

# Memories Rediscovered

For anyone born in the 1950's and 1960's, our parents were from that Greatest Generation. Collectively, they weathered the Great Depression, the rise of Hitler, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, World War II black-out, raid drills, ration booklets, danced to the Andrews Sisters and Glen Miller, bought soda from machines with glass bottle cap removers, witnessed the dubious advent of margarine and polyester, and engaged in great debates about Elvis and the Beatles.

As a kid born in 1965, my school years were in the 70's and early 80's. And yet, many of my experiences with my parents took me back to the 40's and 50's - to drive-in theatres on a Friday night in my PJ's, with a blanket and pillow because my sister and I wouldn't make it through the second feature. Saturday afternoons were spent cozied up between my mom and sister watching movie matinees in front of the TV, falling in love with Cary Grant and Gene Kelly, dreaming of growing up to be just like Katherine Hepburn or Maureen O'Hara, and wanting a dream house, just like Mr. Blandings'.

Nights out for dinner during these years were also marked by meals at classic diners, dives (greasy spoons, as my dad used to affectionately refer to them), and dimly lit, log cabin restaurants with naugahyde booths, paper placemats, and large, glass sugar dispensers with flip-up spouts on their shiny, chrome lids.

My parents rarely diverted from such places, where waitresses were affable but always seemed ancient at what was probably just forty. They would hand us the menus with overwhelmingly large selections, offer a glass of tap water with ice at each of our places, and bring a basket of Italian bread with a salmon colored spread in a small, round, white serving container. There was no inquiry as to whether we desired sparkling or still, no lemon wedge, no fresh whipped, dill butter or olive oil with a pepper grinder placed at the table. It was simple, predictable, and I always felt loved. It was especially true when I dipped my knife into the salmon colored spread for bread, smoothed it across a piece of bread, and took my first bite.

I didn't know or fully comprehend what I was enjoying so much then. Mom's cooking was stick to your ribs, hearty, and basic meat, potatoes, carrots, frequently over cooked peas, and over boiled beets from a can. If fish was on the menu, it was fish sticks from a box and tartar sauce from a jar. It was all made with love, mind you, but horseradish, basil, tarragon, or truffles were not on the menu. Mom cooked largely from memory, rarely using a cookbook for an average night's meal, and always with heart.

But those nights we ate in naugahyde booths were moments I treasured. It was only later that I'd come to appreciate that the delightful flavor I so enjoyed was the horseradish. Its special taste in the mom and pop, log cabin restaurants my parents frequented became a warm and welcomed friend, woven into the most enjoyable memories of my childhood.

Soon the 80's came, and the diners, greasy spoons, and log cabin restaurants faded away; college, too, seemed to come and go in the blink of an eye as well. Before I knew it, I was on my own, running my own household and going to the latest hotspot with friends, eating fusion food, tapas, or my new found favorite, Vietnamese pho soup.

Dad passed away in the mid-90's, and mom followed in 2018 and with their passing, so much was lost in cobwebbed memories. I'd long forgotten about my old friends - greasy spoons, chrome sided diners, and dimly lit, log cabin restaurants. Pushed far to the recesses of memory was my love for salmon colored, horseradish spread on fresh Italian bread.

And then it happened one summer day in July of 2019 that my darling David and I found ourselves crossing into the United States at the New York State border after a five day getaway in Montreal.

We were mentally drained after a three hour wait at the border - traffic was just miserable and Siri had directed us west of our entry point at the Vermont border. The drive through New York seemed endless. Mid afternoon had evaporated into early evening, as we drove, and we were becoming quite hungry.

We stopped to refuel. David looked for a place to eat, and we noted some options about an hour south of our current location. Soon we were back on the road, continuing our journey toward home along the freeway that cut through the picturesque though seemingly endless Adirondacks. At long last, we exited at Lake George, a place I've heard much of but have never ventured to visit.

To our delight, as we turned right onto Route 9, we saw a few options, but one grabbed my attention and filled me with a feeling of instant relief - it was a log cabin restaurant. We pulled in, and for my part, I eagerly entered, ready to take a break from the long drive and fill my belly with some food - anything would do.

I stepped away from the table to freshen up and when I returned, there it was - among the paper placemats, two glasses filled with tap water and ice, and the bread basket - the salmon-colored, horseradish spread. David pointed to it, as if to say, "What the hell is that?" I instantly smiled. I could taste it, just looking at it. I sat, took a deep breath, and smiled at David again, as I opened the paper napkin enfolding the bread in the basket to reveal fresh Italian bread. I took a slice, tossed aside any cares about my carb intake to the wind, and put it on my plate. Then I picked up my knife, placed it into the delightful spread, and then I smoothed it across the bread. I then took my first bite, closing my eyes, taking in that wonderful flavor, opened my eyes and encouraged David to try it. I watched him as he delighted in his equal passion for horseradish. And here we sat together, enjoying my old friend from childhood.

I ate my bread and horseradish spread, looked around at the log walls, naugahyde booths, dim light, and felt an inner peace wash over me. The affable waitress came over and asked if we were ready to order. I just smiled. If only for a moment, I was enjoying dinner with my mom and dad. They were there - all around me - and my heart was full.