

ON THE MENU

BY JOANNE KATES

Good burgers of Toronto on Yonge

SEVERAL WEEKS ago I was denounced in a letter to Fanfare that accused me of insufficient "mingling with the common folk." Needless to say, I am still reeling from the blow. The writer of the letter suggested: "Try Harvey's, another favorite with the throng. And here's a hint — don't order lobster." Golly gee, she must think I have crustaceans in my cerebrum but the skeleton in my closet just happens to be a Harvey's habit.

Every few months my taste buds begin to twitch in that oh-so-familiar way. Burger-lust invades my mind and I end up at the Bloor and Bedford Harvey's. None other will do.

A psychiatrist would say that this is a result of my parents' separation 18 years ago. If Kramer vs. Kramer had its french toast, then Kates vs. Kates had its Harvey burgers. Every Sunday, Daddy would pull up outside the house, my sibling and I would rush to his car and Daddy would drive to Harvey's. The routine never varied.

In 1978 Canadians spent about \$2-billion in fast food restaurants. In 1979, 30 companies opened 500 new fast food units in Canada. Places like Harvey's get a big share of the Canadian food dollar, so I went back to find out what it's like at the burger stops.

At Harvey's the burger has grill marks but no charcoal taste. The texture is mealy, the taste, to put it kindly, elusive. The chocolate shake has no discernible chocolate flavor but it is thick and cold. When you press a fried onion ring, grease oozes out. Only the fries are like the memory of things past.

I turn next to the high priest of burgerdom, the home of the golden arches. At McDonald's at Yonge and Dundas, burgers roll down a ramp toward the counter. I ask when they were cooked. The clerk smiles mysteriously. Sitting down, I open the Styrofoam box and eat Big Mac. Two all-beef patties (thin and utterly lacking in flavor) on a (mushy) sesame seed bun with lettuce, pickle, onion and processed cheese. The fries are inedible. The shake has a little chocolate flavor.

Next is Burger King, Home of the Whopper. Again I am processed by a clerk who takes my order and then goes back to a ramp under a bank of microwave ovens. From the oven, the burger hits the ramp and rolls down to the clerk. I ask when the burger was cooked. She won't say. The Whopper comes with a pickle that gives it a little flavor, which it needs. The sesame bun is hot and therefore pleasant. The fries are too thin to be soggy, cooked almost enough and therefore quite edible. The chocolate shake doesn't taste of chocolate.

Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers is so old-fashioned that the clerk calls your order into a mike, and 20 seconds later your change drops down from a machine and your order arrives. The burgers are thin, tasteless patties served on a flaccid white bun with an iceberg lettuce leaf, tomato, a paltry onion ring and a little mayo. Fries are mushy and undercooked. The chocolate Frosty is superthick and has no taste but sugar.

All of the aforementioned proletarian burgers cost no more than \$1 each. For triple that price, you can get an edible burger at The Empire Diner.

The burgers are thick and cooked until they're pink. The fries are an interesting oval shape and freshly fried. The garnish is romaine lettuce, cucumber, tomato and grated carrot. The chocolate shake is superb, and very chocolatey. At \$11 for two, you can afford to know food from schlock.

Harvey's, 238 Bloor Street West 962-4570

McDonald's, 239 Yonge Street 368-8213

Burger King, 243 Yonge Street 268-7190

Wendy's Old Fashioned Hamburgers, 306 Yonge Street 368-2720

Empire Diner, 678 Yonge Street 967-3311

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