

Matt -----

FYC 13100

Professor Clauss

December 7, 2010

Love Shack

My friends call me crazy. Why else would I venture one hundred miles away from home to go to the beaches of Avalon, NJ every summer weekend? After all, there is a beach literally five minutes from my home in Little Silver, NJ, my fleet-footed friends immediately point out. While I know from personal experience that beaches along the Jersey shore are not vastly different from one another, there are two reasons I make the trek every weekend: family and food. Specifically, there is one place close to my heart called the Fishin' Pier Grill where food and family fuse together perfectly to form my favorite restaurant. Despite its unseemly physical characteristics, the Fishin' Pier Grill is a venue with a relaxed atmosphere, loyal customers, compassionate owners, and mouthwatering breakfast food.

While walking along Avalon's beautiful boardwalk, feeling the sea mist of the Atlantic Ocean, I would be understandably puzzled how the Fishin' Pier Grill could possibly be a good restaurant upon first seeing the building. There is this picturesque setting with classic lifeguard boats deploying into the ocean, breaking waves, dune grass waving in the breeze, surfers dropping in on glassy swells, volleyballs flying through the air, and fisherman fishing off of the pier, but the one-story box of a building known as the Fishin' Pier Grill sticks out as an eyesore compared with the rest of the fantastic features of the boardwalk. In one notable situation, my friend Danny Pepitone, who had never been to Avalon, was visiting for a weekend. He asked me where to go to get the complete Avalon experience. Naturally, I immediately suggested the

Fishin' Pier Grill. While I was trying to direct Danny to the Grill on the phone, however, he literally walked by it on foot three times because he couldn't believe the building he was passing could be the restaurant I had raved so fervently about. To further illustrate how much the building is out of place with the rest of the beautiful boardwalk, I remember one specific instance where I lightly leaned against the side of the building and one of the side panels fell off. This is not to say that the restaurant is unsafe, but rather that it doesn't exactly catch your eye as a good restaurant upon first sight.

While the outside is unimpressive, the inside is, at first, just as unappealing. Patrons can't appreciate the fantastic setting outside, it's humid and muggy, and the tables are sticky at all times. Patrons can't appreciate the setting because the windows don't face the ocean, the beach, or pretty much anything for that matter. I think adding a well-placed window could definitely spruce up the place and allow clients to see all the activity surrounding the restaurant. This window when opened could also help with the humidity in the building. For all the times I have been there I cannot say that the fans blowing on the ceiling actually help cool me down. I do, however, understand the fact that the tables can be sticky. For instance, one time when my family entered to eat we ran into our family friends the Smiths, who were on their way out. Since both families had six family members, we occupied the table where they had been sitting. The Smiths had three children under the age of ten at the time and all of them ordered pancakes. Needless to say, they spilled syrup all over the table. Of course, the waitresses tried their best to clean it up, but it was nearly impossible to get rid of all the residual syrup coating the table.

While unappealing conditions such as the humidity and sticky tables are present, the Grill is always filled to the brim. It's interesting how being so crowded doesn't make people irritated, however, because the Grill fosters a sense of tolerance in its clients. For example, I will never

forget one breakfast when I was twelve. I had to have bumped elbows with the person to my right at least twenty times over the course of the meal--but he was at a different table across the “aisle.” Instead of getting mad at bumping elbows with the boy, however, I began talking to him along the course of breakfast. The boy’s name was Tommie Jones. To this day, Tommie and I are great friends that hang out, surf, and run together whenever we are both in Avalon. The sense of tolerance despite the crowded environment allowed us to become close friends.

The feeling of tolerance the Grill creates is due to the atmosphere within the establishment. As a result of the building’s history, the wooden benches, signs throughout the restaurant, and the waitresses’ shirts, clients are mollified to negatives such as crowdedness or the humidity. While the building itself largely has no positive characteristics, the building’s history lends to offsetting this issue. It is a simple building originally used by anglers fishing on the pier that extends out of the back of the restaurant. Clients can almost see themselves as fishermen taking a break from work whenever they are in the restaurant. Another way they can make this correlation is that the seats and benches are all made of wood. While these wooden benches perhaps aren’t the most comfortable seats, they add a fisherman’s flavor. Signs, big and small, hanging throughout the place add this flavor as well. All have something to do with fishing, most are comical, and they help give a relaxed and comfortable feel. My favorite sign in particular is, “A fisherman is a jerk on one end waiting for a jerk on the other.” My sister Grace’s choice is “Fisherman’s Prayer: Lord, help me to catch a fish so large that even I in the tell of it never need to lie....” To be expected, my dad prefers the sign that reads “A woman that has never seen her husband fishing doesn’t know what a patient man she married!” There are simply too many clever ones to list. Additionally, the waitresses all wear purple shirts that say in

bright yellow letters on the back, “No you may NOT!” to help inject a comic flair and relax customers.

The Grill’s relaxed feel contributes to the loyalty of its patrons. For instance, it is not uncommon to wait at least twenty minutes to be seated. Furthermore, I have heard of patrons who have waited over an hour and a half to get a table in the small dining shack. Personally, my family has probably waited that long at least once. The crazy thing is, we didn’t mind at all because we knew we were getting good food and a good time in return. Moreover, my family alone has been visiting the Grill for over seventy years, starting with my grandma during her childhood. It has become part of a family tradition. Every Sunday after church, my family and I alternate between eating homemade breakfast at my grandma’s house and going to the Fishin’ Pier Grill. At both locations, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and siblings all join together to participate in eating delicious food while spending quality time together.

Not to be forgotten, Ed, the owner of the Fishin’ Pier Grill, contributes largely to the atmosphere because he truly cares about the customers. Ed knows many of his patrons by name. I have seen him just about every single time I have gone to the Grill and he greets my family with a smile every time we enter. There is plentiful evidence of his caring nature. For example, I remember one specific time where he stood outside for three hours talking to customers, greeting clients going in, and thanking those leaving. To further emphasize the point, I recall one day when it was roughly 102°F out and quite humid. The combination was sweltering and even the inside of the Grill would be nicer than standing outside. Ed, recognizing the heat, personally brought out refreshments to everyone waiting outside. On top of that, he stayed out with us the length of time we had to wait. Even though we waited over a half hour for a table in

that heat, I can easily admit that we never would have stayed if it weren't for Ed's generosity towards us and the other patrons outside.

While the people and the atmosphere are half the reason we go, the Grill's delicious food and good value are the reason we keep coming back for more. The omelets at the Grill are unmatched in my experiences and their hash-browns are a greasy heaven. Both are prepared on a special iron skillet I once learned after asking the cook. While the skillet isn't very large, it has a unique curvature that allows it to flip eggs well and distribute heat to the whole egg, cooking the egg perfectly. The skillet is very old, but iron skillets absorb grease over time, thus making it better with age. I have never seen anything like the skillet since. It also doesn't hurt that the cooks use quality ingredients and stuff the three-egg omelets to the point of bursting with countless delicious items such as ham, bacon, peppers, onions, cheese, among other mouth-watering choices. Case in point: my parents typically order the spinach-mushroom-cheese omelet for breakfast because the eggs physically can't wrap around all the ingredients they put into the omelet. Another popular choice of customers, especially the younger ones, is the pancakes. Each order consists of three pancakes that literally have a one-foot diameter each. Needless to say, it takes a big stomach to finish an order, but when fresh blueberries, other fruit, or chocolate chips are added into the pancake batter equation it makes finishing even more difficult. Additionally, "The Big One" is a good value. For only around ten dollars, you can get three of the aforementioned pancakes, two pieces of french toast, a poached egg, and a side of bacon, ham, or sausage. They call it the Big One for a reason! Since Avalon is a beach town where prices of most merchandise and food are overinflated, The Big One is one of the better values around town. The large pancakes and The Big One are both delicious, but I personally stick with the omelets most times--they are simply too good to pass up.

For a multitude of reasons, The Fishin' Pier Grill is my favorite restaurant and will always be a special place to me. Once new patrons get past the outdated exterior and the cramped quarters inside, they can come to realize what a great and wholesome place the Grill is. The atmosphere allows customers to be relaxed, have a good time while they are there, and make them want to come back for more. It doesn't hurt that the food is absolutely delicious and has good value compared with other restaurants. If you are ever in Avalon, NJ, you would be remiss not to experience all the Fishin' Pier Grill has to offer. Maybe I shouldn't travel one hundred miles away from home every summer weekend just because of a breakfast place. Maybe I should go someplace else, someplace closer. But I won't, because I love the little shack on Avalon's boardwalk. I always will. Go ahead, call me crazy.