Pizza

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Abstract

Man, if there’s anything that bugs me more than this pizza making bit during a Saturday night rush, I’m sure I don’t know what it is...
MAN, if there's anything that bugs me more than this pizza making bit during a Saturday night rush, I'm sure I don't know what it is. People, people, people. They wander in off the boulevard like sheep to eat this foul-smelling mess I cook. I don't know who ever invented pizza, but by God I'd like to get my hands on him about now. Hurry, hurry, hurry. No time to think, just work, dammit, just work. "All right, all right, don't get excited, I'm coming." Damn waiters anyway; expect you to wait on them hand and foot. "Peque­amo questa bella pizza." Pick it up. Get it out of my sight. It makes me sick. God, how I hate pizza.

That big guy over there by the cash register is Sammy Miceli. He owns the joint, and don't he know it too! You should see the way he writes up an order; it looks like Sanskrit. I sure as hell wish he would learn how to write. When Sammy gets mad he can swear like a frustrated stevedore. It's funny as hell . . . a real gasser.

I look down at the order spindle. The damn thing's got so many orders on it I'm thinking I could start a paper drive. I bet I've made a thousand pizzas already. Damn people. Why can't they all eat hamburger?
“Mehmet, pick it up.” Get a load of these names: Mehmet, Andre, Julio, Carmen, Diamo. Sounds like the roster at a Turkish bath. Mehmet is about the slowest-moving waiter I’ve ever seen. I hear he used to be a gravedigger before he came to work here. I believe it. By the time the pie is good and cold, Mehmet picks it up and says, “Why youa no calla me? No wonder a customer he getta madda.” He pronounces customer, ‘kustomur.’

About this time I run out of mushrooms and I gotta go clear to the cellar to get more. Damn day shift. They never set up a thing. Cut out the first chance they get. When I get back from the cellar I gotta go back down again because I forget to get onions. By the time I get back the second time smoke is pouring out of one of the ovens, and Sammy is screaming his head off. “I pay you to make pizza not to burn it.” Go to hell, Sammy. I’d like to see you make them this fast. One irate customer gets up and leaves because he has had to wait too long for his pie. Well, he can go to hell too. The whole world can go to hell.

I open the oven door and pull out a pizza. Anchovy and garlic. God! How can they stand it? The smell alone makes me sick. Oh well, it’s their money.

Along about eleven the crowd thins out and I get a chance to grab a smoke and coke. By this time I’m filled to the gills with aggravation and I need this break to keep me from flipping. I’d quit this damn job if my landlady weren’t so persistent.

Andre, the dishwasher, is working like a man on fire. He always works fast. I don’t know how he keeps it up. Andre is new in the country and he doesn’t speak English. He works at night and goes to U.C.L.A. in the daytime. We shuck a little, and then I gotta make it back to the pit.

A live one gets up from table two and walks over to the jukebox. “Hey buddy, play E-4, willya?” Wotta creep this cat is, I mean he comes on like squaresville. Polkas. The creep plays polkas. Wow . . . what a job!

Julio, the bus-boy, comes over to the pizza stand to watch me flip the dough. You know what I mean; I take the dough and throw it into the air above my head at the same time
spinning it. The centrifugal force of the spinning dough causes it to get bigger as it goes around. It's a great gimmick to get the suckers in off the bricks. Little kids get a bang out of watching me and parents get a bang out of watching their kids watch me, so I guess it isn't too bad. Julio says, "I'm going to learn how to do that." "Take it from me, man," I tell him, "You don't want no part of this job. Like it's a real drag." "Yeah, but you make lots of dough. Dough, ha . . . ha . . . get it?" Julio slaps his thigh. I got it; so did Julio, right over the head. Julio and I are always clowning around. He's good people. I guess everybody in the joint is good people, but during the rush I get so damn bugged I gotta holler at somebody. We all remain good friends after working hours.

I look at my watch. Two-thirty and another hour and a half to go. I don't mind working the night shift because I can make the beach in the daytime. I wish I had a nickel for every hour of sack time I've logged at the beach. The joint is empty now, and I'm using the time to set up the stand for those ingrates on the day shift. I don't know why I'm so good to those guys, but I haven't got anything else to do, so I might as well. Mushrooms, sausage, pepperoni, bacon, salami, peppers, onions, garlic, anchovies, cheese, marinara, and sauce. I still don't see how people can eat this stuff. I have a pet theory about pizza. I think it was created by the Communists to destroy people's minds by distorting their sense of values, to say nothing of destroying their stomachs. Pizza is like an addiction to some people. One family I know comes in every night and has the same thing. A bottle of Chianti and a creation called a "combo-dombo." The latter is one-fourth anchovies, one-fourth sausage, one-fourth garlic and one-fourth lemon. Combo-dombo. Good grief, is the whole world nuts?

The boulevard bar-flies come in just before closing to mooch free coffee and yak it up with Sammy. Some of them are real beasts; others aren't so bad.

While the waiters clear the tables and stack the chairs, Sammy checks out the cash register and Julio carts all the clean dishes out to the racks in the dining room. I clean out my ovens and sweep the kitchen floor. Andre swabs the floor
with a dirty mop and we close. It's four in the morning and I'm tired like Hercules after the stable-cleaning bit. After I wash the sticky flour off my face and arms, I change and come into the dining room to say good-night. The waiters are bitching because, poor things, they only made twenty bucks in tips. Twenty bucks plus their salary and they complain. What a bunch of yo-yos! they oughta have to cook; then they would have something to complain about. I was going to try and beat Sammy for a raise but what the hell, I'll be leaving soon and it doesn't seem quite fair.

“Good-night everybody.”

“See ya tomorra.”

“Yeah, tomorrow,” I say to myself, “I can hardly wait.”

Adios

by Nancy Johnston

EVEN at eleven o'clock in the evening the winding streets of Acupulco were teeming with happy Mexicans. Whole families walked barefoot together along the pavement, laughing and shoving each other, completely unaware of our car as they stepped dangerously close. But Juan, our little Mexican guide, calmly turned his old Ford in and around the swarming natives, one brown hand lying relaxed on the steering wheel, the other hanging out the window tapping a Latin beat on the side of the car. My mother leaned forward in the back seat and spoke to Juan, chuckling. “I can still remember how frightened I was the first day we rode with you in Mexico City, Juan. I thought we'd never see United States soil alive again!”

“Ah, señora!” Juan turned his head toward my mother, his teeth showing white against the darkness of his round face, as he grinned broadly. “You know I am best driver een all of Mehico. Si?”

“Si!” my mother answered laughing.

“My friends,” Juan continued, turning his head to us again, “you know I am een Mehico City again later tonight?”

“Tonight!” My father repeated.