

“EATING OUT AT BAXTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL”

By Tammer Jerry “Gus” Denny - 2008

Not too long ago (to older people time tends to get shorter in memory) I attended a luncheon at the local school for my grandson. I was shocked and amazed at the modernistic furniture, steam tables, stainless steel cafeteria lines that ending with an electronic cash register with receipt. The food and service was professional and even though I did not see it they must have had a chief in the kitchen. It brought back memories to year’s long sense past.

I had to recall when was the last time I went “out” to eat. That was not a hard question as it was only the night before at the outback. Then another time appeared before me: When was the first time I went out to eat? Now it becomes more complicated; did mom and dad take us out for a burger at McDonalds or Burger King. No, couldn’t have been that because they were not born at that time, so; what was it? I bet it was a trip to grandmother’s house or maybe we stopped by Aunt Vert’s for one of her famous fried chicken dinners. This sounds good but in all fairness they do not count because that was family. I mean out to eat on my own at a “big” time café I didn’t know what the word restaurant meant at that time). How about Baxter Grammar school? The year 1937 will not go down in history as the year of dining out. You were lucky to dine anywhere with the depression just starting to roll by.

To the kids at Baxter Grammar School an event was about to happen that would change our whole outlook on life and fill a void in our stomach. We were not hungry or mistreated but the “lard” bucket with what Mam could scrap up, especially when there was five to feed, was sometime not covered enough that you couldn’t see the bottom. Then one day thru an act of God and Franklin D. Roosevelt (we also had a hard time figuring out which of these two were the most powerful) the school hot lunch program came to Baxter Grammar School. But wait and see what else it brought other than a full stomach of green beans, peas. Potatoes, turnip greens, carrots, and then the following day combine the leftovers and that was soup day. Of course we had dessert (who do you think we were -“hillbillies). The dessert was always bread pudding or rice pudding, maybe not pretty but it sure was sweet and that is what counted, (years later I was privileged to select a menu at a hotel for a convention and noted that the most expensive item on the menu as dessert was bread pudding. I never realized how high on the hog we were eating!!) As you might have noted the words milk, meat, bread and a few other essential in cooking were omitted. This didn’t mean we didn’t have them sense they were provided thru the power of FDR and the free food program. Where did the rest come from?

On Monday the first class also was a day of “show and tell”. That was the day the student got to get up in class and show what type of food they had brought, as noted before we had no cash register sense the lunches were “free” but they had to be supplemented by “brought” in food from the students. This was a day to “toot” your horn and place in front of the world your contribution to this great program. The more affluent even brought “store bought canned goods” but mostly it was home canned, cured, dried, or grown in the garden. (looking back in retrospect this was a cruel day for some as several brought only five cents worth of salt. (this might explain the high blood pressure some of us suffer today.) To this day I accuse the teachers of praise for the most brought and intimidation to those who were not able to afford more.

Not wanting to have problems with the trouble eaters they established a “gold star” program. A gold star was presented each day to the ones who “cleaned” their plates and a poster of the stars was put up in the dining room for all to see. (this perhaps explain my present day weight problem) I still remember the heading on the poster: Eat all you are given for a gold star reward.

All in all with everyone forgiven it was a great program and the results will probably never be known but one thing is for sure. We didn’t go hungry, all ate the same; so no one got their “lard bucket lunch pail” looked down on. But probably the one receiving the most out of the program was the mothers who had no more lunches to fix for the kids.

*See other stories by Tammer Jerry “Gus” Denny at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>