

School Lunch



President Truman started the National School Lunch Program in 1946. A little over a decade later I was born. I went to a Catholic School as a child. Most every kid stayed at school for lunch. It was an expected part of the program.

My mother fairly regularly volunteered as a “lunch lady” at the school. She went in early in the morning and helped prepare the food, helped serve and clean up, and then ran errands on her way home to cook dinner for the family. She became friends with many of the on-staff ladies who were the full-time pros. Those were the women who designed the menus, ordered the food and supplies and supervised the cooking.

I can remember many of the meals we were served. Each of them contained a protein, a starch or two, a veggie and something for dessert. One of my favorites was chicken with gravy, mashed potatoes, mixed peas and carrots, a dinner roll with butter and freshly made apple crisp. Sure, there were times when something was served that I didn’t like. Sauerkraut comes to mind. We’d have some kind of roasted meat with the sauerkraut on the side. I’d eat the meat and everything else on my plate but the sauerkraut always stayed on my tray. There were plenty of lunch ladies cruising the aisles making sure you ate the majority of

your meal, but I could get away with leaving the sauerkraut behind.

The drink was always 8 ounces of whole, white milk. In Wisconsin, that was a given. The meals were subsidized by a weekly payment (I think my weekly payment was about a dollar, maybe less). Now compare that to the average lunch in a grade school today.

Deep fried popcorn chicken, tiny taters, bread, barbecue sauce, ketchup and chocolate milk. EEEW. You call that a healthy meal that is going to keep a kid full and focused all afternoon. Making matters worse, none of that food is cooked in the cafeteria. You never see anyone peeling a potato. That food is shipped in and reheated. That's enough to turn a kid's brain to mush.

Other mainstays on the menu: pizza, French fries, hot dogs and a mystery pork they call "ribicue." Do you see anything green and leafy on that list? No. Oh yeah, and the "fruit cup" they call dessert is floating in sugar water. You have to open the top of it and peel back the plastic to eat the diced fruit out of a plastic cup. How long has that fruit been in that cup? And how many preservatives are in there? Compare that to the freshly baked apple crisp that I could smell as I descended the stairs to the school cafeteria as a kid. My mouth was watering by the time I stepped in. If I were a kid these days I'd be gagging.

And get this: in many schools the children are allowed to sit with the meal they are served and wait 15 minutes. Then they are allowed to throw it out, take their own money and buy things a la carte. They can buy cake, brand name junk foods like chips and sodas, along with candy bars. No limits. The big name food companies ship that stuff in.

Sadly 16.9% of children between the ages of 2 and 19 are obese.

No wonder.

Guess what a typical meal in a French school is? Beet salad, veal stew and pumpkin soup. What do they eat in Korea? Stir-fried beef with carrots and kimchi. What is WRONG with this picture? Are those nations more wealthy than ours? Do they care more for the well-being of their kids than we do? The United States sadly budgets \$2.68 per child for lunch and only \$1.25 of that money goes toward the food!

Children born in 2000 have more than a 30% chance of developing diabetes in their lifetime. We are sending our children down a nutrition and health hell-hole.

I'm feeling ill.

I think I better stop now.