Donuts

by

*Eyes Right*

**Carolina Beach, NC –** Arguably the most dangerous location in which to find yourself is downwind of a donut bakery. I know of no one who can resist the wonderfully intoxicating scent of fresh donuts wafting through the air. Basically, you lose all self-control, stop whatever you are doing, and proceed zombie-like directly to the source of that scent. I can recall numerous times when I imagined this sensation to be akin to what one undoubtedly smells at the Pearly Gates.

My first introduction to freshly “baked” donuts (they are not baked, but fried in oil) took place in Covington, Kentucky where a small neighborhood bakery was located less than a block from my high school. Every morning I would hop off the #17 Crosstown bus and race to the bakery. I did not have to do much exertion because I was, in truth, being drawn by a force of nature – that come-here scent. My parents gave me a dollar, more than sufficient to buy two glazed donuts and one of those small cartons of milk (usually chocolate). I would down the donuts and the milk in the half block to my school, then play softball in the school yard until classes began at 8. It was a wonderful way to begin each weekday while school was in session.

The history of doughnuts (donut is a recent contraction and is used interchangeably), at least in the U.S., is a bit complicated. Most sources suggest that Dutch immigrants, in what later became New York City, fried a ball of dough which later evolved into the classic ringed donut of today. They called them “oily cakes.” Others, based on fossilized bits found by archeologists, contend that Native Americans had a similar concoction.

The rest of the world had long enjoyed some form of fried dough. Supposedly, a recipe for a deep-fried dough ball was written by Cato the Elder, a Roman soldier 200 years B.C. An American ship captain’s mother, named Elizabeth Gregory, put hazelnuts or walnuts in the middle where the dough did not cook as well and…..presto, dough*nuts*. The ship captain always took credit for his mother’s cleverness. Still, donuts were not something that most Americans craved until our WW I soldiers became addicted to donuts supplied to them by French ladies who had been cooking these forever..

What is certain is that the first donut-making machine was put into operation in New York City in 1920 by a fellow named Adolph Levitt who had recently immigrated from Russia. He concocted this device to meet the demand of addicted New Yorkers who kept clamoring for more donuts. In 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, a Kentucky lad of 18, Vernon Rudolph, started making and selling doughnuts in his uncle’s general store in Paducah using a “secret recipe” inspired by a cook on a barge on the Ohio River. In 1934 the uncle and Vernon moved to Nashville and did so well selling doughnuts that Vernon opened his own store in Winston-Salem, NC calling it The Krispy Kreme Doughnut Company. Krispy Kreme thrived throughout the South and ultimately expanded all over the U.S. There are now over 1000 American shops, with hundreds now throughout the world, and in a few locations, there are now even Krispy Kreme vending machines dispensing 3-packs of donuts 24 hours a day.

Krispy’s main competitor, Dunkin’ Donuts, was a latecomer founded in 1950 in Quincy, MA. It has grown exponentially and now has nearly 13,000 locations in 42 countries selling coffee, donuts, and lately, breakfast sandwiches. My experience when traveling in the Northeast is that it is difficult to drive a few miles without finding a Dunkin’ (its new name). But you better bring some serious cash….one donut here in northern Virginia will set you back $2.11 !

Of course, you can always make some donuts in your own home. Just mix some flour with water or milk and add yeast and sugar to make a dough. Then you let it rise, roll it out, and again let it rise before cutting circular pieces with holes in the center. The final step is to fry each round piece (including the holes) in hot oil, drain ’em, and add a glaze. Unless you are fixing donuts for the entire neighborhood, this is probably not a cost-effective gambit.

When your next donut crave comes, you don’t even have to jump in your car to head to a donut shop because, now in many areas, you can have them delivered. Of course, that wonderful scent is not included.

I thought you might like to know.

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