

TROPICAL LIFE

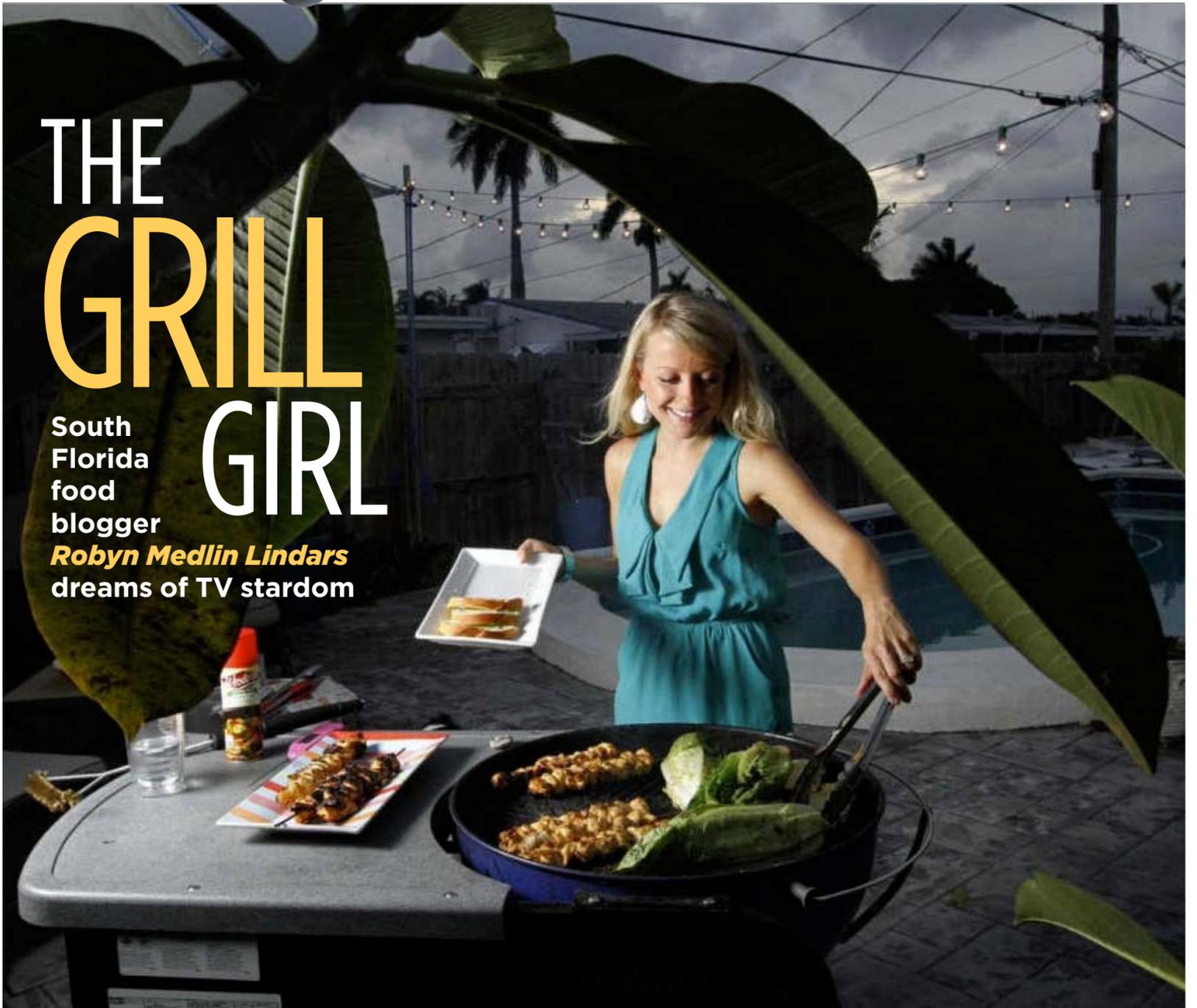


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THE GRILL GIRL

South Florida food blogger

Robyn Medlin Lindars dreams of TV stardom

BY SERENA DAI sdai@MiamiHerald.com

G Grill Girl blogger Robyn Medlin Lindars' outdoor cooking career got off to a rocky start. She was trying to fire up her husband's finicky gas grill in the small backyard of their Hollywood home and kept switching it on and off. Then *poof!*, a flame shot up, eating up the gas that had spilled out with each crack at the ignition.

"I almost singed my eyebrows on his old

grill," she says. "I can't even believe I didn't fall into the pool. I tripped back and I was like 'That's it! I'm buying him a new grill.'"

Three years later, the 32-year-old is an established food blogger who's trying to parlay her grillgrrrl.com and cheery, blond charm into a television career.

"Ideally, I'd love to have a show," she says. So far she's done online grilling videos for McCormick Spices and appeared in an episode of the Cooking Channel's *Food(ography) With Mo Rocca* that's scheduled to air this summer.

Last year she made it to the second round

of auditions for the Fox reality show *MasterChef*. ("I think they just brought me in the second round 'cause they thought I was funny," she says.) And now she's taping a pilot with a friend for a show she says will be "like a video blog on steroids" for the new website Outdoor Cooking Channel.

It's not that her cooking is anything extraordinary, Medlin Lindars says. It's her energy, charm and girl-next-door good looks she's banking on to set her apart from other food bloggers.

• TURN TO GRILL GIRL, 4E

EMILY MICHOT/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

SUNSET GRILL: Robyn Medlin Lindars cooks chicken satay and Romaine hearts in her backyard in Hollywood.

TELEVISION REVIEW

A real-life 'Friday Night Lights'

■ '4th and Forever.' 9 p.m. Thursday. Current TV.

BY FRAZIER MOORE Associated Press

It's not uncommon for football teams to play as if their lives depended on it. For the Long Beach Poly Jackrabbits, they really do.

An absorbing new docu-series on Current TV, *4th and Forever*, tells the tale. It chronicles the high-stakes 2010 football season of California's Long Beach Polytechnic High School, where life is tough but the football team is tougher. Or better be.

"What the heck is going on? Fighting is not football!" moans coach Raul Lara when an on-field brawl erupts during a preseason scrimmage with a rival team.

He's right, to a point. But preserving the glorious legacy of Long Beach Poly is a fight. So is each furious day for the players off the gridiron.

"If I don't break this tackle, then my son won't be able to eat," says Jeremiah Hollowell, a senior running back and single father.

Their simple, shimmering dream: to land a college football scholarship and break loose from this disadvantaged, gang-ridden world.

Poly has been recognized for the past five years as one of the nation's Top Athletic Schools by Sports Il-



LARA

• TURN TO TV REVIEW, 2E

WINE

To Tuscany's 'Wild West'

Here are a couple of old wine areas newly in the news. If you're a traveler and a wine fan, they're worth visiting on your next vacation. And they make wines that are worth trying next time you're in a wine shop.

In Italy, visitors flock to Tuscany to enjoy the wonders of Florence and the great wines of Chianti. But Tuscany also has a lesser-known, interesting and fast-growing wine region called Maremma.

It's in the southwest, hard by the Mediterranean Sea, and Italians call it their "Wild West." It has cowboys called *butteri* who, until recently, herded the region's famed Maremma beef cattle. Today, with their traditional black hats and wooden saddles, they mostly put on shows for tourists. Here the Cecchi Family, major



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Chianti producers, make wines in the traditional style of Tuscany's southwest.

Maremma winemakers use sangiovese, the same grape as Chianti, but often call it morellino. They say Maremma's warmer, Mediterranean climate makes the grape softer, richer and less tannic. Some even say it takes on a tang of salt from the nearby sea.

In Portugal, they make port. They've done it for centuries in the Douro Valley, east of the

• TURN TO WINE, 4E



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WINE

Spotlight on new wines from old areas

• WINE, FROM 1E

country's appropriately named second city, Porto. Port is a powerful, sweet dessert wine, fortified with grape brandy up to 18 percent alcohol or more. Its traditional recipe calls for at least six grapes, from touriga franca to tinta amarela, but can have up to 13 grapes, including the unfortunately named bastardo.

What's less known is that Portugal is making some excellent fine, dry table wines — at around 12 or 13 percent alcohol — from some of those same grapes. These are hearty wines, great with big, roast meats, from beef to lamb to goose.

The Douro region is mountainous and picturesque; it's fun to park by the road and slide down to the vines on slopes so steep growers can't use tractors and must rely on horses. And, yes, occasionally tourists can find a winery that will let them clamber into the massive concrete crushing tanks and stomp the grapes — even if the winery crushes 95 percent of its grapes with modern machines.

If you're touring the Iberian Peninsula, the Douro Valley is a logical if rigorous drive heading west from the city and region of Toro, one of Spain's newest, best-quality wine areas.

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED

• **2008 Pombal do Vesúvio DOC Douro**, Portugal (touriga franca, touriga nacional, tinta amarela grapes): rose petal aromas, flavors of black plums and chocolate, big, rich, smooth and hearty; \$29.

RECOMMENDED

• **2008 Vale do Bomfim Douro**, Portugal (tinta barroca, tinta roriz, touriga nacional and touriga franca grapes): fresh, fruity red plum and clove aromas and flavors, medium body, big, ripe tannins; \$12.

• **2007 Val delle Rose Morellino di Scansano Riserva**, DOC, Maremma, Tuscany, Italy: ruby red color, aromas and flavors of black plums and cloves, ripe tannins, big and hearty; \$20. (This wine can be confusing because it's from "Val delle Rose," or the "Valley of Roses." But it's not a rosé. It's a full red wine.)

• **2008 Cecchi Bonizio Sangiovese di Maremma**, Tuscany, Italy: deep red color, aromas of red raspberries, earth and oak, flavors of black cherries and cinnamon, mild acids and soft tannins; \$9.



Grill Girl Tips

Use a chimney starter or paraffin cubes to light a charcoal grill. Lighter fluid leaves a weird taste.

Oil the grill grates a little to prevent sticking.

Don't over handle the food: Flip it just once, and don't press on meat with your spatula.

Use an instant-read thermometer to check meat and poultry for doneness.

Tent meat with foil for 5 minutes after it comes off the grill so the juices reabsorb.

Sea salt, pepper and fresh herbs are vegetables' best friends; use a little and it will go a long way.

Next Clinic: Sept. 24 at Culinary Concepts, Pompano Beach; details at grillgrrrr.com/womens-grilling-clinics/



PHOTOS BY EMILY MICHOT/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

THE GRILL GIRL

Blogger has television dreams

• GRILL GIRL, FROM 1E

"I'm probably just more marketable as a brand," she says. "Not to sound snotty, [but] it helps that I'm not a competition barbecue cook, so I'm not 300 pounds."

Medlin Lindars is from North Carolina, but her twang is more Valley Girl than Southern belle. At five-foot-one, she's not much bigger than the charcoal bags she hoists, but she seems unfazed. Her sentences often end in "so ..." before her voice trails away into a joke or infectious laugh.

"Spend two minutes with her, and you want to be her best friend," says her husband and "chief tasting officer," Scott Lindars.

"Who'd you rather watch cooking? A big barbecue guy from Tennessee, smoking a pork butt, or, you know, a cute blonde girl grilling?"

Robyn had always loved to cook but hated to clean up, and the custom Weber grill she got to replace Scott's old gas model was a revelation.

"Once I grilled, there weren't as many dishes as when I'd make a huge mess in the kitchen," she says. "It was like 'Oh I love grilling! This is awesome!'"

Outdoor cooking took over the recipe blog she'd been keeping. She began connecting with other grilling bloggers, and her grill collection grew to nine.

When she realized some of her friends were intimidated by outdoor cooking, she invited them over for a girls-only grilling get-together that inspired her clinics — four-hour, \$35-per-woman sessions she leads at Culinary Concepts in Pompano Beach and has taken on the road to Washington, D.C., Knoxville, Tenn., and Charleston, S.C.

Medlin Lindars considers grilling the perfect way to entertain in South Florida. Cooking the entire meal — meat, starch, side dishes, dessert — on the grill leaves the hostess time to enjoy herself.

"You can really hang out outside with your guests without having to run back and forth inside [to the kitchen]," she says with a grin. "Unless you need to make yourself another drink."

She uses banana leaves and loquats from her backyard and mangoes from a neighbor in her cooking.

"You have the Cuban influence, and the Haitian, Jamaican and the French Canadian. It just kind of creates a diverse environment for all different kinds of cooking styles."

An Appalachian State University journalism graduate who works for the press-release service MarketWire, Medlin Lindars has found an outlet for her love of writing and cooking and her on-screen aspira-



SAFE COOKING: Robyn Medlin Lindars checks the temperature of her chicken satay. Above, the finished meal.

tions in Grill Girl.

"I'm just seeing what's panning out right now," she said. "A lot of—what is it?—irons in the fire."

She knows there's plenty of competition. A quick Google search turns up "Girls on the Grill," "Girl on Grill Action" and "Yes! You Can Grill," to name a few female-oriented grilling blogs.

But Medlin Lindars thinks she's got what it takes.

"Some people, [being on camera] works for them," she says. "For others, it doesn't. It works for me."

MAIN DISH

CHICKEN SATAY

This makes lots of sauce. Serve the extra on noodles or rice another day.

- 1 1/2 cups coconut milk
- 1 cup peanut butter
- 1/4 cup rice vinegar
- 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
- 2 tablespoons Thai fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons Sriracha hot sauce
- 1/4 cup fresh mint leaves (or 1 large bunch)
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tablespoon grated lime zest
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into strips

Soak 8 bamboo skewers in water for at least 30 minutes. Prepare grill for direct grilling at medium heat (about 350 degrees).

Combine the coconut milk, peanut butter, vinegar, lime juice, fish sauce, hot sauce, mint, garlic and lime zest in a blender or food processor. Process until smooth.

Pour about half of the sauce over the chicken, coating it completely. Reserve remaining sauce. Let the chicken marinate for a few minutes.

Thread the chicken strips onto the skewers. (Discard the marinade.) Grill the chicken for 3 to 4 minutes per side, or until the internal temperature reaches 165 degrees. Let the meat rest, tented with foil, about 5 minutes. Serve with some of the reserved sauce on the side. Makes 4 servings.

Source: Adapted from Robyn Medlin Lindars

Per serving (using half the sauce): 422 calories (59 percent calories from fat), 28 g fat (12 g saturated fat, 9 g monounsaturated fat) 75 mg cholesterol, 35 g protein, 9.3 g carbohydrates, 2 g fiber, 1229 mg sodium.

Basil Butter Texas Toast

Combine 1 stick butter (at room temperature), 3 peeled garlic cloves, 1 heaping tablespoon chopped fresh basil and sea salt to taste in a food processor. Pulse to puree. **Cut** a large baguette into 2-inch slices, and spread them generously with basil butter on both sides.

While you grill the rest of your meal, place the bread slices on the top shelf of the grill, where the residual heat will toast them. (Or place them directly on the grill, watching carefully so they don't burn.)

Source: Adapted from Robyn Medlin Lindars

Grilled Romaine Hearts

These are a perfect addition to your favorite meal on the grill, and can cook alongside the meat. Figure 1 romaine heart per guest.

- Prepare grill for direct grilling at medium heat (about 350 degrees).
- Rinse romaine hearts and dry well with paper towels.
- Drizzle with olive oil and season generously with sea salt and freshly ground pepper.
- Grill romaine hearts for 3 to 5 minutes per side, or until char marks form and lettuce begins to wilt.

Serve with a generous amount of freshly grated Parmesan or other aged hard cheese.

Source: Adapted from Robyn Medlin Lindars

Grilled Pound Cake and Pineapple

"I paired this with sea salt caramel gelato," Medlin Lindars says, "and my husband was literally licking his plate."

Cut pound cake into 2-inch slices.

- Peel and core a pineapple, and cut it into rings.
- Grill cake and pineapple on medium direct heat until char marks form, being careful not to burn the cake.
- On dessert plates, top each cake slice with a pineapple slice and add a scoop of ice cream or gelato.



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