

PLEASURES OF THE FLESH

Having sworn off factory-farmed meat and made a modest case for eating less of the stuff generally (but still with a vaguely clean conscience), something quite primitive has overcome me. It's been back to the cave around here, a flesh fest. I have eaten more beef in the past week than most males manage in a month. And I should be ashamed, but I'm not.

Because, in an effort to source meat I can eat and still sleep at night, I took delivery of a 10kg mystery box from Daniela Mollica, who, with her husband Sam Walker, is raising Chianina breed cattle on a small property in southern Victoria. Chianina are best associated with that most magnificent and outrageously expensive of steaks, the bistecca Fiorentina, many versions of which I've tried with none matching an example served in a restaurant in Tuscany a few years back. When in Florence...

Chianina is basically a lean-fleshed Italian cow, and Mollica, a co-founder of Slow Food Melbourne (i.e., pretty much on board with the whole humane approach) is bringing them up only on grass, ageing the carcasses after slaughter and then marketing the animals to friends on a more-or-less nose-to-tail approach: you get some prime stuff, sure, and you get lesser cuts, too. Her system can't work any other way.

So what do you do when 10kg of assorted meat arrives in a box, fresh? First instinct: freezing this lovely, dark beef is just plain wrong. So while, inevitably, some had to go in the Kelvinator, a lot didn't.

And so I roasted a piece of topside to make school lunches of sliced beef. I made a magnificent spaghetti sauce of the mince, some of which was frozen, the balance turned into a (stunning) lasagne. And I made ossobucco from the shin.

For Sunday dinner we had a 500g rib cutlet and a 400g T-bone between four. Monday was the most extraordinary ossobucco (Giorgio Locatelli recipe) with saffron risotto. Tuesday was the lasagne. Wednesday the ossobucco became a pasta sauce and, I'm ashamed to say, I followed that with the second of the T-Bones, shared with my son, who has developed a surprising taste for steak. It had to be eaten.

Between, we had beef sandwiches with lots of mustard for lunch.

The bad news is that all the fresh beef has gone; the good news is that I'm off to Bhutan, a Buddhist country and, hopefully, a largely vegetarian one. Aside from the odd yak stew, I expect to eat a lot of anything but meat while I'm there. Thank bloody goodness.

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