



## Ode to Baltimore Comestibles

By Dara Bunjon

**H**onestly, I'm not a native Baltimorean. I was born in a small town in Pennsylvania. How small was it, you ask? It was so small they put mirrors at each end of the town to make it look larger. Being the bonvivant that I am, I was insistent with my parents that we move somewhere where I could enjoy a lifestyle to which I could grow accustomed. At the age of 3 months, the Fromm family moved from Loch Haven, Pennsylvania to Pennsylvania Avenue in Baltimore – a slight bit of irony.

My earliest recollections of the joys of dining in Baltimore were a handful of restaurants. The ones I remember are Wilson's on North Avenue, The Chesapeake Restaurant, Mandel's, Allen's on Garrison Boulevard, Gordon's Crabs and the Pimlico Restaurant on Park Heights Avenue.

The Pimlico Restaurant really sticks out in my mind. I can see its clubhouse style dining rooms with horse racing names and horsy murals; waiters and waitresses with perfectly ironed uniforms responding efficiently as their numbers lit up in a fluorescent box on the wall. The Pimlico was one of the first places to have a multi-ethnic menu with Asian food along with the Maryland classics of crab cake and crab imperial. At this time, Baltimore was a city with limited dining choices. My first Chinese food was in the little dining room in Hutzler's basement, it was Chicken Chow Mein- by today's standards a hair above Chung King quality.

On the other hand, we have some unusual foods unique to Baltimore. What other city could you get a coddie and a coke? Hey, for eleven cents that was a good snack after school. Every neighborhood in the city had a "docs," a corner drugstore with a fountain where the thick coke syrup was mixed with soda and put in a paper cone cup in a metallic holder. Even more odd were those who put ammonia in their cokes.

As I got older, my taste buds became more refined and I craved something more. By the 7<sup>th</sup> grade I was a French fry and beef gravy junkie. It is an addiction I have yet to

lose and it especially goes well with a shrimp salad on rye bread. I remember my summer of 68<sup>th</sup> in Atlantic City when kids from other cities turned up their nose to gravy on fries. I would ask "do you put gravy on mashed potatoes?" and they would say "yes." I converted many a Philadelphian to fries and gravies and I learned to eat hoagies instead of subs it was a cultural exchange of miniscule proportion.

Tourists come to Baltimore and all they want are crab cakes. ho hum, how mundane. From Dundalk to Essex, from the West Harbor to Canton and Federal Hill to the Charles Street corridor we have some very amazing restaurants and Baltimore keeps getting better. Just as much as the Preakness, the Orioles or the Aquarium brings people to Baltimore it is the food that sustains us. In the view of Dr. Richard W. Wrangham, a professor of anthropology at



Dara on her first car phone

Harvard, the preparing, cooking and sociable eating of food are so central to the human experience that the culinary arts may well be what made us human in the first place.

My fear for Baltimore is that we, the consumers, aren't there for our local restaurants, the ones that continually support charities and little leagues and brighten Baltimore's multi-ethnic uniqueness. In celebrating the joys of Baltimore we would be remiss if we forgot our lite fare dining to fine dining establishments. Imagine what Artscape, the Fells Point Festival or the Hopkins Festival would be without the restaurateurs. I don't know about you but it isn't a Baltimore celebration if you don't have boardwalk fries, sates, tempura veggies and a tall glass of lemonade.

In my heart I will always consider myself a true Baltimorean. A town much much bigger than a certain small burg in Pennsylvania and not too large to obliterate what makes Baltimore special. Rejoice in the special moment when a waitress comes up to you and says "what will you have today, Hon!"

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