Personally, I consider myself a reasonable cook and my roast red pepper and tomato soup is one of the favourites of my family and friends. However, if I'm feeling a bit down or under the weather, homesick the only soup that really does the trick is Campbell's or Heinz tomato soup. Mass produced factory made, from a tin, probably not terribly healthy but that's the one for me.

When it comes to soup in literature, I know I have referred to Charles Dickins quite a lot in these podcasts so I am not going to remind you of the scene in Oliver Twists when Oliver has the mendacity to ask for a second helping. My favourite soup story is actually a children's book I read my son when he was growing up. It's about three friends who make pumpkin soup. The soup is perfect because they each make an essential contribution. It's only when they try changing their roles that they make a mess of it. Writing about it now makes me realize some people might consider it a soft piece of social conformist propaganda. We just liked the stories and the pictures. A poem I really like is **Bread Soup: An Old Icelandic Recipe** By Bill Holm.

Start with the square heavy loaf
steamed a whole day in a hot spring
until the coarse rye, sugar, yeast
grow dense as a black hole of bread.
Let it age and dry a little,
then soak the old loaf for a day
in warm water flavored
with raisins and lemon slices.
Boil it until it is thick as molasses.
Pour it in a flat white bowl.
Ladle a good dollop of whipped cream
to melt in its brown belly.
This soup is alive as any animal,
and the yeast and cream and rye
will sing inside you after eating
for a long time.

I`m very tempted to try and cook it. But finding a hot spring might be difficult.

And this is from a poem by Mary Ruefle, called Blood Soup, and it follows a reflection on her father's passing:

And what did I want
more than anything in the world? Probably the ancient Polish
recipe for blood soup, which was finally told to me
in an empty deli in a deserted mill town in western Massachusetts
by the owner's mother, who was alone one day when I burst
in and demanded a bowl. But, she said, lacing her fingers
around a jar of morello cherries, it requires one cup of
new blood drawn from the goose whose neck you've just wrung
to put in the pot, and where in these days can I find
anything as fresh as that? I had lost track of my life
before, but nothing prepared me for the onslaught of
wayfarer's bliss when she continued to list, one
by one, the impossible ingredients I needed to live.

I think that says in a very profound and haunting way how tastes and rituals live in our memories and sense of of identity even when we are far from home and alone.

Finally, an old tale with a nice message that takes us back to the theme of soup it forward day.

John died and went straight to hell. Great long tables. Bowls of delicious food. John was amazed by the site. Even more amazing were the spoons that lay beside the bowls. They were 4 m and a half long. When you try to eat with them you couldn't get them into your mouth. So everybody in hell sat looking at the delicious food and starving.
John asked if you could go up and have a look at heaven. Up he went. Again, great long tables laid with delicious food. Again, great long spoons. He asked someone what the difference between heaven and hell was. The answer he got was very clear. In heaven we use the spoons to feed each other!

When I consider 'soup it forward,' I am reminded of Bertrand Russel saying something along the lines of 'after studying philosophy for thirty years the only advice I can give you is, try being a bit nicer to each other.'

I would like to thank all those who told me about their soup preferences, apart from those mentioned I can add Alex, Ventura, Marta, Laura, Patricia, Jimena and Esperanza, to name but a few.

I feel I've learned a lot. Including a couple of new recipes.

Thank you for listening. I hope you will join me next week.