

Home, Home on the Range

Golden fried chicken crispy and crunchy, soft and moist banana pudding, lip smacking cornbread, meaty ribs dripping in barbeque sauce, second only to food; the south is also known for its humidity. Inhaling deeply I choke haphazardly on the thick air; I *could* always smell the heat before I could feel it, even at six thirty in the morning, but summer usually behaved with a blatant disregard for its Georgian dwellers. Frequently, a moist heat would settle over the state like someone had covered it with a damp rag, immediately suffocating you with every mouthful of air. Eventually your breathing would slow just to avoid the process completely; shade and shelter most times offered little or no reprieve from the sun's harsh rays. Putting on lotion would be a waste of time, even if you were outside for a few moments; your skin would be somewhere in between sticky and clammy, leaving your clothes matted to your body. Often at times, I used to think that Hell itself was about to burst out from beneath my feet because it was just so damn hot.

However, no matter if it was boiling or below freezing, you could be sure that the Kyles, who were in their early sixties, are going to be walking the course. Or the Foy's, who believe in being early, are going to come in for beer at twelve. Here was the consistency a body could count on, out here on the golf course.

The Frog is one of the most well groomed golf courses in the state. The grass is a bright healthy green, with each blade cut low and evenly throughout the course. Every morning our outside staffs, who coincidentally were all Mexicans, would arrive at about five in the early morning hour to clean and prepare for the day's clients. Rightly so, my

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business didn't deal with the outside (I can't stand the heat), but with our four-and-a-half star restaurant. After ten years, this high ranking bistro still didn't have a name, so we just called it The Restaurant, but what it did have was a renowned Chef.

Though I was the dishwasher and should have been in the back eagerly awaiting my first dish, I could always be spotted right behind Eunice, a woman in her mid forties of middle weight, average height, red skin, and a gap between her two front teeth. Born and raised in Georgia, the sixth child of thirteen, Eunice was full of sassy comments and confidence always playfully bantering with the members.

"Hey Rex, when you gon take me out ta dinner?" she'd purr. He'd pause for a moment as if he were seriously considering this query, "Oh i'on kno, I haf to ask my wife first," his country vernacular showing his southern roots.

Brazenly Eunice would ask, "Why?"

Listeners and passerby's who heard the repartee would laugh and chuckle quietly to themselves. I guess it's because she came from such a big family that she had to be loud and bold to make her voice heard, and that carried over to her life. Anyway, she would joke with complete strangers in that same manner, that was Eunice, our Chief Chef.

"Damnit Courtney! What da hell do you think you're doing? Get da hell out my kitchen," her Georgian accent thick and country.

For a second I revel around her words trying to record the pitch and speed in my mind to play whenever I felt the need. In a jovial rejoinder, I chuckle and smile, but I don't leave the kitchen. Generally, this is what she would say to me after only ten minutes in her company, but that was because I was either clumsily knocking food off the

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bar to show her what a good cook I was; or I was over cooking the food she let me make. When a customer wanted their hamburger cooked medium rare, not knowing what medium rare looked like and instead of getting Eu, I would take it upon myself to cook it well done. My intentions were meaningful and honest, and honestly I didn't think anyone would know the difference. I was always trying to help, but I was more so in the way. Despite her cursing and yelling my name, she was still my favorite person out of the whole establishment. She never held back her annoyance or anger with me; in a way it reminded me a lot of my mom, which is probably why I took such affection to her.

"Eu!" I'd roar her name and beam contentedly like a child playing peek-a-boo, wanting to believe that this moment would never abscond, and I'd always be within my comfort zone, here...on the golf course...in Georgia. I gaze up at the sheetrock ceiling (as if it would have the answer) and wonder why leaving home after nineteen years feels so good, but coming back after one month or one year feels even better?

I write in Spanish on the outside staff's lunch boxes like I've always done for the past two years. Eunice would always encourage me to speak to them, but I was afraid that I'd make a mistake, and they would laugh at me. I had too much pride to be laughed at that way. So I would help them with the white foam boxes and the tub of sweet tea, then I'd confidently say, *"Hasta luego!"* Something that I've said more times than I've tied my shoes, and knew I couldn't it mess up. Eunice would just shake her shaved head and continue on with her business in the kitchen, probably thinking, well maybe tomorrow.

Whenever business was slow we'd all get a drink and a snack, and take it into the "staff" area. Our section looked like any other with a table, and four chairs, the only

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difference is that our spot was in the corner of the dining room by the large windows and French doors. In my opinion, these were the best seats in the whole restaurant, because you can soak in the sun, gaze upon that beautiful green grass, and for us, we would be able to see anyone who comes in to the restaurant. Occasionally, when the course was dead and the weather was to our liking, we'd go outside and sit leisurely under the covered deck. Closing our eyes tilting our heads back we would take in the breeze, loving the southern lazy life and wanting to be nowhere except where we were at that instant. Why do the simple pleasures in life always feel like you've just hit a grand slam?

It was in that particular moment when I thought to myself: It's hard to find a pair of jeans that fit, hug, and compliment in all the right places, but it's even harder to find people who do the same. Within the restaurant I had found my perfect pair of jeans. They were my encouragers for an upcoming Statistics Test, they were my motivators for my non-existent love life, and they were even my family to offer advice about friendships and the rigors of life. Faded glory though they were, full of faults and flaws, I knew I'd never throw them away.

Who is to say for sure, if no one ever left everything would remain the same? The paradise I live, is with the perception of a nineteen year old girl, how do I know that they see this occupation the same as I? Who is to say that even if I never left, Eunice or my other coworkers wouldn't leave also? Not knowing answers to such questions, I do know that I don't want to take those chances and leaving would only be in my best interest.

Everyone stays a little longer for me that day. We talk and laugh as is our wont; they drink a little as is their habit, and we settle into our peaceful and familiar rhythm of

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the enjoyment of each other's company. We reminisce of the first day I came to the restaurant and had become lost for about an hour trying to find our supply trailer, which should have taken me five minutes at most. They talk about how I backed the brand new food cart into a tree while golfers were at play, and was dully written up. Or about when I mistook the golf balls on the range as Easter eggs; that human err is their favorite and to prove it, they laugh louder, longer and harder. All my antics were recreated and reenacted, as if I didn't live the experiences myself.

Of course I didn't mind their teasing; they were my foster family, and I was going to miss them. Like an avid reader is reluctant to come to the conclusion of their favorite novel, I too am loath to say goodbye to this exciting chapter of my life, but at the same time am anxious to see what life has in store next. The sun descends and our shadows grow taller and leaner; we know that it is time to go. After hugs and kisses, once promises to write and call had been made, the last car pulls out of the parking lot. I stand still for a time, remembering how I began here as an unsure, lost, and clumsy girl. Now I was leaving as a confident, ambitious, clumsy young lady. I stop to appreciate experience and all that she has taught me.