

The Dilemma of Modern Dining

by

Shawna E. Leonard

Frequently, I enjoy consuming comestibles in the company of my fellow man. To wit, I often eat "out." Doing so, I have gained some insight into the service at America's eating establishments.

A typical meal unfolds thusly: my party is greeted by a phalanx of youths adorned in brightly-colored polo shirts. (There seem to be an awful lot of people involved in obtaining a meal. The old saying about too many cooks can also be applied to waitstaff.) Spotting us, one of the fray peels off and leads us through a labyrinthine maze to our table. (I often wonder at the architectural devilry that occurs in the designing of modern restaurants.) Once deposited in our seats, menus as thick as tomes are thrust upon us. Informed that "Sierra" will be 'taking care of us' (an ominous turn of phrase), we are then left to our own devices for far too long.

When Sierra arrives, I invariably feel sheepish, because by this point the table is littered with origami cranes made from torn napkins and modern sculptures fashioned from the cutlery. Sierra takes our drink orders and wants to leave us to put them in, we must deftly lasso her to give her our meal orders as well.

As I tell her my (undoubtedly quite complicated, due to my numerous food phobias) order, she stands there with a glazed smile and wild eye (or is it the other way round?), nodding vigorously, writing nothing down. When I inquire whether she understands, she continues to nod and I worry about the state of her suboccipital muscles.

Unconvinced, my eyes follow her back to the kitchen and, sure enough, I see her furiously scribbling as she goes.

Another age passes; drinks are brought, with the assurance that our food will follow shortly. Knowing it won't, I now come prepared with a list of topics, which can range from the care of iguanas to how best to prepare crepe suzettes. Even with this forethought, there are gaps in the conversation, filled only by the grumbling of stomachs.

By the time the food does arrive (brought by yet a third person), I usually have eaten my napkin and am no longer hungry. At that point, all I can do is sit patiently and wait for the check.

Copyright © Shawna E. Leonard 2005