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# Still Rather Go to Druther’s

To you dear reader, I will start this memoir with a fair warning. If you are expecting a lengthy pontification on the joys of a specific bit of culinary delight, you are going to be disappointed. Oh there will be some gushing about the greasy breaded fowl and equally triglyceride spiking side dishes, but for the most part this is a story of trust and disappointment. Nostalgia vs. reality. Desire and progress. Or perhaps just a bit of overly dramatic exposition on of tasty fast food from a regional franchise no one outside of Kentucky likely ever heard of? I shall leave quandary that to you.

The memory of my first Druther’s exposure is nebulous at best, but I do remember it wasn’t even a Druthers’ yet. I was perhaps three years of age at my young mother’s side visiting Aunt Sanchia at the “Burger Queen”. At the time I recall finding the concept amusing. Thanks to the ubiquity of advertising, I knew of Burger King – so it only made since there would be a wife, yes? Soon after Druther’s would become Druther’s, and I would be introduced to a brand of low brow cuisine that my unrefined but discerning taste still craves to this day. I’d like to tell you more of when and how this happened, but alas the memory has been lost to a timeless ether. When I say I’ve loved Druther’s longer than I can remember, I mean it!

Alas, the innocence of youth must give away to education and progress does it not? You aren’t likely to get far in this world without a lengthy tryst in school, and you won’t certainly won’t get in the door without the dreaded immunizations. I’ve never heard of a child who didn’t shudder at the thought of needles, and I sad to say took this to new heights. My mother was a clever sort though. She knew the typical child bribes would not suffice. Candy? Ice Cream? Sure, I enjoyed those things – but if you wanted to bribe me good and proper, you had to appeal to my budding carnivore nature. The simple promise of a Druther’s Chicken dinner afterward was all it took to get me sitting stoically subdued while Dr. Caudill performed her roughshod but well-practiced exam. All was going well, and my fears were quieted by the assurance they would informed me of every step before it transpired. Unfortunately, the PA on duty (Suzie, I name I shall never forget) must have had a different idea of “informed” than I did. I will never forget the sudden searing pain in my right arm that came without sight, sound, or warning of any kind. To my everlasting shame I screamed aloud like the panicked child I was, though I did manage presence of mind not to jerk away and risk more injury. What remained of my mental faculties after processing those sensations was to be spent on one thought: I had been right all along. No one in the medical profession was to be trusted. Ever. The years since, rather than calm my suspicious, have instead provided me with a far more robust frame and acerbic jocularity to enforce them. To wit, I am a polite but less than fun patient to get stuck attending to. Fair? Maybe not, but I didn’t care then and have no plans to start any time soon. Anyone with the misfortunate of tending my wounds and calamites may thank Ms. Suzie for your troubles.

Now then, weren’t we talking about a reward of the culinary sort? With bedside manor burned and lesson learned the promise of regional pseudo fast food goodness was filled less than an hour later. Truly, I lack the appellations needed to describe the sublime experience of each bite, nor am I sufficiently adroit describing psychology subtleties to fully explain the obvious correlation of comfort vs. true taste. What I can say is the meal was and remains one of the best I ever had the privilege to sit in front of. I may have solidified a distrust for doctors, but I also learned that if you save the reward for later, any unwanted task can be turned around. Even now as I write this, I look forward to rewarding myself with this evening’s meal. Holding off until the work is complete will make it all the sweeter, just as facing the ultimately well founded fears of an immunization visit first transformed a simple meal into a grand reward.

Alas again, youth gives way once more, and so it goes like onion layers until I found myself an adult. Well, at least chronologically, even if lacking the maturity to back it up. Sadly, I had to count Druther’s as one of the many things lost along the way to that nebulous mecca of adulthood. Only a few short years after the *traumatic* needle stick incident, Druther’s began selling their franchises to Dairy Queen. Those that did not convert simply shuttered outright. It was a travesty of the highest order I tell you! Or so I believed. As it happens, there is still as I write this one Druther’s remaining. Cursory google searches revealed that several franchise owners in Central Kentucky knew a good thing when they had it. They purchased rights to operate with the former Druther’s name and formula, and continued their taste bud teasing operations as usual. But even these holdouts gradually dwindled, until as of today, 2014-09-29 only one remains. Situated in Campbellsville KY, it is the last Mecca for Druther’s lovers everywhere.

No sooner did I discover these facts had I made the decision to seek out and satisfy my subdued but still intense craving for Burger Queen’s spawn. It was only a two hour trip from my Lexington area domicile. Certainly nothing all that far out of the way. Yet time once again proved herself a cruel mistress. Activities and responsibilities continuous coalesced to delay my intended pilgrimage for over two years. But one cold and rainy late fall afternoon I found time and purpose enough to set forth. What better way to travel and enjoy comfort food? I love the rain and cold weather, especially when seeking out a nice meal. Somehow the verisimilitude of warm luxury inside and what most consider unwelcome weather makes any food taste better. The trip was pleasant enough; while the truck’s electronic brain futility struggled to bring economy into a two ton metal box and its three hundred horse power plant, my less binary calculations swirled around Druther’s centric childhood memories. Silly one shot moments like a cheesy “Chilly? Chilli!” sign in the window, or the literal fryolator scrapings they had the nerve to market as “Crispens” mixed and mingled with childhood nostalgia to whet the anticipation even more.

Finally, the moment arrived! I walked in the door, greeted by a comely red haired lass who identified me as a “tourist” on site. Turns out I was but one of many who wanted a little taste of Kentucky’s own take on 80’s fast food. Order was taken, and I even got a visit from the manager who liked hearing stories from visitors. Everything was perfect, just like the day I had my unsuspecting arms pierced and pumped full of chemicals I couldn’t hope to annunciate. Then I took a bite. It was good, and little else. I cannot recall being more disappointed in a meal. In my comforting nostalgia I had expected to indulge in what could only be described as salt, grease, virgin purity and the coo of white dives. Instead it was just… good.

The lesson I took from this is that even when you are aware of human frailties like nostalgia – they will take hold anyway. I knew well as anyone building up an experience too much might result in a letdown, but I did so anyway. Don’t get me wrong, it was good. Perhaps more so than I realized. That is the true failing of over anticipation. You may in fact be so disappointed or disgusted you don’t realize the thing was in fact a wonder you should be filing as a present memory rather than comparing it to the past.

Don’t even lose sight of your childhood, but nor should you allow it color your life’s perceptions as an adult. Whether old or new, see every experience for what it is rather than what you wish it to be, and you might be pleasantly surprised. I intend to go back to Druther’s soon, and next time I’ll be better prepared for the uncultured greatness that awaits me.