



**Your on the
Street Reporter**



Uyless Black

America's Eating Habits

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If eating supposedly healthy food can put us at Urgent Care, consider what eating unhealthy food can do to us. It's summed up well by this old saying, "We live off half of what we eat, and the doctors live off the other half."

Here a few observations and experiences I've made over the last few years about the subject.

A Terrorist Plot

A few years ago, when I was living in the Shenandoah Valley, I would drive from our country home to the town of Front Royal for a daily newspaper. Thus, I made frequent appearances at the local 7/11 store. During these purchases, I became aware of the buying habits of the customers in front of me. I came up with the notion that there was a relationship between fat people and the kinds of food and drinks they purchased. Amazing, and to think some people attribute obesity to an unhappy childhood. Quite the opposite, the childhood was far too happy.

I jotted down some observations about those 7/11 customers. Here they are. I have listed three customers who were in a queue of seven people in two lines. (I decided not to hang around taking a lot of notes. There were some "Deliverance" types in the line.)

- Customer one: Female, approximately 5'6" at 170 lbs. Purchase: Non-diet Sprite, potato chips, cigarettes, lottery ticket, breath freshener.
- Customer two: Female, approximately 5'9" at 190 lbs. Purchase: Six small powdered donuts, non-diet Coke.
- Customer three: Male, approximately 5'10" at 230 lbs. Purchase: Two Baby Ruth candy bars, one malt liquor, cigarettes, lottery ticket.

During my visits to this store, I do not recall seeing an overweight customer purchase a cup of yogurt. Of course, I confined my own purchases to the paper, skim milk, and a fat-free banana. I wish. Who can resist a Krispy Kreme? I think donut makers are terrorists in disguise, set out to gradually kill-off America's citizens with Chocolate Glazes.

Is Ronald McDonald also a Terrorist?

I also wish I didn't relish Big Macs, or for that matter, McDonald's French fries. I've altered my eating habits as I've grown older, but like a recovering alcoholic who daydreams about a shot of booze, I am sure I will never stem the urge for an oily, salty, hot, sumptuous, savory McDonald's French fry.

¹ Some of these stories are also in the *Traveling America* series. In the spirit of plagiarism, I have re-worded the more pithy comments to disguise their unoriginality. The man eating the hamburgers on the cover is courtesy of Google.

My antidote to America's Fast Food Mania and its associated goodies---my way of avoiding the cholesterol-laden stops along my way to the Pearly Gates---is to sing to myself a ditty I composed a few years ago:

*You deserve a stroke today.
So get out and get away,
to McDonald's.*

That jingle gets me past McDonald's. But I need to compose other verses if I am to bypass Arby's, Burger King, Denny's, IHOP, Kentucky Fried Chicken...and other Terrorists' Cafes set-up to put me under.

About that old saying above, here's another: "Take twice as long to eat half as much." Two birds killed with one stone. That one-half you do not eat would have gone to your doctor.

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Fried Food...Deep Fried Food

I have traveled to a number of countries and sampled their cuisine. In no country have I witnessed the preponderance of cafes and restaurants that serve fried food on the scale of America's restaurants. During one trek, I stopped at an eatery named Chester's. Located in a convenience store in North Carolina, this establishment's *entire* menu featured fried food, and nothing else. The fare consisted of four offerings:

1. Fried chicken.
2. Fried potatoes.
3. Fried okra.
4. A strange looking fried cylindrical object.

I spoke with the cook, who was also the waitress and cashier,

- "I'll have an order of okra and two chicken tenders. My wife will have water. The dog will have a Coke. Just joking, my dog is French and prefers a dry wine with her okra. (No response from the cook). Say what's the funny looking fried cylinder?"
- Cook, "It's corn on the cob."
- "Get atta here! You deep fry corn on the cob?"
- Cook, "That's right honey. Are you tempted?"
- "Why would anyone want to *fry* corn-on-the-cob, one of the wonders of the world?"
- Cook, "Honey, try it. You'll like it."
- "OK." And I did. And I did.

If there is anything in the food world that hasn't undergone deep frying, I wager it has not (yet) been imported into America.

By the way, for any foreigners reading this story who do not know about the customs of America: Don't get flirty and heated up if a waitress calls you "Honey." They call everybody honey.

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Cuisine?

A few years ago, I happened to be in Eureka, Nevada. My wife and I were driving around the country, looking at the scenery, and discovered we had to circumvent a snowstorm. We were tempted to try to make it to a larger city but found a motel in Fallon. Dark came early this time of the year, and the roads would soon be icy. We were glad to be in a safe spot.

Down the street from our motel was the Owl Club, a local bar and café. After a difficult day of driving a modern sedan over four lane highways, we had built up an appetite. The Owl Club featured a T-bone steak as its special for the day. Protein, fat, and carbs. They were just what we desired, if not needed.

After we finished-off a fine salad, the waitress brought us two huge steaks, probably 16 ounces apiece.

- Uyless, "I can't wait. Here goes," as I cut-off a piece of meat and took it into my mouth."...Chewing, tasting. "Ugh. This is awful."
- Holly concurred and the waitress was summoned. I protested, "Ma'am, something is wrong with the steak. It tastes as if the cook put meat tenderizer on it."
- Waitress, "Oh no, sir! That's just Worcestershire Sauce. We put it on all our steaks."
- "Really? I can't understand why anyone would put Worcestershire Sauce on a prime cut of meat. I..."
- Waitress, "I'll bring you the A-1. Some of our customers prefer it."

The waitress left our table to fetch yet another steak sauce. We had had enough of the stuff, so we cut-off the bones from the steaks as a present to dog Milli. We then cut-out of the Owl Club and shortly thereafter, gorged ourselves on a Slim Fast in our hotel room.

We continued our trip and found another motel just before sundown. Across the street from our inn, was the "4 in 1 Casino, Bar, Cafe, Restaurant, and Truck Stop."

Waitress, "Hi folks. Anything to drink?" I ordered a Coors Light. Holly ordered a Bud Light. In the spirit of the evening, the two of us conducted a blind taste test of two beers many beer aficionados believe taste more like water than beer. No offense to Bud and Coors lovers, just reporting facts. I can't tell the difference myself, which made me imminently qualified to participate in the test.

Results:

Holly: **Bud:** Paler, sharper, malty & creamy, more beer-like, which was good because she was drinking beer. **Coors:** More fizz, more carbonation, less flavor, watery but no aftertaste, which was good because water tastes better if it has no aftertaste.

Uyless: I couldn't tell the difference. I stopped drinking beer in college after I discovered Ripple. Later, I graduated to Boone's Farm Semi-Wine, then to Mateus, later to Lancers---with a side trip to Cold Bear Wine. (The instructions on the Cold Bear label advised, "Serve exceedingly chilled.")

During the test, we checked-out the menu. I was tempted to order the Garbage Omelet, described on the menu as, "Everything but the kitchen sink." But I opted for the same meal I

order in every truck stop/casino/bar/cafe I visit: chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes, lots of gravy, Texas Toast with garlic butter, and hold the veggies...the latter being dangerously healthy. (See Figure 1.) Oh, and one beta blocker just before the mud pie dessert. Being the sensible sort, Holly ordered shrimp---deep fried, of course.



Figure 1. One meal exceeds my daily calorie requirement.

Shortly, after polishing off the Bud and Coors, and graduating to Pabst Blue Ribbon, our chow arrived...with veggies. As seen in Figure 1, my meal was of Texas sized proportions. As a calorie counter, I knew intuitively how many of those little Cs were on this plate: Counting the Texas Toast (not shown), the count was about 1800 calories. Because I was on a diet, I put-aside the vegetables. The mud pie filled-out my daily calorie requirement. Trouble is, I had already eaten two meals today. Oh well, I rationalize: Tomorrow I'll not eat...as much.

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Any Chance for some Goat Cheese?

A few years ago, while traveling around in the Northwest, we spent one night in a modest but clean motel in Jordon Valley, Oregon. It was called the Desert Inn, and reminded me of my stays at the Desert Inn in Las Vegas. As told here, the ambience was not quite the same.

It was a convenient place, assuming the hotel accepted pets and would admit our six-pound monster, Milli. But I need not have been concerned, because the party checking in behind us was traveling with a mini-zoo. They had pulled up in the drive-way in a big cargo-type truck. A woman registered two dogs, one cat, *three goats*, one husband, and herself. (Again, why write fiction?)

Six animal animals and two human animals, all sequestered in a small motel room. I love writing these reports, because parody aside, I have no need to make up the stories. They simply unfold before me, as I'm sure they do for anyone who takes the time to look around and observe the behavior of our fellow humans.

No questions were asked at the front desk...such as, "OK, will that be one room for the humans and one room for the other animals?" After all, a sign at the desk said, "We accept pets." It did not hedge with, "We accept pets, with the exception of goats." Nowadays, one can't



Figure 3. Two of the goat guests.

discriminate, because it could lead to law suits. "Your honor, the Desert Inn rented a room to a poodle, but denied my goats the same service."

I am still amazed at that scene in the registration lobby. Maybe the customers knew the owner?

I snapped the photos in Figure 3 of two of the goat guests. The top picture is the owner of the goats sitting outside their room with one of her pals. The bottom shot is of another goat guest. As you can see from this photo, the goats did not order room service. I said to

myself as I watched this interesting scene. *The Desert Inn in Las Vegas was never like this.*

I introduced myself to the female goat shepherd.

- "Hello, eh...noticed you didn't have any trouble at the registration desk with your goats."
- "They don't sleep in our room! They come in sometimes for company. Have to keep an eye on them with the furniture. Mostly, they stay in the truck. We stay here sometimes. Pay our bill. The place ain't choosy, and we don't have a lot of money."
- "Yeah, I got a room. But no room service here. Say, mind if I ask, why do you travel with goats?"
- "Why do you travel with a dog?"
- She had me there, "Good question."
- She smiled, "Well, you asked it, I didn't."
- She looked as if she was in a funk, and I didn't want to bother her anymore. I walked away, "I enjoyed the talk. By the way, those pets of yours...they produce the best cheese in the world! I could live on goat cheese!" (It's a good practice to leave strangers on a positive note.)
- "I'll pass that along to them."...I got a grin out of her.

The Desert Inn of Nampa, Idaho, once enjoyed fame, and I'll leave my *Traveling America* stories for you to learn about this hotel's exciting past. In this way, I have subtly enticed you to read more. Well, maybe not so subtle, but read anyway.