



# A MAN INVENTED THE BBQ

One of the best things about summer evenings is the barbecue, and I think it was invented by a man. Between you and me, the ladies think they are pretty clever getting the guys out there

cooking, and for that reason might lay claim to the invention, but they're wrong. I don't argue this point though, because no matter how I mistreat the meat, Diane is unfailingly complimentary. She wants to encourage me, to make sure I stand outside midst the smoke and the flames, trying valiantly to cook.

The thing that's wrong with this picture is that I like it. For one thing, a man cannot, absolutely cannot, attempt to barbecue without a drink. There's no counting them either when you're toiling away on the "Q". If one beer isn't enough to carry the procedure far enough, uncap another. If two beers isn't enough, well, you get the picture. This feature may well account for the unpredictability of the results.

It's a manly thing, too. The cave man stands by a roaring blaze, a mastodon steak hovering over the flames, preparing to feed his family. Ugh! Ugh! If they made barbecue chef's aprons in animal pelts, I'd buy one. Unfortunately, they only sell them with stupid remarks emblazoned on the front, so I have to do without. That's a good marketing idea and you can have it for free. A barbecue apron that looks like a tiger skin, or has a mane on it.

The propane BBQ has taken away a little of the romance and manliness. Remember when we had hibachi's, or the charcoal ones? The man had to start the fire then, there was no little red starter button on the barbecue. Of course, the button doesn't work anyway. It's curious, isn't it? Why do barbecue manufacturers go to the trouble to put that little red clicker on them when they must know it will never survive the first rainstorm.

Anyway, charcoal starting was a risky and dangerous procedure. We had to stack all the little briquettes into a pile, and the squirt a huge serving of starter fluid on them. Then, standing back as far as one could, you threw matches at this potential inferno. Finally, when a lit match struck the stack there was a satisfying "WHOOSH", and flames reared three or four feet above your head. Very very macho. That's not to say that propane has removed all the risk. You only have to forget you left the gas and the burners on a few times, hear that "WHUMP" as the accumulated gas ignites and lose all the hair off your knuckles and eyebrows, to use a little caution.

My friend Bill set his house on fire. He lived in a neighbourhood where theft was a major problem, so he chained his barbecue to the porch. He was cooking chicken, and the darned things burst into flame when he was occupied with something else (probably into the beer fridge for a couple more). The barbecue was a mass of flames, and chained to the house, he couldn't move it away. The firemen, after putting out the vinyl siding, and after all the snickering had died down, advised Bill that he might want to move the barbecue further from the house. Duh, OK, he hadn't figured that out. People in authority are the masters of unneeded advice. "You should have put oil in that power mower", says the mechanic. "You should have called before you dug that post hole", says the Bell guy. "You don't want to glide through stop signs like that", says the cop. You get the idea.

I'm not a BBQ freak mind you. I don't like to do it in January when by five-thirty it's pitch black so you need a flashlight to see what's cooking, and it's too cold to even think about pouring a brew. There are people who enjoy barbecuing it in all seasons (at least they say they do), just like there's fishermen who are so desperate to practice their art they'll go ice fishing. The National Barbecue Association has an annual meeting somewhere called "Barbeqlossal" and there are any number of BBQ cooking contests. One of them is "The Annual SwineFlew BBQ Contest". It only proves that there are those who will overreact to anything.

Aahh, but in the summer, with the Vesuvian smoke and ash curling about my head, a cold one in hand, gazing about mesmerized by the bird life (ever notice that the vultures circle ever lower once the smell of carbonized burgers wafts upward in the breeze?), that's when I know that the barbecue was invented by a man.

- George Underhill