

‘I’m Ellie Goulding’s Personal Chef... Thanks To Instagram!’

Posting vegan pics online was a hobby for Mary Mattern, 28, until a certain singer got in touch

My phone pings and I flick through the new comments I've received on Instagram and Twitter. And then my heart stops. I've received a message from Ellie Goulding. "This looks amazing!" she's written underneath a picture of one of my latest recipes. This

can't be real, I think, frantically clicking through to the profile it was sent from. Oh jeez, it is real. Ellie Goulding likes my sweet potato roll.

"We should grab some food sometime," I reply, not really thinking as I type. But somehow with those words I became private chef to one of the world's biggest popstars.

It all started in August 2012 when I was working as a nanny for a two-year-old boy, Spencer, in Baltimore. I felt bad about how much veg I was throwing away every day because I didn't know how to cook with it. I started teaching myself some vegetable-only recipes and was amazed by how many delicious meat and dairy-free dishes I'd been missing out on. I posted pictures of my inventions on Instagram and after two weeks someone wrote: "So, you're vegan now?" I realised I actually was eating a plant-only diet – and I felt great! Admittedly I still craved cheese, but I didn't miss meat at all, which was a surprise. Two months later I decided to go for it properly, ditching leather and



Hanging with her fellow vegan (and friend) Ellie



any cosmetics that contained animal products, too. I'd always been uneasy about the ethics of farming animals so felt morally much better for it.

Meanwhile, my Instagram pictures had been getting so many hits I'd created a food-only account called Nom Yourself. Within three weeks I had 2,000 followers – an insane amount for anyone, let alone a nanny in Baltimore. People were asking for more recipes, more photos and more tips so I started a website. By April 2013, seven months after I got the vegan bug, I knew I'd have to quit nannying to keep up with it all. I'd looked after Spencer since he was seven months old so it was a wrench, but with publishers on the phone asking me to release recipe books, and agents begging to sign me up, I moved back home to New York.

It was slow progress. I put everything I had into developing my site, creating more recipes and continuing to learn about vegan food. Then in December 2013 I received the message from Ellie. When she replied, I couldn't believe it – this was the girl whose music I listened to every day. We started chatting on social media and exchanged numbers. Initially we just swapped recipes, but as time passed we became friends. She'd text to ask how my day was going, and vice versa. I almost forgot she was a star – she was just like any other friend.

When I told her to look me up when she came to the States, she invited me to cook for her before she performed at Madison Square Gardens in March 2014. To say I was nervous would be a huge understatement. But I was so



Mary is publishing her first recipe book later this year

The pair bonded over a sweet potato roll

market or whole foods store then whip up some cauliflower and noodles in the kitchen at whatever venue she was playing. I watched all her performances from backstage and was blown away by her passion, dedication and work ethic. It was truly inspiring. But off-stage, she was so normal. During her days off we'd hang out. In Portland we went kayaking in the rain, while in Miami we just chilled by the pool.

I had an amazing time, but the tour couldn't last forever so I headed back home to work on my cookbook, which is being published by Penguin in September. Meanwhile I've also been private cheffing for other famous faces, including Jeremy Piven from *Entourage*, who's now on British TV in *Mr Selfridge*. I spotted him in a restaurant in California and tweeted him to say so – he replied, complimented my food pictures and asked to meet me. Soon I was cooking him meals at my home and his assistant would collect them. Ellie and I are still in touch. I'm even booked to join her again on her next US tour this year. I sometimes can't believe all of this has happened. It just shows how far you can go when you're doing something you love.'

“During her days off we'd hang out, chilling by the pool”

meals a day and one of my special smoothies to drink when she came off stage. The kale, protein powder and coconut water mix re-energised her after her crazy energetic performances. There wasn't an oven on the bus, and we often travelled overnight, so I'd make her raw wraps with Swiss chard and kale. If I had access to a hob, I'd grab a taxi to the nearest farmers'

Our Favourite Nom Yourself Recipes



Vegan Shepherd's Pie

Vegan Turk'y is a thing, apparently – a surprisingly tasty thing. You won't even notice this winter warmer is vegan.



Fried Eggplant (Aubergine) Sticks

Ditch the chips (even though vegans can eat them) and whip up some aubergine sticks as a healthy alternative.



Lemon Pound Cake

Vegans don't have to eat dusty, cardboard desserts. This beauty is packed with lemons and vanilla.