

"Taste"

Heaven, Hell, & Hash browns By Stew Magnuson

Hash browns, cheese and brown gravy. Do these words make you feel queasy? Or do they make your mouth water? Or maybe you're thinking, "Hash browns, cheese and gravy, I'm repulsed, . . . yet fascinated." Hash browns, cheese and gravy, "the taste sensation that's sweeping the nation." Well, maybe not the nation, but it's still a popular dish at Stormie's, 1640 Holdrege. In fact, it's so popular at Lincoln's all-night cafe that the first annual Hash Browns, Cheese and Gravy Eating Contest was last Friday night at Stormie's prime time, 1 a.m.

But this isn't the story of some weird dish. This is the story of David and Goliath. This is the story of the deminutive senior sociology major, Todd Greene, against the 250-pound blue-collar behemoth, Curtis Jacobson, a part-time proctologist who sometimes sits in for Fatz at Showbiz Pizza.

So the two sat beneath the dogs playing poker wall hanging, to see how many plates of the yellow and brown ooze they could put down in the span of an hour. The official rules were read:

Rule 1. No self-induced vomiting.
Rule 2. Licking of plates strictly prohibited.

Rule 3. No fishing from bridge.
Rule 4. No extinguishing of cigarettes in opponents hash browns.

Rule 5. Janet Jackson impersonations on the table are not allowed.

The first two plates were brought out and Greene and Jacobson quickly ate while the crowd roared for their favorite contestant. Most were for the underdog, Greene, a mere shadow of a man compared to hulking Jacobson. By the time they finished the first round, Stormie's post-bar crowd started to file in.

Stormie's, for the uninitiated, is only open from 11 p.m. to 2 p.m. It's the only night-time eatery with any character in Lincoln.

Stormie's burgers are the best in town as far as I'm concerned. Sizes range from regular, big, to the incredible Belt Buster, which lives up to its name. The Big Burger is more than enough for me and sells for \$3.50, a bargain considering it comes with a small salad and choice of potato. The Belt Buster, a sandwich for the truly famished, goes for \$4.70. Gravy on the choice of potato is optional.

Ah yes, the gravy. Homemade and wonderful. Better than Grandma's and fit for the next Presidential Inauguration dinner. The oddest thing owner cook Bob VonBusch says he put his famous gravy on was pancakes. For those who like to take their gravy straight, VonBusch said a medium glass of the brown ambrosia would cost only .65¢. The famous hash browns, cheese and gravy go for a mere \$1.05.

But back to the fight of the century.

For convenience's sake, two plates were ordered to keep the contest moving. VonBusch had a mountain of hash browns on the grill. A crowd of post-bar patrons looked on in horror.

Jacobson quickly eats his second plate, while Greene shows signs of stress. Greene gets up to go to the restroom. An official observer is sent to make sure there are no infringements of Rule 1. Green stretches before sitting back down to resume picking at the second serving.

"What's wrong, Todd, you're starting to slow down!" Jacobson says.

"This is a contest of endurance, not speed," he replies.

Greene finally starts on his third plate as Jacobson finishes his. Then the stalling begins in earnest. Greene lights up a cigarette, and steps outside for a breath of fresh air. Greene doesn't look well. He plays with his hash browns and rarely puts any in his mouth. The crowd begins to turn against him. As Jacobson finishes the third plate, Greene's plate is still covered. Greene receives his first warning for stalling. Another warning would mean a half-plate penalty.

"Throw-up, throw-up," the crowd chants. For a moment it looks as if they may get their request. Greene finally cleans up the third plate with only 10 minutes left on the clock. Jacobson waits, knowing he has the contest won. Greene picks at the fourth order of HB, C, and G. With two minutes left, he throws in the napkin. The final score: four plates to three and a quarter.

The victor, Jacobson, announces: "I'll take on all challengers! Name the time! I can eat more hash browns, cheese and gravy than any man alive. I'm the champ! I'm the champ!"



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