

THE BROWN BAG DELI

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[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.]

When my senior year in high school rolled around, I gained a wonderful thing. Senior privileges. Our senior privileges allowed us to roam around the halls without a pass, leave school early, and go out for lunch. Having already experienced four and one-half years of school food, there was no way we were going to stay in the cafeteria to eat. On the first day of school, I found that one of my friends, Rebecca, had the same lunch period as I did, so I asked her if she would like to go to the Brown Bag Deli with me. She said yes, and off we went.

I had been introduced to the Brown Bag Deli the previous summer and had fallen in love with it. My friend Becky (not to be confused with Rebecca) had taken me there for lunch one day because I was burned out on fast food and had no money for a real sit-down meal. When we arrived, I noticed a big canopy above the door that boldly said "Brown Bag Deli." There was a special feeling to the place when I walked in.

The food was good, and the service was fast. You could watch them slice your meat, unlike the tradition of pre-cut meats at Subway, and you got your service with a smile. There was nice, soft, even recognizable music playing in the background, like Rod Stewart and Sting, so much nicer than the re-made elevator music that they blast at McDonald's.

Eating at the deli became a regular Wednesday tradition for the two of us, and we even named the day "Deli Day." Every time we walked in we would announce our arrival with a loud greeting. It got so that the girls behind the counter would give us a sarcastic groan of irritation. These were the sweetest people--they always smiled, they always offered their recommendations of what to eat, and they always asked us how we were doing.

It got to the point where we would walk in and tell them that we wanted our "usual." My "usual" was a turkey sub on a Kaiser roll, lettuce, tomato, mayonnaise--and it always came with a free pickle. I would order a bag of sour cream and onion potato chips, which they trusted you to get for yourself off the rack. That was my favorite thing to order. My drinks varied,

sometimes a Mountain Dew float, sometimes Mountain Dew, and sometimes I would get a Snapple--peach or raspberry.

We serenaded the cashier many times (she was such a giggly one--ALWAYS smiling, no matter what) just to make her laugh. This could take minutes sometimes, because as a good cashier, she was always attentive to her customers. Rebecca and I would sit in the corner waving our arms in the air singing songs to her like Rod Stewart's "Have I Told You Lately" or Sting's "Fields of Gold" until she would finally look up and see us. One time, I actually danced for her. Without fail, she would laugh.

We had many a sandwich spear fight with those little things they put in the sandwiches to keep them together, and we always made jokes about what was in the pasta salad that day (sometimes it wasn't identifiable, however edible). Also, every "Deli Day" one of us would buy a cookie for dessert, and we shared it. One cookie was always \$.29 with tax, and we would often tell the cooks whether it was any good or not (sometimes they were burnt).

One time, I accidentally threw my retainer into the garbage, not realizing that it was gone until I returned to school. I called them up as soon as I noticed, and they fetched it out of the garbage for me. When I went to go pick it up it was all wrapped up in a little baggie for me (needless to say, I've been a lot more careful with it since then).

My favorite day was my birthday. The staff took a cookie and stuck a sandwich spear (toothpick) into it and told me to make a wish on the golden fringed tip of it. To humor them I did. I then broke my cookie in half, and shared it with Rebecca, and then threw the toothpick into my car for a few months until I cleaned it out.

Due to these memories, I really love The Brown Bag Deli, and I couldn't imagine life during my senior year without it. Because I've moved away from Mundelein, Illinois, I doubt that I will spend many more days there for lunch. When I go back someday, however, I know that I will find a smiling face and a good sandwich.