

'Gie her a haggis'

Today is Robbie Burns Day, that day when all Scots (and wannabe Scots) have the perfect excuse to eat heartily, drink and make merry, all in memory of their native Scottish son.

Over the years, I've covered my share of Burns dinners, enjoying all the ceremony and pageantry that one associates with the event.

The piping in of the haggis, the long drawn-out address, (which few people have any inkling of what's actually said) followed by the toast, is a ritual that everyone ought to see at least once. The same with tasting haggis.

Those who turn their nose up at the dish are pre-judging the medieval treat, just because it was originally made from the liver, lungs and heart of a sheep, which were boiled, minced and mixed with chopped onions, toasted oatmeal, salt, pepper, and spices, then plopped into a sheep's stomach, stitched up and cooked.

Okay, it sounds gross—I agree. But it actually tastes great, especially with a little beef gravy drizzled over it.

Today, the recipe is a little less earthy. The finest meats are selected, and the ingredients are fine-tuned to make a great dish.

Even the stomach is synthetic material, and some websites are even offering recipes for vegetarian versions of haggis.

I covered a Burns dinner last weekend at St. John's United Church in Georgetown.

For the first time in all of my 25 years of attending Burns dinners, the *Address to The Haggis* was performed by a woman.

Now I've seen some great recitations of the address—and some less than great ones.

You see, I figure the more theatrics one puts into the address, the better it gets. And I tell ya, at St. John's, Bett Leverette certainly didn't disappoint with her rendition.

Now I tend to shoot the address up close and personal, right under the nose of the speaker, capturing the expressions and gestures as best I can. I've watched with anticipation as speakers

Ted Brown



pull out a dinky little 'sgian dubh' (black knife) tucked in their sock, to perform the dastardly deed, slashing open the haggis:

*An' cut you up wi' ready sleight,
Trenching your gushing entrails bright,
Like ony ditch...*

But when Bett came to that part, she didn't pull out some puny little blade. No siree— she hauled out a weapon that'd make Crocodile Dundee proud.

Actually, wielding it about, within inches of my nose like some possessed demon... well, she scared me... maybe a little.

A few wild swipes in the air and she plunged that knife into that poor haggis so savagely that I was pretty certain I heard it scream out.

Of course, in retrospect, it might have been me that screamed.

As Bett and piper Steve Jenkins partook of their toast to the Haggis, I thought to myself, 'Yup, another haggis sacrificed for the immortal memory of Scotland's native son.'

Tonight, The Sidekick and I will be partaking of some of Burn's traditional bill 'o fare, like neeps (turnips) and tatties (potatoes) and an ample serving of haggis, of course. And as someone reads the *Immortal Memory*, I'm sure we'll all sit back, musing:

*"But if ye wish her gratefu' prayer,
Gie her a haggis!"*

—Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com

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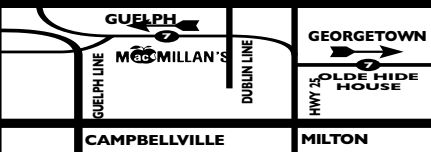
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