

FOREWORD BY
ANTHONY BOURDAIN

Grand

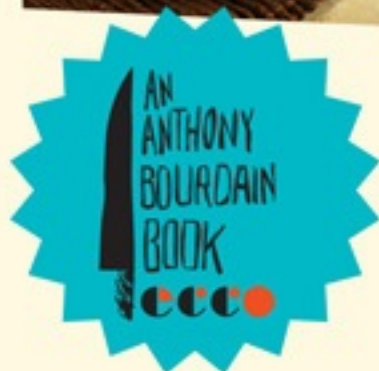


Forks

**A HISTORY OF AMERICAN
DINING IN 128 REVIEWS**



**MARILYN
HAGERTY**



**"ANYONE WHO COMES AWAY FROM THIS WORK ANYTHING
LESS THAN CHARMED BY MS. HAGERTY—AND THE PLACES AND
CHARACTERS SHE DESCRIBES—HAS A HEART OF STONE."
—ANTHONY BOURDAIN, AUTHOR OF *KITCHEN CONFIDENTIAL***

Grand Forks

*A History of American
Dining in 128 Reviews*

MARILYN HAGERTY

AN
ANTHONY
BOURCAIN
BOOK
ecco

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the people who have the gumption to work so hard in restaurants across our land.

It is also dedicated to the memory of my daughter Carol Hagerty Werner and in honor of her husband Curt, along with my daughter Gail Hagerty and her husband, Dale Sandstrom, and my son, James R. "Bob" Hagerty, and his wife, Lorraine. And especially to the eight grandchildren who brightened the last days of Grandpa Jack Hagerty and continue to make my life worthwhile. They are Jack Golden, Carrie and Anne Sandstrom; Curtis, Mariah, and Anna Werner; and James and Carmen Hagerty.

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Foreword

by Anthony Bourdain

If you're looking for the kind of rapturous food porn you'd find in a book by M. F. K. Fisher, or lusty descriptions of sizzling kidneys à la Liebling—or even the knife-edged criticism of an A. A. Gill or Sam Sifton—you will not find it here.

The territory covered here is not New York or Paris or London or San Francisco. And Marilyn Hagerty is none of those people.

For twenty-seven years, Marilyn Hagerty has been covering the restaurant scene in and around the city of Grand Forks, North Dakota, population approximately 55,000. She also, it should be pointed out, writes a total of five columns a week, about history and local personalities and events, in addition to her writing about restaurants and food. As one might expect, she knows many of her subjects personally. Given the size of her territory, it is not unusual for her to write about the same restaurant two or more times in a single year. In short, she is writing about a community that she is very much a part of.

If you knew her name before picking up this book, it was probably because of her infamous guileless Olive Garden review, which went viral and caused a tidal wave of snarky derision, followed by an even stronger antisnark backlash, followed by invitations to appear on Anderson Cooper and the *Today* show, dinner at Le Bernardin, an appearance on *Top Chef*, an Al Neuharth Award, a publishing deal—a sudden and unexpected elevation to media darling.

Why was that?

What is it about the eighty-seven-year-old Ms. Hagerty that inspired such attention and affection?

Why should you read this book?

Of the seven thousand pages of articles and reviews I read while assembling this collection, there is little of what one would call pyrotechnical prose. Ms. Hagerty's choices of food are shockingly consistent: A "clubhouse sandwich," coleslaw, wild rice soup, salads assembled from a salad bar, baked potatoes. She is not what you'd call an adventurous diner, exploring the dark recesses of menus. Far from it. Of one lunch, she writes: "There were signs saying the luncheon special was soup and a Denver sandwich for \$2.25. In places where food service is limited, I tend to take the special. I wasn't born yesterday."

She is never mean—even when circumstances would clearly excuse a sharp elbow, a cruel remark. In fact, watching Marilyn struggle to find something nice to say about a place she clearly loathes is part of the fun. She is, unfailingly, a good neighbor and good citizen first—and an entertainer second.

But what she *has* given us, over all these years, is a fascinating picture of dining in America, a gradual, cumulative overview of how we got from there . . . to here.

Grand Forks is not New York City. We forget that—until we read her earlier reviews and remember, some of us, when you'd find a sloppy joe, steak Diane, turkey noodle soup, three-bean salad, red Jell-O in *our* neighborhoods. When the tuft of curly parsley and lemon wedge, or a leaf of lettuce and an orange segment, or three spears of asparagus fashioned into a wagon wheel, were state-of-the-art garnishes. When you could order a half sandwich, a cup of soup. A prehipster world where lefse, potato dumplings, and walleye were far more likely to appear on a menu than pork belly.

Reading these reviews, we can see, we can watch over the course of time, who makes it and who doesn't. Which bold, undercapitalized pioneers survived—and who, no matter how ahead of the

time, just couldn't hang on until the neighborhood caught up. You will get to know the names of owners and chefs like Warren LeClerc, whose homey lunch restaurant, The Pantry, turned down the lights to become the sophisticated French restaurant Le Pantre by night. And Chef Nardane of Touc of Magic Ballroom, who, in his 6,200-square-foot space, served cheesecakes inspired by Debb Reynolds and Elizabeth Taylor and envisioned an exclusive private membership club with frequent celebrity entertainment. And Steve Novak of Beaver's Family Restaurant, who, when Marilyn visited his establishment, spoke of reviving his beaver act, complete with costume, for birthday parties.

And you will understand why the opening of an Olive Garden might be earnestly anticipated as an exciting and much-welcomed event.

Ms. Hagerty is not naive about her work, her newfound fame, or the world. She has traveled widely in her life.

In person, she has a flinty, dry, very sharp sense of humor. She misses nothing.

I would not want to play poker with her for money.

This is a straightforward account of what people have been eating—still *are* eating—in much of America. As related by a kind, good-hearted reporter looking to pass along as much useful information as she can—while hurting no one.

Anyone who comes away from this work anything less than charmed by Ms. Hagerty—and the places and characters she describes—has a heart of stone.

This book kills snark dead.

Introduction

When I started writing about restaurants in a weekly column called the Eatbeat, I never dreamed it would catch the attention of Anthony Bourdain or that it would lead to dinner at Le Bernardin in New York City.

All I was thinking was that I write for the *Herald*—the daily newspaper in Grand Forks, North Dakota—and as features editor thirty-some years ago, I wanted to have a restaurant review. After all, I would dine with writers from the Minneapolis *Star Tribune* and the *New York Times* when I attended the annual meetings of the Association of Food Journalists. We traveled annually to major cities, from Hawaii, to China. They talked of their restaurant reviews.

My favorite pastime is eating. I know how to cook. Long ago, I memorized *Betty Crocker Picture Cookbook* and the *Joy of Cooking*. I have edited two cookbooks for my church.

Why not have a restaurant review in Grand Forks? I asked myself. But how could I do it?

We don't have that many restaurants in our city. So I decided it would work if I went to every restaurant in town. That would mean places such as Taco John's, McDonald's, and the truck stops. To me, these places are interesting. And plenty of people eat in them.

To broaden my Eatbeat coverage, I visited neighboring towns. Dinner or lunch and a drive make a nice outing.

Thus began my routine of reviewing restaurants in the circulation area of the Grand Forks Herald. One review led to another. When I traveled in Portugal, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Shanghai, London, and Brussels, I took the Eatbeat with me. Readers told me they enjoyed the travel and dining experience vicariously. Twice, I have eaten in the White House; once with the American Society of News Editors and once with the Association of Food Journalists.

My goal with the Eatbeat is to tell readers of the *Grand Forks Herald* what is available at restaurants and how much it costs. How clean it is, and how the service is. And yes, the condition of the restroom, because it sends a message. Then when readers come in from around the area they know what to expect.

I write the Eatbeat as a reporter—not as a critic. This is not Los Angeles. It is not New York City. What point, I wonder, is there in tearing down some hardworking restaurant people? Sometimes I point out pluses and minuses. And if a place is just too bad, I move on. I don't write about it.

Some people berate my Eatbeats. Many more tell me they read and enjoy them. Years ago when *Herald* publisher Mike Maidenbergh told me he liked what I wrote, I felt I had the green light to keep going.

I go in unannounced, but by now plenty of people know who I am. That just makes it more fun. Since the Eatbeat was my idea and I like to eat anyway, I have always personally paid for my own food at restaurants I review. No expense account. I thank those in restaurants who occasionally offer to give me a free meal. And when I explain why I cannot accept, they understand and they appreciate my insistence on not being subsidized.

Over the years, restaurants have come and gone. This is a tough business. Here in Grand Forks there are more chain restaurants now than the home-owned restaurants we used to know. Some longtime residents of Grand Forks may recall the Golden Hour, downtown, where they served heavenly halibut. It's long gone, along with the Ryan Hotel, where they offered lemon pie with meringue high meringue. Gone, too, is Jacoby's Hamburger Heaven, where I would rather go than to a fine

dinner. And gone is the A&W Root Beer place where we ate with the kids in the backseat. Only the
~~Kegs Drive-In with its sloppy joes remains from the olden days. The servers used to be on roll~~
skates. People still are drawn back there when they come for high school reunions.

If Food Isn't Right, Diner Should Speak Up—Softly

OCTOBER 7, 1987

To me, it's embarrassing when companions make noisy complaints in restaurants. In fact, I avoid complaining even when asked by the waitress if everything is OK. I usually just nod my head and say everything is fine.

But one of my friends tells me, "You are wrong." She maintains that it helps the restaurant when you let them know what you don't like.

OK. I'll concede you should let them know. But I think you should do it politely.

Recently, a friend complained that the iced tea we were drinking in a local restaurant was so weak it was nothing more than water. She asked the waitress if we could have some fresh iced tea. Within a short time, the waitress came back with iced tea that had some color and flavor. I think the restaurant will serve better tea now that they know the diluted, stale tea they were serving was not acceptable.

The same goes for service. A reader called to tell me she had read a nice write-up about a local restaurant. She said she and her husband had gone there with a reservation. They were left waiting and stranded. They didn't know if they were ignored because they were wearing jeans. But, she said, they wore nice jeans with neat shirts. Still, they had to wait so long after they finally were seated that they got up and left.

"Don't tell me, tell them," I suggested. I encouraged her to tell the manager how they felt and ask if they did something wrong. I think the manager will appreciate it.

This business of rushing diners keeps plaguing me. When I go out to eat, I like to relax and visit with my companions. At some restaurants, the plates are snapped away from us as quickly as we take the last bite—sometimes before we finish.

I know, I know. Waitresses are instructed to remove dirty plates promptly. I think they should wait until everyone at the table is finished.

One day, I was lunching with a friend who had a lot to tell me. I ate my lunch as I listened. By the time she got around to serious eating, the waitress had whipped my plate away. My friend, I could tell, felt uneasy eating alone. So she took a few bites and set her fork down.

To avoid such situations, I now purposely leave a little something on my plate and pretend I am still eating until everyone at the table has finished.

One of my pet peeves about some restaurants is that they serve imitation seafood without acknowledging it. For instance, we were told the special at a Grand Forks dining room was steak and lobster for \$8.50. I jumped at the offer, only to find the lobster was some kind of fish reconstituted in the shape of lobster tail. It even had red markings painted on it. Ick.

At another restaurant one evening, a friend ordered a crabmeat salad. When it came, there were little hunks of reconstituted fish in the shape of meat from crab legs. But it clearly was not crab. When we asked the waitress about it, she didn't know. And when we asked her to go and check with the cook, she came back and told us it was not crab.

North Dakota has a truth in menu law that requires food to be represented correctly. If the menu says crab, then it better be crab. If the menu offers buttered toast, then real butter must be used on the toast. The restaurant needn't serve butter on toast. It may serve a substitute. But it must not say that it is butter.

From the other side, I had notes from a waiter, a waitress and a motel maid after I wrote a column

with the theme that these people earn every red cent they get. Those waiting tables point out the wages are in the \$2.85 range and that they depend on their tips. The waitress said she doesn't mind sharing, or "tipping out," 8 percent to busboys and 5 percent to the bartenders. But she resents being required to tip out to the cooks. She says it's against federal wage and hour law regulations. But she's afraid to complain because it might bring on retaliation from her employer. In other words, the ax.

Waiters and waitresses work long shifts with no prospects for getting a raise. They work irregular hours. They must handle the heat in the kitchen. The waiter wrote, "So the next time a waitress or waiter leaves your check and tells you to have a good day, remember to tip them well because chances are they're not."

The motel maid said she works for low wages and few—if any—tips. She said, "We have to clean up some of the most revolting messes ever known to man or beast." She says she never realized what a maid has to do until she tried it herself. "You are either bending over a bed or on your hands and knees. By the time you've made 18 to 20 beds, you can't stand straight. You should follow a maid one day, and you'd agree."

Neon Lights, Burgers, Malts Are Topper's Trademarks

OCTOBER 21, 1987

Neon lights announce this is a hamburger grill and malt shop. You swing off North 42nd Street and into a large, paved parking lot. You give your order at the counter. They ask your name. You take a seat. They call your name. You pick up your burger and proceed to an extensive topping bar. There you can put anything your heart desires on your burger.

You take your malt—in the metal can. You eat your burger, your fries and your malt. Or maybe you prefer a soft drink. You can have free refills from the machine in the dining room.

This is a happy place. This is Topper's.

On our first visit, there were quite a few people. On our second stop last Thursday night, all the tables but one were full. We sat down at the last table and looked around. There was a couple at the next table enjoying each other. As they talked they would put their heads together. Then she spoon-fed him the last of her malt.

Ah, yes. This is the reincarnation of a 1950s malt shop, and it is done well. The walls are white. The accent colors are pink and green. There are neon lights. There is a nickelodeon. On one wall, there are checked running shoes arranged in a trail with a sign saying, "Let's dance." Near the front, there are plastic records in various colors just swinging in the breeze.

The hamburgers are good. They are even better when you add tomato, lettuce, pickles and onion. The malts are ample. For \$1.85, you get a malt with 15 ounces of ice cream and three ounces of milk. And the ice cream is homemade. There are 16 flavors available, and you can have it in plain or sugar cones. Topper's even has tiny cones that go with the children's meals, or separately for 27 cents.

Ideas for flavors come from the customers, according to Jane Borman, who, with her husband John, operates Topper's. She said new flavors are added regularly to the repertoire.

The Bormans are succeeding in a location where several other restaurants have failed. What they did, she says, is to change the image of the place. People seem to like it. And the location close to Crown Colony theaters and UND [University of North Dakota] seems to help. It's a happy place to be—a good place to go on a cloudy day if you enjoy being around people.

The tables are covered with yellow and white plastic cloths. There are salt and pepper shakers made from canning jars. Plastic containers of mustard and catsup are on each table. And there are little trays of Trivial Pursuit cards, which people seem to enjoy as they wait for their food.

There's no real menu at Topper's. You just read the board above the counter as you come in. You can order burgers, bratwurst, hot dogs, tacos, fish or chicken sandwiches, pita clubs, chili or vegetable soup. You also can get beer or wine at Topper's. In fact, there is one section of the restaurant partitioned off by empty cardboard beer cases.

My idea of fun is eating a hamburger loaded with toppings. I like to go and let my imagination run wild. The french fries look great, but I try not to eat them. My first choice at Topper's is a hamburger and a cone. For variety the other night, I tried a fajita pita, and Constant Companion had a bratwurst.

Topper's succumbed to a fire and the site is now home to a bank.

Mr. Steak Aims to Be the Gathering Place for Birthdays

NOVEMBER 4, 1987

They greet you and seat you promptly at Mr. Steak restaurant. They bring on food a cut above your run-of-the-mill fast food restaurants and a cut in price below your top-drawer restaurants. Mr. Steak has been perking along steadily in Grand Forks for 15 years. On two visits within the past week, they were packing 'em in.

People have come to depend on the restaurant. Senior citizens like the discount. Parents like the attention given their children. People celebrating birthdays go there for a free steak.

We went there Friday night for a quick supper. I was going on to the play at the Fire Hall Theater. You could tell by the green sweaters that many others were going on to the Sioux hockey game. We were seated in a nonsmoking section of booths, and Matt was our waiter. I didn't ask Matt his last name, and he didn't ask me my first or last name. He was a good waiter. Friendly, but impersonal.

I chose chicken strips for \$5.99—without the salad bar, which makes it \$4.99. That's something like about Mr. Steak. You can have \$1 off if you don't want to go through the salad bar. You still get a nice little loaf of warm whole wheat bread and your choice of potato. And your entree comes with an edible garnish of lettuce and orange slice.

Constant Companion ordered the traditional cut steak, also at \$5.99. He elected to forgo the salad bar but he requested the "hot, buttery mushrooms." That brought him back up to \$5.99. We were well pleased with our food.

We made another swing into Mr. Steak for lunch Sunday. I took a trip through the salad bar and had a cup of soup for \$3.99. CC chose the Reuben sandwich, even though he knows every restaurant has its own idea about Reubens. He found Mr. Steak turns out a pretty good version.

Seating is comfortable. In the evening, there's a soft light from the hanging lamps above each table. Plants in wicker baskets and tiny vases of permanent flowers on the tables add to the surroundings. The carpeting softens the slam-banging that goes on in some crowded restaurants.

Among the pluses for Mr. Steak: Large glass glasses of ice water are served promptly; potatoes are extra good; the baked potatoes are reds; the Mr. Steak fries are thick wedges with skin on, done to a deep golden brown; the hostess gives you the precise brand name and cost of wines or beer; and they serve an average of 100 to 110 free birthday steaks every week.

Mr. Steak is no longer in business.

Krumkake Served with Scones at High Tea in Bismarck

DECEMBER 16, 1987

High tea has come to North Dakota, and it is doing very well, thank you.

On the second Monday of each month, between the hours of three and five o'clock, David Barber's Restaurant at Logan and Third Streets in Bismarck holds high tea. Seventy-five to 100 women (and a sprinkling of men) from central North Dakota show up.

They pay \$5.25.

In Bismarck's version of the English high tea, guests are welcomed with Concord red grape and cranberry juice in dainty aperitif glasses. They are seated at tables with white crocheted doilies beneath the glass covers. At each table, there are individual tea pots. Many of them are English bone china.

Since Lupe Barbere—who operates the restaurant with her husband, David Barbere—is a teetotaler, she brews the tea herself. She uses tea balls and only English teas, and she is enthusiastic about the response to the teas, which she has been holding for six months.

"It's time-consuming to make the foods," said Barbere, "but we are getting it down to science now. We serve thinly sliced cucumber and egg slices on little open-face sandwiches. We serve them with English butter with herbs mixed in as spreads. We also have chicken pâté and ham spreads on tiny sandwiches. Last month, we had asparagus spears sliced diagonally on sandwiches. We bake our own scones and serve them with clotted cream and jam. Then we make bars, pinwheels and cookies. And," she continued, "it isn't really English, but we make krumkake and rosettes. The Norwegian people around here like that."

The restaurant makes sure there are slices of lemon on each table. Four girls in pink pinafores do the serving, and they come around with hot water to add to the tea for those who think it seems too strong.

As high tea progresses, there is usually informal modeling of fashions by one of the Bismarck stores. In December, there was a presentation by Anderson's State Fur. There is piano music in the background.

The teas not only add a touch of glamor to a late afternoon in Bismarck, but they also bring in business at a time of day when the restaurant isn't busy. Lupe Barbere herself has never been to high tea in England, but she knows all about it from reading. And she has had high tea at hotels in San Francisco.

"There," she said, "many guests have brandies with tea. Not many order brandy here in Bismarck. This is a more conservative area."

David's is no longer is business.

The Pantry Brings Blue Plate Back to Grand Forks

DECEMBER 30, 1987

The blue plate special is back. The old-time lunch bargain of the 1940s has returned to Grand Forks with the opening of The Pantry. This is a downtown restaurant at 109 N. Third St., in the building formerly occupied by the Girl Scouts. It's well located for people who work or do business downtown, with a handy back door to accommodate quick entries from the alley.

The blue plate isn't what it used to be. At The Pantry, it's an almost elegant meal of something like three pastas blended with cheeses, or beef stroganoff with a French flair. It is served with vegetables (yes, vegetables are back, too) and wedges of French bread. And it isn't 98 cents. But for these times, The Pantry's blue plate is almost that reasonable at around \$3.50 or \$3.75.

Since the deli-style restaurant opened here early in December, it has been drawing longer lines for lunch each noon. And customers have started trickling in all afternoon, sometimes just for coffee and dessert. Paul Ringstrom, who operates The Pantry with his uncle Warren LeClerc, says he is looking to expand hours after the New Year.

It seems as though they have a good thing going here. I was attracted to the place even before I got through the front door. I like the blackboard out in front on the sidewalk, where in various colors of chalk, you can read the specials of the day.

Once inside, you queue up. And while you await your turn, you have a chance to look over the foods in the delicatessen case. When you give your order, you get a wooden block—the kind children used to play with—and you take it to your table. Before long, they bring out your order and find you by the letter on your block.

On a recent lunch visit to The Pantry, I ordered a house salad, and added chicken salad for a grand total of \$2.97, including the tax. Constant Companion asked for the blue plate special, which was beef stroganoff. It came to \$3.97 with tax.

The food is good. So good, in fact, that I went back twice after my initial visit. After lunch one day, I had a chance to visit with Ringstrom, the chef. He told me he has loved baking ever since he helped his grandmother as a child. Ringstrom was born in Devils Lake and grew up in California. He is a graduate of Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., where he majored in hotel administration. After graduation, he spent a year in Europe. From the time he bought his first croissant, he has had a passion for French food. So strong, in fact, that he has learned the language, and puts a French twist in almost everything he bakes.

Ringstrom has worked in hotels and restaurants enough to know he wants to help make the decisions. And going into business here with his uncle gives him that opportunity. At 25, he is enthusiastic as he launches into his business. The Pantry will succeed, I predict, if it keeps its quality of food at reasonable prices. What this takes is hard work, and Ringstrom and LeClerc seem ready.

As in all businesses, there are rough spots that need smoothing out. But they are managing to handle unpredictable numbers of customers and stay relatively serene.

My suggestion would be to have the waiters and waitresses slip into aprons and pink pinafores to lend a more professional look. With a little more training, the waitpersons could do a better job of serving and clearing tables.

On the positive side, The Pantry is like a gem. It adds one more option to the variety of eating places in downtown Grand Forks. It will draw me back because of such details as pepper mills on each

table, making it possible to help yourself to coarsely ground pepper; slices of lemon in the ice water; wooden boxes in which sandwiches are served; dishes with red and blue designs, which are so much nicer than institutional-type plates, cups and bowls; lace curtains on the windows; and the chance to help yourself to a free mint out of a little machine as you leave.

Gramma Butterwicks Has Soup, Pot Pies Waiting

JANUARY 6, 1988

Grandma puts a little too much salt in her soup, but otherwise it's very good. The beef is plentiful and tender. The vegetables are cut in chunks just the way I like them.

I learned about her vegetable-beef soup when we stopped into Gramma Butterwicks Family Restaurant on South Washington Street on Saturday. When it was first built in 1960s, the restaurant was known as Sambo's. Then it became Seasons. Up until a week or so ago, the place was known as the Crestwood Restaurant. All of a sudden, it sprouted a new sign. "Gramma Butterwicks." It made me curious.

What I found was the same restaurant with a new image and a very appealing menu. It makes you feel good all over when you come to the children's part of the menu marked, "Grandchildren's menu." And then if you're more than 60, you like the next page. It's the seniors' menu, "for Gramma's friends 60 years and over." She likes her senior friends so well, in fact, that "Gramma" offers them free appetizer pie with dinners served between 4 and 9 P.M. on Sundays.

Actually, there is no "Gramma Butterwick," but it sounds very nice. Kevin Dorman, part-owner and manager, says it's a way of marketing specialties on the family restaurant menu. Dorman is staking his hopes for the success of Gramma Butterwicks on such homey foods as pot pies and appetizer pie. He's quick to admit that he relies on Charlie's Bakery for his pastries and that there is no grandmother in the kitchen.

We were well satisfied with our lunch stop there. With my soup (\$1.45), I had the salad bar (\$3.25) served with Texas toast. Constant Companion ordered a Philly steak sandwich. The sandwich (\$3.99) is made of thin slices of beef with mushrooms, green peppers, onions and Swiss cheese served on a hoagie bun with a small bowl of au jus—or maybe just bouillon. Anyway, he liked it.

Pear Tree Is Place in the Pink for Leisurely Dining

FEBRUARY 10, 1988

It was colder than all get out and I wished Constant Companion would drive our car right into the lobby of the Holiday Inn. As it was he parked as close as he could. And we were all set for lunch in the Pear Tree Restaurant. We went there late for lunch last Tuesday, but there were several tables of people lingering over their coffee.

The luncheon menu is organized neatly. It gives you a list of starters under the heading, "The first move." It lists salads and light meals on one page and sandwiches, "Between the slices," on the next page.

For some reason, the Nutty Bird caught my eye. It's a pumpernickel rye and cream cheese topped with sliced breast of turkey, sprouts and sunflower seeds for \$4.35. With the sandwiches, you get fried onion rings or coleslaw. Constant Companion ordered a Burger Outrageous. This is described as a half pound of choice ground beef, broiled and served on a toasted bun and garnished with "the usual" for \$3.25. For 35 cents an item, you can add your choices of cheeses, bacon or barbecue sauce.

CC figured the burger itself would be enough. And when our sandwiches arrived, he was sure of it—although he had a hard time believing it was actually a half pound of beef. My Nutty Bird turned out to be a delightful combination. It's the type of sandwich you eat with a fork. You wipe your chin often with your cloth napkin. And you take your time to savor it.

That's what I like about the Pear Tree. It's a place where you enjoy lingering. The room is done in tones of mauve and gray, with a raised center area for tables surrounded by a brass rail. Around it are large, comfortable booths. The chairs are all upholstered. There are better-than-average goblets and nice tableware along with pink place mats and dainty pink and mauve silk flowers. There are green plants in hanging baskets. And there are accents of light woodwork and latticed windows.

Lunch at the Holiday Inn might cost you a buck or so more than it does when you eat on the run, but it's worth it. You'll spend anywhere from \$2.50 for soup and salad to \$5.25 for a seafood salad. The food is a grade above what I have come to associate with Holiday Inns in other cities. The salad with my sandwich was crisp and fresh tasting. The sandwich was garnished nicely with a lettuce leaf and orange wedge.

After lunch, I had a chance to visit with Chef Brent Knop, who has been restaurant manager since the first of the year. He formerly worked as assistant director of food service for Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. A 1981 graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in New York City, he's been cooking ever since he was inspired as a youngster by his Lithuanian grandmother. "She never had one meat for a dinner. She had three or four," he said.

Knop likes continental cuisine. He likes dealing with the classics. Recently, he started Saturday evening service of steak Diane, which he prepares tableside. Chef Knop is one of the few professional chefs in Grand Forks. He loves what he does, and that is reflected in the foods he has been turning out.

Chuck House Is Good Place to Be “Out to Lunch”

FEBRUARY 24, 1988

We chose the Chuck House Ranch Restaurant in the Westward Ho Motel when we went out to lunch Feb. 16 because it's steady and reliable. You always can find something unique on the menu.

We found an almost full house when we arrived at 12:30 p.m. We noticed many of the customers were north enders—people from the North Dakota Mill and Elevator and UND, as well as nearby businesses such as Northern Pump and Caterpillar. Intermingled were several lunch customers from downtown. The Chuck House, with its colorful totem poles and rustic decor, always is interesting. The walls are covered with Wild West posters. There are arrows sticking in the walls. The tables are covered with red-checked cloths. The plastic cow cream pitchers on the table are for sale, and customers buy a couple dozen every week.

I like the menu. It's varied. It's clever. And it's easy to read.

Just to be different, I ordered gyros, “a blend of lamb and beef seasoned with herbs, served with Grecian sauce, onions, tomatoes, pita bread and olives.” All this for \$3.75. Constant Companion ordered barbecued beef served on a sourdough bun with french fries for \$3.25. Our waitress allowed him to substitute coleslaw for the fries, and we all were happy. It didn't take her long to motor back with our order. My gyros was topped with eight raw onion rings, so I gave six of them to CC. In turn, he let me finish his coleslaw.

His barbecue meat was lean, and the serving was generous. My meat had a pleasing taste of lamb and I enjoyed the black olives, lemon and parsley used as garnish. The dressing had a piquant flavor and I was glad it was on the side. That's where dressing belongs. When I worked my way down to the pita bread, I found it was thick and delicately browned. It tasted maybe like a fat lefse, and it was good.

The Chuck House went an extra mile, with plenty of ice in a nice glass glass of water; a waitress who mercifully asked us only once if everything was all right (six times is too many); and allowed both of us to keep our plates until both of us were finished.

The Chuck House is an anytime-of-the-day place. It flourishes on home cooking with baked goods by Sandy Montgomery. Breakfasts are big in the Chuck House. It's one of the few places where you can order hash browns and be assured they will be done crisp and brown. It's a popular spot for people who like to eat out on Sunday morning.

In its 17 years, the Chuck House has developed a reputation as a very informal, very casual restaurant, but owner Don Lindgren takes salads seriously.

“Lately,” he said, “we've been paying more attention to salads. We keep our bowls in the refrigerator and serve romaine lettuce. When we hear people comment on the salad they had with their meal, we know it's important to them.”

Sonja's Hus Has Cheery Blue and Red Norwegian Décor

APRIL 13, 1988

Sonja's Hus in the Regency Inn, East Grand Forks, is a homey, cheery and rather quiet little place to go for lunch. The wallpaper is bright blue with a white pattern. There are dainty bouquets of permanent daisies on the table. The booths are deep blue with red cushions. The backs of the wooden booths and the valance for the drapes are decorated with rosemaling, a graceful Norwegian style painting. The walls are decorated with Norwegian art pieces.

The food is reasonable, especially if you choose the specials. Each day, the coffee shop has two lunch choices for \$2.29. Last week, I tried the soup, salad bar and sloppy joe combination, offered as a special. Constant Companion asked, as he often does, for a French dip. It was \$3.95.

The coffee shop was rather quiet when we came, but it wasn't long before many of the tables were filled. Two waitresses were doing double duty there for a while.

Our waitress was Jane. She didn't have to tell us because she wore a nametag. I thought that was a good idea. She invited me to help myself to the soup and salad bar as she left to put in our order. The salad bar was nice, small but adequate, and all of the items seemed fresh. Sometimes salad bars get so big they are unmanageable. You'll find rubbery vegetables and French dressing slopped across the carrots. Not so at Sonja's Hus. There was one large metal bowl of lettuce mixed with shredded red cabbage and it was replenished. There were several items nearby but not a lot more than would be used.

I started my salad bowl with lettuce on the bottom. I carefully added a couple of broccoli flowers and three wedges of tomato. Out of respect for my elevated cholesterol count, I used cottage cheese for a topping. I finished it off with a sprinkling of sunflower seeds and grated cheese. Then I took a cup of beef noodle soup. It was good. The noodles were plentiful and the beef was thinly sliced and lean. The broth was a tad too salty.

It took a while, but my sloppy joe arrived. The meat had a good flavor. I was going to skip the potato chips, but they were better than most chips. So I ate them all and looked out the window to see where my self-control had gone. Meanwhile, CC was examining his French dip, which he said was pretty good. The au jus in which he was to dip his beef sandwich was a little on the oily side.

We had coffee and took our time. Some of the other customers were farmers who had been to a meeting in the Regency Inn. Former UND football coach Jerry Olson was sitting nearby, so I asked, "Would you rather be coaching football or farming?"

Olson grinned and said, "It depends on who's winning." Then he told us he was about to start planting wheat on his farm near Hoople, N.D. I noticed he ordered the other \$2.29 special, chicken, potatoes and vegetable.

Before we left, I visited with Kirsten Jones. She is in charge of Sonja's Hus coffee shop and Ferdinand's dining room in the Regency Inn. Her father was born near Erskine, Minn., she said, "and the whole family is Norwegian. So we wanted to use a Norwegian theme in the coffee shop."

Kirsten threw a little Norwegian into the conversation, enough to convince me she is Norwegian. I knew it for sure when she said, "Uff da."

The Regency Inn and Sonja's Hus no longer operate in East Grand Forks.

At the Tomahawk, They Roast the Whole Turkey. People Go to the Highway Cafe for the Kind of Meals They Used to Eat at Home: Meat, Potatoes, Pie.

MAY 4, 1988

“Oh, I see you’re out for a home-cooked meal, too,” said Roy Bakken as he and his wife, Yvonne, sat down in the booth next to ours in the Tomahawk Cafe one night last week.

“Yes,” I said. “This is my idea of a home-cooked meal.”

Actually, when you go for a meal at this truck stop cafe near the intersection of U.S. Highway 1 and Interstate 29, you are going back to the basics. There’s nothing fancy about the food. Nothing fancy either. If you want pheasant under glass or oysters Rockefeller, you won’t find them here. You might, however, find lutefisk and lefse. This is one of those places where they peel a batch of potatoes every morning and make up a big pot of soup. They roast whole turkeys—none of this turkey roll business. People come in here and order meat and potatoes. With it, they get gravy and vegetables. And they get soup and coleslaw.

I heard the Bakkens order roast pork sandwiches. And later on, I heard Roy Bakken say, “Pretty good.” That’s exactly what Constant Companion says when he is pleased with something. Men don’t get exuberant.

I should have settled for a sandwich, but instead I ordered the dinner special: Polish sausage and sauerkraut with hash browns and coleslaw. CC ordered roast pork and dressing.

We started with a cup of navy bean soup, which was good. I mean real good. As we continued on with our meal, we found everything good. The coleslaw was crisp, and the potatoes were fried to a golden brown. The food reminded us of dinners people used to eat at noon. If there was any complaint, it would have been that there was too much food. Some people, we understand, order a half a dinner.

Pies are a specialty at the Tomahawk Cafe. You see them when you enter the spacious restaurant. They are going round and round right inside the front door in one of those twirling display cases. Sometimes, I get kind of dizzy watching them. There’s a wide choice of homemade pie every day. And they are good. Cream pies are \$1.25 a slice and fruit pies are 95 cents. Ask for them a la mode and it will cost you 30 cents more. But you get Bridgeman’s ice cream, which to my mind is about as good as it comes.

The Tomahawk Cafe is one of those places that keeps you coming back. In the first place, it’s clean. In the second place, it’s homey. The other night, a trucker was sitting at the counter working on a crossword puzzle. People were eating their turkey and dressing and Gordon and Colleen Kukloks’ children were helping out clearing tables and running the cash register. The children are Heather, 14, Callie, 12, Meaghan, 10, and Eamon, 9.

Business has been good in the two years the Kukloks have been in their new location. Gordon Kuklok says his philosophy is to serve good food and make it reasonable. They are busiest Sundays when they serve roast turkey and dressing for \$4.25 and hot turkey sandwiches for \$3.25. The hours are between 10:30 A.M. and 2 P.M.

Steady customers count on the Tomahawk for soup. They don’t need a calendar. They know that it’s pea soup, it’s Monday; bean soup, Tuesday; macaroni-tomato, Wednesday; chicken rice, Thursday; old-fashioned tomato, Friday; and vegetable beef, Saturday.

Marilyn says, "Tomahawk has closed down, and there is no new restaurant in its place."

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