



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Hamburger Haven**

## Hamburger Haven<sup>1</sup>

The Katty Korner Kafe was my hometown's answer to McDonald's. The "Kafe," as it was known by us locals, did not have the merry employees and sparkling counters of our modern day fast food heavens. Two surly men comprised the personnel staff. One worked the counter and cash register (the maitre d'). The other cooked the burgers and French Fries (the chef).

The Kafe was tiny, consisting of a counter with three or four stools and a couple of small tables, each sided by two chairs. The even smaller kitchen was separated from the main dining room by a wall and a swinging half-door.

The door was kept open for three reasons: The customers could see the chef in action. The chef could communicate with the maitre d'. Of equal importance, the greasy ether emanating from the grill could more easily escape the kitchen to lodge inside the lungs of the diners in the other room.

The Kafe food was not only palatable, it was delicious. The cook's irresistible recipes were forerunners to the modern fast food chains. Consider these examples demonstrating how the Katty Korner Kafe was ahead of its time (Granted, with changes from our recent healthy mania.): The hamburgers were laden with fat. The fried potatoes were covered with a greasy sheen...somewhat oily looking. Everything coming off the grill was covered with so much salt and pepper it was difficult to detect the color of the underlying food. To accentuate the four-star dining, cigarette smoke modulated the greasy air drifting in from the kitchen. My kind of kafe!

Fortunately for my health, I had an ongoing battle with Mom about consuming the Kafe's food. On rare occasions, she would allow me to eat at the Kafe, usually during a trip to the movie theatre. The Katty Korner Kafe was conveniently located next to the Lea Theatre (at an angle to two intersecting streets---thus, its name). More often than not, I had to be satisfied with a bag of popcorn. But on wonderful, limited occasions, I was given a quarter for the purchase of one hamburger, one order of French Fries, and one Coke. A visit to the Katty Korner Kafe was a big event in my life.

During one of these special treats, I had placed my order and was sitting at the counter, sipping my Coke, idly watching the cook fulfill his job description. He was efficient as he went about his job. He gave me confidence in his craft. Sporting a stubby beard, dangling a cigarette in his lips, with hair falling into his eyes, he nonchalantly tossed hamburger patties into the air. Without fail, they landed back onto their allotted places on the grill. Really, quite impressive.

Hm. Make that *almost* without fail. On this occasion, with one other customer in the kafe, the cook made a slight error in one flip and the patty landed on the floor.

There it lay, awaiting an answer to two metaphysical questions. Question One: Would the hamburger patty transfer grease to the floor, or would the floor transfer grease to the patty? Question Two: Which of the two Katty Korner Kafe customers was destined to eat this piece of meat?

The answer to the first question was never answered. The second question was easy to answer: Not me. From my perspective, the patty was destined for the sandwich of the *other* customer. After all, it was I, not he, who witnessed its aerial experience.

The cook took a quick look at the floored hamburger patty. Its position didn't faze him for a second. He simply picked it up and placed it back on the grill.

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<sup>1</sup> This article was excerpted from my book titled, *The Light Side of Little Texas*.

But his cover was blown. Just as he completed the transfer, he looked into the dining room and beheld an eight-year-old kid who had been a witness to his culinary exploits. He was surprised to see me staring at him. I was equally surprised to see him looking at me.

But without ado, he put his finger to his lips to signal me to be quiet. Then he motioned with his hands that the wayward patty (pointing to it) was scheduled for the other customer (pointing to him). He finished-off the classical “My Lips are Sealed” protocol exchange with placing his finger to his lips again.

Caught in an adult conspiracy! All because of a hamburger patty. And what was I to do? Complain to the management? The management consisted of the two men in the kafe. Should I warn the other customer he was about to eat a dirty hamburger patty?

*“Excuse me, sir, but I just noticed the cook dropped your hamburger meat on the floor. He asked me not to reveal his mistake, but I feel it is my moral, eight-year-old duty to warn you.”*

First, would this stranger believe me? Second, I tried to avoid confrontations with adults. Even with only eight years of experience with them, I knew they could be pretty nasty when aroused or threatened. Third, if I ratted on the cook, I was certain I would become *persona non grata* at the Katty Korner Kafe. No more Kafe hamburgers for me.

I made a momentous decision: To hell with the cook, his conspiracy, and the Katty Korner Kafe. I got up from my stool, placed a nickel on the counter for my Coke, headed for the door, opened it, and yelled, “Hey, mister, the cook dropped your hamburger on the floor!”

I then slammed the door and ran toward the Lea Theatre---without my cherished hamburger and fries.

Within a few seconds I had made a decision that would keep me from my Hamburger Haven. I’m not sure what tipped the scales, but I recall part of my decision took this fact into account: Jake’s Fountain, just down the street, made a delicious hamburger.