



BARBECUE ENVY: *Invading the Last Bastion of American Malehood*

IN THE WAR BETWEEN THE SEXES, there are two indisputable facts: no woman is satisfied with the number of shoes in her closet, and no man can resist the seductive siren song of the barbecue grill. Much like the compulsive accumulation of stiletto heels by *Sex & the City*'s hot-to-trot HBO actresses, American men have been known to horde an assortment of BBQs suitable for every occasion.

Need a quick supper for six? Wheel out a push-button-igniting, propane-fueled gas grill with 884 inches of porcelain-coated cooking surface. Craving the smoky taste of a kabob, but alone tonight? Heck, bring the little hibachi in from the garage and experience, privately, what *Barbecue Bible* author Steven Raichlen calls, "the thrill most men [enjoy] when they set something on fire."

As the female owner of a wobbly tabletop model that I've stretched to its limits with pudgy Bratwurst links and moist Tomales Bay oysters, my barbecue envy has reached a volatile scale bordering on combustible. And although the idea of owning a serious barbecue sparks my imagination, the reality of shopping at places like *Barbecues Galore* is as intimidating as a visit to a used car lot.

I DECIDED TO BUILD MY BBQ CONFIDENCE UP SLOWLY, and like a smoldering pile of instant-light briquettes, I cheated – heading to my local Target store where I was certain I could shop for hours without interference from condescending salesmen brimming with barbecue expertise. Yet even at Target, the choices made my head spin: prices ranged from fifteen dollars to well over five hundred, and easily recognizable brand names including Char-Broil© battled for floor space with upstarts like Aussie©.

Standing in the aisle, I scratched my head and tried to think like a man. Does size really matter? I pulled the top off a good-looking Thermos© gas grill, only to suffer disenchantment at the sight of a measly 464 inch rack. That much cooking grid space might work for a few weenies, but if I ever felt the urge to throw a turkey on the Barby, I'd be in big trouble.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spied a hot little Sunbeam© number with push-button ignition, porcelain-wire cooking grids and a gas burner built into a handy side-shelf. Little miss Quick-N-Ready© beckoned me closer with promises of 'no tools required assembly,' but when I opened her

instruction manual, I felt like I was reading a foreign language. As a self-sufficient adult who boasts a well-endowed tool chest and can change her own tires, the realization that I can't figure out how to put a stupid barbecue grill together makes me want to explode! For a thirty-dollar fee, someone on staff will do the assembly for me. But after the grill's assembled, how in the hell do I get one of those unwieldy, 200 pound hunks of cast iron home? Could it be that the grill-transportation factor explains the equally perplexing issue of a manly obsession with Monster Trucks and SUVs? If you're driving one of those road warriors, Mister, you can bring home both the bacon and the barbecue.

A TRIP TO THE LIBRARY threw more heat on my quest for fire. Dozens of books on grilling and barbecuing crowd the cooking section, and each opened wide to full color photo spreads of hot, beefy butts and pork rumps. Steven Raichlen's *Barbecue Bible* cleared up my misconceptions about what real American-style barbecue is: a method of cooking where the heat source is in a separate firebox, the food cooks in slow, low heat under 225 degrees; and smoke generates all that rib-tickling flavor. Of course, the word barbecue is also used to describe a dish or a recipe, a piece of equipment (the very grill I lust after), and an act or a social gathering.

The origin of the word itself is hotly debated, but the most colorful story is that of pork-loving French Caribbean pirates cooking whole piglets over open-pit fires and using the term "de barbe et queue" (literally, "head to tail"). Or, you can choose to believe the equally swashbuckling tale of *Spanish* buccaneers in Haiti smoking porkers over fresh wood and adapting the American Indian word *barbacoa*. Both versions have been touted by the very *marketeters* who are behind all those smoky pink rings circling cuts sliced from BBQed beef brisket.

Beginning in the late 1950s, food producers and briquette peddlers like Kingsford began the heavy promotion of backyard barbecue grilling because, as Harvey Levenstein says in his book, *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America*, it, "provided welcome relief from the drudgery of cooking for Mom." It also provided increased sales of Oscar Mayer wieners and charcoal briquettes – a commodity unknown by either sex until pioneering auto maker Henry Ford (with the help of Thomas Edison) created the hard, black nuggets to use waste wood leftover from his chemical plant operations. In the post-war years, barbecue grilling became such a rage, Levenstein notes, because advertisers peddled the very "idea that cooking over an open fire was itself a particularly masculine pursuit ... reflecting American images of cowboys on the range or fishermen in the woods rather than the fact that [cooking] is women's daily task throughout much of the world."

The charcoal versus gas debate consumes whole chapters in every BBQ book, and even America's earliest grilling authority, James Beard, weighs in with, "It is my opinion that charcoal has nothing to do with the success of cooking meat."

Born to Grill authors Cheryl and Bill Jamison also make strong points in favor of home chefs using modern-day gas. Charcoal's "character comes as much from the industrial plant as from anything that grows in the great outdoors," the couple wisely notes. And, blowing a puff of pit smoke at haughty regional-cooking traditionalists' beliefs, the Jamisons remind readers that, "both briquettes and propane would have bewildered George Washington and Scarlett O'Hara."

The bottom line here is that grilling *is not* barbecuing. Grilling is the cooking of "small, tender ingredients" (and, occasionally, whole animals) over an open fire – a fire that blazes hot-as-Hades without actually burning the food. This age-old, open-air technique is something both George W. the First and Miss Scarlett would have felt right at home with. Gas grills have become America's favorite, however, because they save time – push the ignition button and ten minutes later you're

cookin. ' And with this ease of use, you'll probably cook on your grill more often – lowering its cost per use.

In addition to reflecting on home grillers, *Paradox of Plenty* author Levinson comments on the mighty Barbecue Belt that once stretched along Route 66 from Chicago to California. Tender, slow cooked barbecued beef and *haws* were sold from so many roadside BBQ joints that a depression-era newspaper editor remarked, "it was the love of barbecue that separated the Southwest from the rest of the United States." And beyond this savory fast food served to transient motorists, Southern barbecue-centric events –including cooking contests and political rallies camouflaged as all you can eat pig outs– became, Levenstein quotes, "the noblest demonstration of American neighborhood eating."

On a lighter note, NBC weatherman Al Roker's book –*Big, Bad Book of Barbecue: 100 Easy Recipes for Backyard Barbecue and Grilling* – also reminded me that what we Americans call a barbecue is, "the most social of cooking arts," and definitely a reason to follow the 'bigger is better' rack-size rule. Flipping through the equally illuminating pages of A. Cort Sinnes' *The Grilling Encyclopedia* –before hiding it under my mattress– I drew up a list of additional traits for the Grill of My Dreams:

- A grill that doesn't burn up my spare cash
- A hot little number (quick to ignite with a high BTU rating)
- Tight parts
- Sturdy legs
- Something I can stand up to and push around
- A grill that gives me all the space I need (or, at least, 754 inches of grid surface)
- Effortless clean up of all those porcine juices

SATISFIED THAT I COULD NOW HOLD MY OWN AT BARBECUES GALORE, I took a deep breath and plunged through the front entry. And there I found her: A Jen-Air© Char-Gas grill that goes both ways. With one integrated unit, I can BBQ on Saturday and flash grill on Sunday.

It's every man's dream – *two grills together!*

The world is my barbecued oyster.

KATE BLOOD is a freelance writer living in Northern California. At the time of his death, her father owned seven charcoal grills.

WHEN THE SMOKE ALARM SOUNDS...

...answer it with one of the barbecue specialties featured in *San Francisco Firehouse Favorites: Great Recipes by the Bay City's Famous Firemen Chefs*. San Francisco's now sexually integrated firefighting teams say, "the hotter the fire, the better the cooking." And in order to eat their well-crafted meals uninterrupted, these brave men and women remind you that all barbecue fires must be well tended!

LIEUTENANT FRANK WALDEYER'S ENGINE COMPANY NO. 10 MUSTARD- BARBECUED CHUCK ROAST

(Reprinted from San Francisco Firehouse Favorites: Great Recipes by the Bay City's Famous Firemen Chefs; Calvello, Harlow, Sackett & Sarvis; Bonaza Books, New York.)

2-inch thick chuck roast (about 5 pounds)
Unseasoned meat tenderizer
1 clove garlic, peeled and slivered
2 tablespoons each dry mustard and Worcestershire sauce

Sprinkle meat generously on both sides with meat tenderizer; with a sharp knife, pierce roast in a few places, and insert slivers of garlic; allow to stand at room temperature for 1 1/2 hours. Barbecue meat over medium-hot coals for 20 minutes on each side. Remove to carving platter. Sprinkle one side of meat with half the mustard and half the Worcestershire; with two forks, pierce through the meat over entire surface. Turn meat, sprinkle second side with remaining mustard and Worcestershire, and pierce as before. Carve roast into "little roasts," following the lines of the gristle; slice each little roast thinly, across the grain (as if it were a large roast). Spoon juices over meat slices. Makes 4 servings.

IT'S GRILLER TIME

Drunken Chicken gets its name from the sight of tipsy birds collapsing as their wobbly, well-done legs give out. This is my adaptation of a classic, regional American recipe:

1 (3-pound) chicken
1 tsp. liquid crab boil
1 tsp. liquid smoke
1 (12-ounce) can Miller© beer, can top removed

Preheat grill over high heat. (If using charcoal, make sure the coals are hot and glowing, and carefully push them over to the side of the grill to leave an open space in the middle.) Clean chicken and pat dry. Drink 9-ounces of the beer, then add remaining 3-ounces to a mixing bowl and stir in the crab boil and liquid smoke. Pour this mixture into the reserved beer can (with top removed) and place the bottom cavity of the chicken over the can (the chicken will be sitting up with his legs just touching the grill). Place can with chicken directly over the fire, cover and cook for one hour and twenty minutes. (Don't open the grill while it's cooking or you'll have to add five to ten minutes time for each peak). Chickens are done when their legs give out. For a drunken flock, several chickens can be cooked at one time.

NAWTH CA'LINA BBQED CORN

(adapted from The Gentleman's Companion: An Exotic Cookery Book, Vol. I, by Charles H. Baker Jr., 1939, The Derrydale Press, Inc.)

In an odd, yet engrossing, epicurian tale dedicated to the author's own, "handsome digestive tract," author Baker recalls a dish, "found during a summer of 1936 which we spent high up in the cloud-masked mountain ranges out of Asheville...by an amateur sportsman chef we know up in those hills who has much to do with various forms of American tobacco." Try this rich combination served alongside greens tossed with a light vinaigrette, grilled chicken or trout and boiled new potatoes. Or do as *Dictionary of American Food & Drink* author John F. Mariani suggests and serve "coleslaw colored with tumeric" – a typical barbecue side dish in Western North Carolina.

4 ears fresh, yellow or white corn on the cob, husked
12 strips of Nieman Ranch brand applewood-smoked bacon, each slice pounded thin
with a rolling pin
1/2 stick unsalted butter
1/2 cup smooth-style peanut butter

Cook corn in rapidly boiling, well-salted water for 8-minutes. Drain, pat dry and set aside. Mix butter and peanut butter together in a small saucepan and heat over medium heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until "lusciously melted together." Remove butter mixture from heat and reserve. Trim off corn cob stems flush, and wrap each ear with three slices of bacon skewered at ends with toothpicks. Impale each ear on a long metal kabob-type skewer (length wise, like a poker) and using a brush, paint each ear well with the butter mixture. Broil wrapped and skewered corn over hot coals – turning to brown evenly on all sides. ("If corn is not parboiled first it takes a long time to cook, burns cheeks, hands and bacon; tends to make the corn too tough.")