

School Lunches

11-4-24

There was no school lunch offered when I was in grade school at the 100+ year-old Sumner School that I attended from kindergarten until the first half of fourth grade. There was no kitchen build into that ancient edifice (although there were *cloak* rooms for our coats and boots.) If you couldn't go home, you brought a bag lunch and ate, gathered with other abandoned students in a designated classroom.

My mother made arrangements for me to eat lunch at my babysitter Mrs Palumb's house, way out almost to the end of Westcott St. I doubt that I was expected to walk that alone as a 1st grader, but I have no memory of who walked with me. Her son Peter, a few grades older than me, might have, but, as I think of it, I think he would have gone to a different school. We must have had a very long lunch break. Otherwise I have no idea how I would have made that distance in time to eat and return to school on time.

By the time I was in third grade I had switched sitters to Mrs. Sherman. The Shermans lived a good two or three blocks closer to school, and I would walk with her daughter Linda who must have been half a grade ahead of me. My favorite lunch at their house was a bowl of tomato soup and a toasted cheese sandwich. That is still my idea of the perfect lunch pairing.

When Sumner School was closed down and demolished, to be replaced with a long-overdue new building, the grade school was temporarily

moved to what was then called “Sumner-Levy,” Levy being the Junior High. That, too, was an old building. My mother had attended high school there in the ‘30’s, before they build a new Nottingham HS about a mile east of the original building. Sumner-Levy was located at the end of the block where I lived so it was very convenient. I could cut it close in the morning and make it to class on time. However, there was still no school lunch for the elementary students. In this new location, I was able to walk over to our neighbor’s house. Unlike my mother, Mrs. Flaggel was a stay-at-home mom and had lunch waiting for me.

When the new grade school was completed, my class returned there. Our class was the very first one to graduate elementary school from the new building. I continued to go to the Flaggel’s for lunch (still no school lunch) and Mr. Flaggel would pick me up at school for a quick drive over the several blocks to their house. That was a less than satisfactory arrangement as far as I was concerned because Mr. Flaggel was a child molester and used to kiss me in the back hallway before we went into the kitchen. UGH!!! That was gross, but I never told anyone.

Back at Junior High at Levy, they finally had a lunch program. Thankfully I didn’t have to go to the Flaggel’s house any more. I could finally either bring a lunch or buy it. My mother gave me ‘lunch money’, 40 cents a day if I recall correctly. That meant standing in a long line, a ritual which continued into high school when our class moved on to Nottingham. You could get your choice of two hot items or pick up a sandwich. I remember that, if I didn’t like the hot options, I

would buy a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and a bag of chips. Then the trick is to open up the sandwich and layer the chips inside before you closed it up again. Now there is a good lunch!

In High School, the lunch period was divided into three sessions of 30 minutes each. You were really lucky if you were assigned to a class that got first lunch, especially if the classroom was located near the cafeteria and you could get there before the line got long. I remember, in my junior year, having American History when we were assigned second lunch. That meant that you had 30 minutes of instruction, then rushed to the lunchroom to stand in line, jockey for a seat at a table, shovel down your food, and make it back to class for the second half of instruction. I wonder now how the teacher was able to juggle her presentation to fit such an awkward schedule.

One special incident that centered around this split period, sticks in my mind. We had an Australian exchange student in class who had never seen snow. That particular day, the first snow of the year started after we got to school and there was a fair accumulation by lunchtime. Our exchange student was thrilled and went outside during this split period and shows up back in class with a snowball. We all tried to tell her to take it back outside because it would melt, but the insightful teacher, grasping the importance of the moment, let her keep it and she put the snowball in her desk. You can picture the result, but our warm climate classmate learned something important about the nature of snow that day.

I guess the split lunch was not all bad.