



The fussy eater

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The wheat-free vegetarian girl's guide to eating like a man: barbecue meat by the pound, Texas-style

The four of us stood on the pavement outside the restaurant. Teddy, a New Yorker who became a wild enthusiast about the world of barbecue to the point of buying a pick-up truck, a giant mobile pit, and competing; Liza, my best friend who showed up wearing blue jeans, rhinestones and cowboy boots; Brian, her beefy boyfriend. And me. The wheat-free vegetarian.

We were about to enter a massive "barbecue market" in Manhattan, the kind of place where people eat meat Texas-style. Where you order by the pound. Where it's cooked "low and slow" and served on brown paper.

Liza reaches into her purse and pulls out a sample of smoked bacon ordered off the internet. I'm already feeling left out. I'm alarmed as well. When did Liza start carrying bacon in her purse?

Apparently, when people are about to consume large quantities of meat, they take leave of their senses. Just then, Teddy declares: "Time to eat! From rooster to tooter!"

I don't know what to say to that.

Luckily, I don't have to say anything because as the front door opens, the



smell is so overwhelming, it renders me speechless. There's a smoky cloud of oak being burned in the pit. I inhale and feel my cholesterol levels go up.

As we wait to be seated, a large man walks in with his party and calls out, "All right fellas. Take off your belts." Given that the expression is usually "Loosen your belts", this is serious business.

This might explain why everything is super-sized. The space, the portions and especially the patrons who resemble bears about to go into hibernation, filling up while they can. I know where to go if I ever need to boost my self-esteem. Hanging around people who eat barbecue, I feel like Kate Moss.

At the table I quickly learn that there really is only one topic of conversation: grilling. How to grill, where to grill,

I find a cucumber salad on the special menu. Liza is holding up a dinosaur rib

grills that were stolen, grills that were frozen; at one point Liza and Brian tell a story in unison about grilling pork chops on the patio.

Bacon in her purse, pork chops on the patio – what's next? A platter of meat on a stick? Turns out, yes. A platter with a variety of cuts arrives – beef rib, prime rib, brisket moist and brisket lean with super-sized toothpicks stuck into each chunk. They dig in and the conversation is on pause. There's a lot of chewing.

I ask the waitress about the sides. There are three sizes: Good Eatin', Heapin' Helpin' and Feed Your Family. I have questions. Collard greens are made with pork? They are. She suggests the macaroni and cheese but that doesn't work. Wheat. The sweet potato bourbon mash has bourbon. Anything without bourbon?

She looks right at me and says, "Let me get you the special menu."

I am delighted to find a cucumber salad. I look over at Liza and she's holding up a brontosaurus rib. The men are eating with their hands. Essentially, I'm having dinner with the Flintstones.

Eating vast quantities of barbecued meat is the ultimate alpha male excuse to be out of control in an environment where it's not only permitted, but encouraged. It's the sort of eating that, while taking another bite, inspires the words, "I don't know what's wrong with me, I'm so full."

The following day, they all have food hangers. Liza says she'll go back for sure, only next time she'll have the chicken. When I ask why she replies, "Stick with what you know." **OFM**

KITCHEN APPS

OFM tests foodie-friendly iPhone apps. Eat, drink, download...

Pair It!



What is it? Clever gizmo that, for £1.79, matches food with the correct variety of wine, removing hassle and embarrassing mistakes from mealtimes. Well, almost, since it doesn't tell you the exact bottle you need but what you want, a miracle?

Key ingredient? Breadth, imagination and refreshing lack of snobbery when it comes to options – we all want to know what

compliments fish and chips or pizza on a Friday night in. Not much on offer for vegetarians, though.

Frustratingly techie? Not at all.

Better than a sommelier? No, nor is it more useful than a wine critic. Apps are about simplicity and an individual's palate is more complicated, hence the baffling nature of some wine apps geared towards experts.

Download? Yes. It'll become a staple part of trips round the supermarket, although using it in a restaurant remains a distinct no, no, at least for now.

THE PIE CHART

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