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Hold the Pickles

Melisa Bruner

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was pleasing to my eye. Besides, all the red went well with the red bandana napkins!

Fortunately, the service at Canyon Road is attentive but not stifling. The members of our group ordered broiled quail, steak, chicken fajitas, and grilled pork chops. The steak was pronounced tender, as were the pork chops, the latter being a bit bland, however, for one customer. The chicken fajitas had an interesting savory seasoning, and the quail was positively succulent. In fact, I would go frequently to the restaurant strictly for the quail. All members of the party said that the baked potatoes were large, firm, and appropriately mealy—an improvement over a previous experience with a less than satisfactory potato. One misses the twice-baked potato of the past as another potato alternative, but the fries are fine for non-baked potato lovers. We did not try the chicken-fried steak, but reports suggest a more than respectable entry from Canyon Road in the race for the ultimate chicken fry.

Our meal was unhurried, relaxing, and filling. We had coffee and watched night falling about us. I remembered a previous outing when I had watched squirrels coming at dusk to the feeders, but I knew nothing along that line would happen on such a cold, slushy night. We paid the bill, got into the car, and drove up the dirt track which leads back to the paved road. In the gloom I suddenly noticed movement along the edges of the trail. Three little brown rabbits had come out to play after all. The sight of them was better than dessert, and it reminded me that you always get a bonus at Canyon Road Steak House. ■

Hold The Pickles

BY MELISSA BRUNER

It is June. Saturday afternoon sounds—lawnmowers buzzing, basketballs thumping, children laughing and splashing in a neighborhood pool—drift into your backyard with the occasional cool breeze. And from your backyard drifts that smell, the ultimate smell of summer: the grilling of hamburgers. And as that smell reaches your next door neighbor, she speculates and wonders, hoping to guess your secret. Is it the marinade? Seasoning salt? Special charcoal? And throughout the summer, as smells of distant burgers drift into your own backyard, you will try to guess the secrets of your neighbor. Is it the grind of the meat? The brand of the grill? For, as all creators and consumers of burgers know, there is always a secret involved in the production of a truly good burger.

Busy lifestyles, vacations, and change of season often force the quest for the perfect burger from the backyard to the restaurant. A fast-food, chain store burger may eliminate physical hunger, but presents no pleasant challenge to the consumer. We may wonder about the ingredients of such a burger, but will probably be happier if we don't know. A good burger, a burger worth traveling for, leaves the consumer trying to guess the creators secrets. Two Oklahoma restaurants that have achieved burger excellence are Murphy's in Bartlesville, and the Meers Store in Meers.

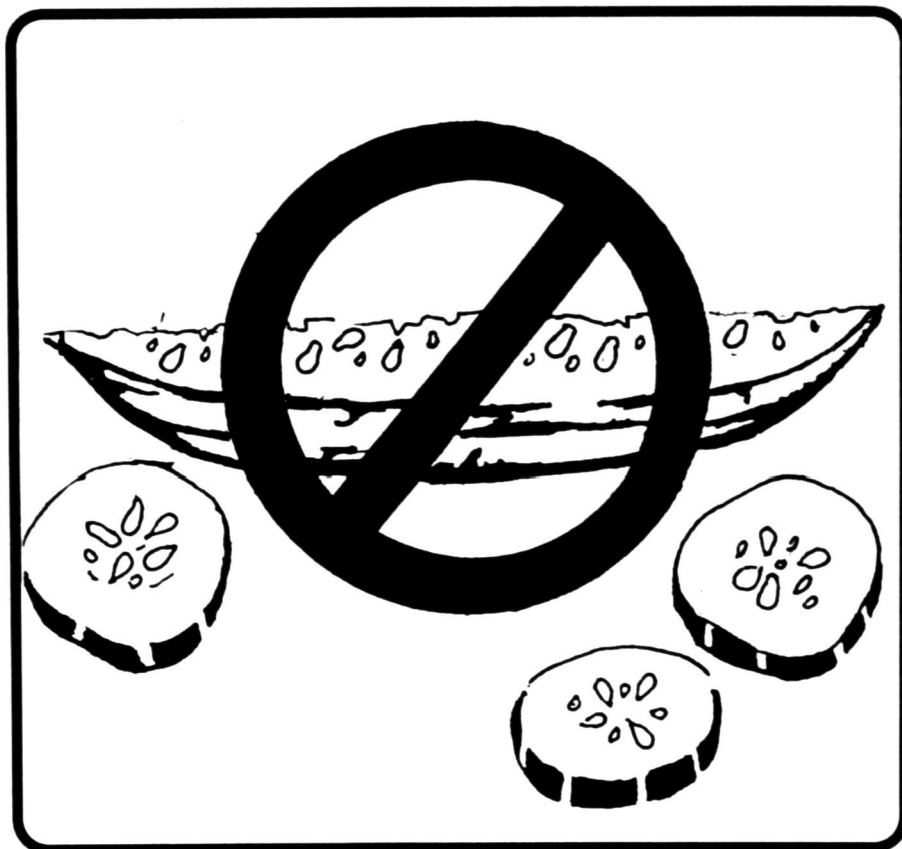
As you pull into the parking lot at Murphy's, you see nothing that brags of great burgers or great prices. There is nothing flashy about Murphy's. The building is plain and old, with only one tall sign to announce its presence. When you walk into the building, you usually have to take a seat in the small, crowded waiting area; if it's after 6:00 on any night of the week, especially Saturday, you will have to stand. If you are alone, or if you are with a friend, you'll probably get a seat at the counter fairly quickly. If you have a large group, you'll have to wait for one of the big corner booths. There is no hostess to put your name on a list or to guide you to your seat: waiting customers keep track of who's next, and the person closest to the doorway usually announces vacant booths or seats at the counter.

Once seated, you quickly receive a plastic laminated menu and a glass of water. The menu includes steaks, a pork chop dinner, and the house specialty: the Hot Hamburger. Unlike traditional burger sandwiches, the hot hamburger is served open-faced. Burger and bread are covered with smooth brown gravy, and you can get onions if you wish. If you are eating light, you can order the Junior Hot Hamburger. Included with the hamburger—in fact, often spilling over to share the gravy—are the best fries in the state. Hand cut, thick, the color of honey with crisp brown edges, these fries are always served hot and fresh. You can dunk them in your gravy or you can drown them in ketchup. Or you can salt them lightly and enjoy them straight. Forget about diet or cholesterol or virtue. Just think of these fries as mental health food.

Ask anyone in Western Oklahoma where you can get a good burger. The almost unanimous reply is "Go to Meers." The legendary Meers Burger is not for the faint of appetite. These burgers require two-handed eating. Seven inches in diameter, this burger covers an entire plate. Fortunately, the meat patties are fairly thin, so you can aspire to eat the whole thing. Perhaps one of the secrets of the Meers Burger is that it is made of ground Texas Longhorn beef, which is leaner than plain ground beef of unspecified breed. The burger is served cut into quarters, but since they are dressed with pickles, tomato, lettuce, and mustard, you will need plenty of napkins. (Point of etiquette: no one here eats a burger with knife and fork.) The Meers Burger is cooked just right. Medium rare, it has a hint of pink and is juicy without being greasy. My

friend managed to eat all of hers; I only finished half of mine because I sampled the homestyle french fries, cooked with skin on. Since both of us were stuffed, we took a few minutes to talk and look out the window as we gathered energy to return to the car. Two cats played on

with a wrought-iron base. Every inch of wall space is covered with business cards, outdated calendars, newspaper clippings, and advertisements, the most interesting of which extolled the wonders of an inflatable plastic bosom. An autographed black-and-white 8 x10 features the star of a



the porch outside the window, and a number of lazier felines napped in sunny spots. As we watched a group of rappellers waddling from the restaurant, we wondered how they would manage to get off the ground, let alone ascend a mountain after such a meal.

The setting of The Meers Store is nearly as interesting as the food. The seating area is multi-level, and the tables and chairs are of various styles. You can pull up a bench at a small picnic table, or you can be seated in a metal chair at an old sewing table

local truck commercial. High on the wall are antlers, and a colorful collection of baseball caps hangs from them. The menu is posted on the wall in the middle of the seating area. Choices listed below the Meers Burger include chili, grub steak, fried okra, and cobbler.

Whether you eat a Hot Hamburger at Murphys or a giant Meers Burger, you benefit from two kinds of burger-making secrets. Now if you could just figure out what they use. . . .