



# The fussy eater

## Ariel Leve

On Father's Day I like to recall the meals I have shared with Dad – and the indecision gene I have inherited

**M**y father has always said: "Food without spices is like a day without sunshine." But for me, a day without sunshine is no big loss.

When it comes to food, like everything else, we couldn't be more different. My father is easy to please. He'll eat something mediocre without a fuss. "You don't think this fish tastes rubbery?" I'll ask. "It didn't bother me," he'll say. "Until you pointed it out."

He lives now in southeast Asia. My parents divorced when I was young and my father moved to Thailand. I would visit him in Bangkok and eat pad thai or chicken satay. I was a lot more adventurous when I was six. My favourite food was sticky rice with mango. But even then I was particular. He would ask if I was happy with the sticky rice. I'd consider this before replying: "It's too sticky."

A lot of our bonding took place over food. Patterns developed. No matter how slow I'm eating, it's never slow enough. A season will change before he finishes an appetiser. I take comfort in the fact that it's the one area of life where he displays anxiety. To this day,



before I take a bite, he will hold up his hand in a gesture of apprehension and say: "Slow down." Slow down? I haven't begun eating yet. Of course, the minute he tells me to slow down, I speed up.

My father's notoriously slow eating habits used to mystify his mother, my grandmother. While everyone else was pigging out on seconds and thirds, he was still gently cutting the gefilte fish.

He was health-conscious before it was fashionable. He talked a lot about balance and moderation; and still does. My grandmother would set out platters of bagels, lox and cream cheese and he would choose fruit and cottage cheese. She never understood this and chalked it up to him living in the tropics.

When he came to New York I'd beg him to take me to Baskin-Robbins for

ice cream. Thirty one flavours! I'd make him read them all out. I was too small to see the ice cream displayed so he would lift me up and recite one flavour after another. I would insist he go through all 31, and in the end get the same thing. Chocolate. This happened every time.

While I don't inherit my fussiness from him, the indecision might be in the DNA. When we go out to eat, I am the first to decide what to order.

Recently, I was with him in Bali. He asked me ahead of time what he should know about that I can't eat. I sent him a list that was epic. He wrote back: "We'll deal with it when you're here."

We had breakfast, lunch and dinner together every day for two weeks. Every morning, he would (slowly) pour olive oil on to his toast. I couldn't help but say: "Not so much." This was the ritual: him telling me to slow down, me telling him to go easy on the olive oil. One morning he asked: "How many days do you have left?"

Most nights he ate spicy food. I can't stand spicy food, and Indonesia is like an oven; it's uncomfortable enough without the extra sweating. "Sweating is great!" he exclaimed. "The hotter the better. It gets rid of the toxins." No thanks. I prefer my mouth not be on fire and I'm happy to leave the toxins inside me in air-conditioned comfort.

Before I left Bali, I asked my father about his favourite meal. He smiled. "My favourite meal is the next one." I thought about this. He is always looking ahead. My favourite meal is in the past.

And I'm sure it was with him. **OFM**  
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**Before I went to see my father he asked what I can't eat. I sent back an epic list**

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### Barista



#### What is it?

If you own an espresso machine, and everything you make with it tastes like a Gold Blend milkshake, then

this app will give your coffee the kick it needs.

#### How will it help?

With step-by-step, detailed-as-you-like instructions and films, it will guide you through making the full repertoire of the modern coffee bar, from declassé americano

to the chi-chi flat white and the infantile babyccino.

#### Will it make me a coffee nerd?

Probably, or a caffeine addict. You will soon become consumed with the java arts of "tamping" and "timing your extraction", and you'll be obsessively practising creating fancy "rosettas" in the froth of your lattes.

#### Missing ingredient?

Café con leche directions are but an update away.

#### Download?

Yes, for £1.79 you will never have to visit Starbucks again.

## THE PIE CHART

**Food by numbers** This month, eating records held by Sonya 'the Black Widow' Thomas (weight 45kg)

