

WE TREAT YOU RIGHT

Erica Maas
Business

Lexington High School, Lexington, NB

[Assignment: For this essay, you begin by writing three lists--a list of people, a list of places, and a list of things--that your world could hardly have existed without, and certainly not well. Once you have compiled your list, consider which item on one of your lists you better write about now because who knows if you will ever get that chance again. Perhaps your Uncle Mike is so weirdly wonderful he belongs in a museum. Perhaps your father's beige '66 Volkswagon Bug with sunroof has led a charmed existence, and when that engine roars to life your mind fills with stories about it and your father. Perhaps there was a hamburger joint in your hometown that represents to you everything that was glorious about being seventeen. Once you have chosen that person, place, or thing to immortalize, write a profile about it that will communicate to your reader what makes your subject worth thinking and writing about, and why the very existence of that person, place, or thing is worth celebrating.]

Hot Eats! Cool Treats! That's Dairy Queen all right. It's not just any Dairy Queen though. It is Lahm's Dairy Queen in Lexington, Nebraska. People from all over the United States who have stopped to eat there comment that it's the best Dairy Queen they have ever been to.

Whenever I go to a Dairy Queen I compare it to Lahm's Dairy Queen. For example, at the one here in Valparaiso, I have noticed that they do not wash their Blizzard collars very well and when I order a Strawberry Breeze it has a taste of chocolate from the Blizzard made before it. Also, they are very slow and easy going compared to the fast service at Lahm's. Their products just don't have the excellent taste that I'm used to.

As soon as the customer walks through the first set of double doors of Lahm's Dairy Queen the sweet aroma of ice cream drifts to her nostrils. Lahm's doesn't have that reeking fast food odor like most fast food places (at home, for example, I can smell the grease in the air as I drive past McDonald's on the highway). Customers can hear the whirring of the ice cream machines, the louder blender-like noise of the Blizzard machines, the tunes of the local radio station, KRVN. On the trash cans there are live plants that were donated by area businesses the day the place opened, giving the place more of a homey look. Unlike service at other Dairy Queens, here the employees bring the customers' orders out to them when the food is ready.

Having worked at that Dairy Queen for two and a half years, I have the inside scoop on the place.

I started out working for the Lahms at the old Dairy Queen in the summer of 1992. It was fifty years old, so it was one of those where one had to order from a window and eat the treat on a wooden bench along the side of the building. A person could see the old red and white, barn-like building with the big Dairy Queen sign on the front of it from Highway 30. Bruce Lahm's parents were the first owners of this Dairy Queen and he took over when his father died and his mother got too old to run the place. Then in December, 1992 the Brazier opened on the main

strip with the other fast food chains and they closed the old place down. But the Lahms moved almost everything to the brand new building, which gives the place character--the old ice scoop with a crack in it, the old, ugly, green Misty machine, and the old ice cream machines that must have been there when they first opened fifty years ago.

Bruce and Pat Lahm are well known in the community for running a great business. Their motto is "The customer is always right." They stress to their employees that the customer is paying for the product so give them good quality and quantity. For example, if they saw me start to hand someone a Blizzard that wasn't completely full they would make me add more ice cream to it. Although they get stressed out from running their own business they manage to joke around and talk to customers and to their employees. They are not like most bosses who sit and watch their employees do all the work. Pat makes all the Dairy Queen cakes that people order, I have often worked with Bruce in the drive-thru during the day, and if it gets busy they come and help with customers.

There are so many different types of atmospheres that take place while working at a Dairy Queen. I like the electricity in the air when everybody in Lexington seems to get a craving for Dairy Queen, the feeling of my adrenalin pumping, trying to make my customer's order as fast as I can. Then when the rush is over my body feels like it should be still rushing around like a chicken with its head chopped off, especially when I work drive-thru because we could have a constant rush for two hours which really wears me out. And I would get really agitated when customers changed their orders when they got up to the window. However, during the winter months it is pretty quiet, so we manage to entertain ourselves. For example, we have fry fights or one of my brilliant co-workers does cartwheels. But when our bosses come to check on us and see us standing around, they say, "If you have time to lean, you have time to clean." So then they find some dirty job for us to do.

At Lahm's there is always a friendly face to take one's order. We are encouraged to talk to and get to know our customers and eventually we get to know the regulars quite well. We are even able to predict what some customers will order. For example, one lady comes everyday and orders a medium Diet Wild Cherry Pepsi, a medium chocolate malt for her son, and a small M&M Blizzard for her daughter. Also, there is a family in a bright red van that comes through almost everyday and orders a Pepsi with whatever else they order. Then there is everybody's favorite retired couple who comes everyday and orders two child-size cones and "that's it." Our day was not complete if these regulars did not come by. I remember one day some of us were talking about the older couple not coming by for the past couple of days and wondered if something had happened to one of them. An hour later, guess who came in and ordered two child-size cones.

The friendships that I have made while working there is what has made this Dairy Queen so special to me. My fellow co-workers range from the age of sixteen to forty-five. Each one of them has their own personality and I love each and every one of them. If it weren't for Dairy Queen I wouldn't have met even half of my good friends. For example, it was where I started my friendship with my best friend, Tiffany. She is a year younger than I am, so I had only seen her occasionally in the halls at school. Once she started working at Dairy Queen we got to know each other and would hang out together outside of work. And Theresa was my drive-thru buddy. She

was my favorite person to work drive-thru with because she and I had a rhythm that no one else had. We would get our orders out so fast it wouldn't feel like we were that busy.

Also I know that if I ever need some advice or if I need to get something off my chest there's always someone who will listen to me at work. I could always confide in Tawna about guy problems because she and I had a lot in common in our relationships with guys. Aaron always seemed to know if something was wrong and I knew I could tell him when he asked me. He made me feel good about myself, and could make me laugh even in the worst moods. Sergio was one I could always goof around with, but he was also one that I had serious talks with often.

Even though most people don't like to hang out at places where they work, I couldn't think of a better place to hang out than at Dairy Queen. It gives me the chance to talk to co-workers I didn't work with that day. Moreover, it's a great place to chat with a friend over some great food.