

Ratner's

Beryl and I loved to go to Ratner's Delicatessen on the Lower East Side until 2002 when it closed. The New York Times called it a "kosher-dairy haven where rude waiters had dished out feather-light matzo balls and pucklike potato pancakes since 1905."

When you went there to dine, it was always a New York happening.

One Sunday afternoon, Beryl and I took the car into the city and got a parking spot right on Delancey Street in front of the deli. We walked in, got a table, took off our coats, and perused the menu. The fresh onion rolls were brought to the table, as were glasses of water. We made our decisions and called over the waiter who was very reminiscent of the comedic actor, Lou Jacobi. He was short in stature, a bit rotund, had a little black mustache, and was very serious about the task at hand.

He asked me, "What would you like, sir?" in a recognizable New York Jewish accent.

"I'd like some creamed spinach with two poached eggs, some *kasha varnishkes*. Oh, and a side of stuffed derma."

Our waiter beamed at me, "*Good choice!*"

Then he looked over to Beryl and asked, "And what would you like, sir?"

"I'd like to have lox and cream cheese with tomato and red onion on a *bagel*."

"*Comes with bagel!*"

"*No*, on the menu it says you can have it with bagel or rye bread."

He was now speaking in clipped tones.

Again, "*Comes with bagel!*"

He looked at Beryl with disdain and sauntered away to fill the order. Beryl, feeling righteous, was annoyed because *anyone* could read on the menu that there was a choice between a bagel *and* rye bread. He was like a dog gnawing on a bone and holding onto it tightly.

"Beryl, let's just have a pleasant meal..." I implored.

"But he's *wrong!*" said Beryl, who had to be *right*.

Exasperated, I said, "Let it go, Beryl, let it go."

"I can't let it go!"

After a few moments, the waiter came back with our orders and placed them in front of us. He noticed that we had devoured the onion rolls and asked me, "Would you like some more onion rolls, sir?"

I said, "Yes, please."

In a few moments, more onion rolls came. The waiter was very pleasant and congenial to me but Beryl was getting the cold shoulder. Beryl was steaming mad, like a teakettle about to blow.

After we finished our luscious kosher delicacies, our waiter returned and removed our dishes and cutlery.

Upon his return, he asked me, “Would you like some coffee, sir?”

I said, “Yes, I’d like that.”

He then nodded in Beryl’s direction and asked me, “What about *him*?”

I turned to Beryl and asked, “Beryl, would you like some coffee?”

I didn’t know what to do. I wasn’t fast on the draw.

Fuming, he said, “*Yes!*”

I turned back to the waiter and said, “Yes, he would.”

He walked away, almost in triumph, as we waited for what seemed an eternity for our coffee to arrive.

When the coffee did arrive, Beryl glared at the waiter. After the check came, Beryl said to me, “I don’t want to tip him!”

“Beryl, we have to leave *something*...”

“Okay, but only 10%!”

He left the tip and I went to the cashier to pay the bill. We got out of there fast.

Next time when we had an urge for deli, we went to Barney Greengrass on the upper West Side.