

More than Mushrooms Johnny Marzetti Philly Steak Sandwich Fiestaa Them's good eatin'! key Americ

By Stew Magnuson
Diversions

The other day I dined at one of students' most popular places to eat. This establishment, along with its affiliates, packs in the student clientele three times a day. In fact, lines form to get into these "restaurants." I'm writing, of course, about the residence-hall food services, affectionately called "Valiswine" or "Valislime" by thousands of UNL students.

As I walked through the line at Cather-Pound-Neihardt, a wave of nostalgia overswept me. There they were, just as I had left them two years ago, those Philly steak sandwiches with curly fries. The kitchen helper, one of those marvelous and underpaid students who take all the abuse about the food, carefully measured out each mushroom and strand of onion, ensuring I didn't get one less or one more piece than I was entitled to after shelling out four bucks.

Oh, yummy. My mouth watered as I walked down the self-service line.

Cather-Pound-Neihardt, where for inexplicable reasons the plates are always hotter than the food, is one of the few dorms where a patron can serve up their own food. This means picking up your own plate, burning your fingers on the plate warmer, then dishing up some food that tastes like it was cooked about two hours previously.

But it seems the staff at C-P-N is addressing the cold-food problem. A small, photocopied sign said that the staff could warm the food for you, but they couldn't microwave it on your plate. They can transfer your food onto a paper plate, take it in the back, nuke it for a while, then put it back on your fine china. Why don't they just keep the food hot to begin with?

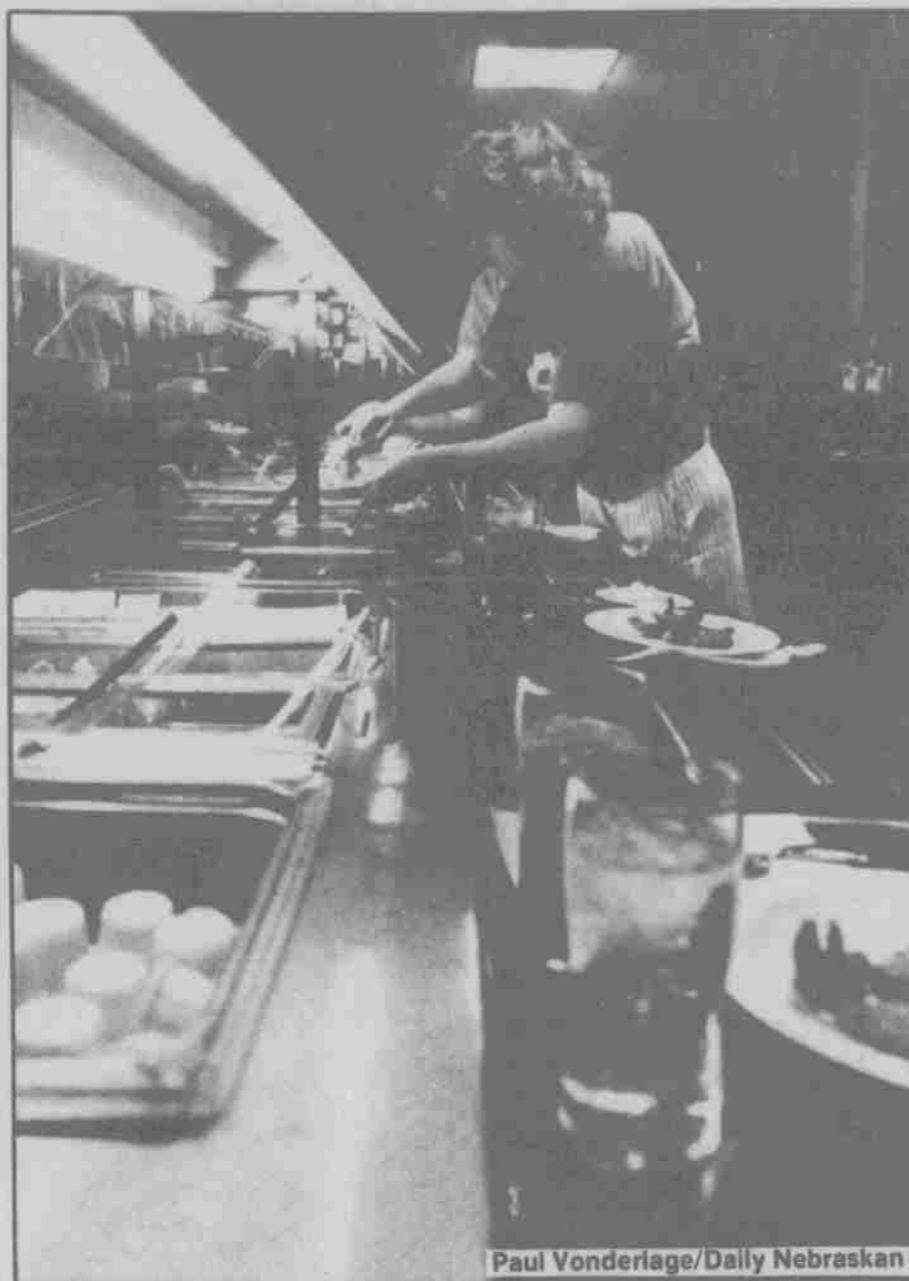
"Is this new Coke or old Coke?" I asked some resident at the drink machine.

"I don't know. It's always so dead, I can never tell," he responded.

So I sat down at the table with my dining companion.

"Look," she said, holding up her lemonade, "Water came out of the lemonade thing. This is the third time this week!"

As I sat at the table, I really did feel some nostalgia. Everything was as I remembered it. Cold, flavorless. I couldn't eat any of my favorite dishes, though. I didn't have that



Paul Vonderlage/Daily Nebraskan

famous Three-Mile-Island Chicken — born boneless. No Love Canal Gar served with a helping of Martian Balls (brussel sprouts).

OK. Maybe I'm being too mean. But let's face it, one of the favorite things to do at food service is make fun of the food. It's an easy target. It can't respond to anything you say. The people who cook it up in back are too busy making sure it's nice and cold to respond. Besides, what else are you going to talk about with those guys who live on your floor from Worms, Central City and North Platte? The only thing you have in common with them is your mutual dislike of the food.

Of course, there's always someone there to defend the food.

"It ain't easy cooking for 700 people, you know."

No, not for you and me, but I figure if you do it for a living, you should do a good job of it.

And what about the East Campus food. It's great! It's the best institutional food I've ever had. And I've had institutional food in France, the

country of fine dining. Why can't all the food in the residence halls be that good? That all the home-economics and food majors are on East Campus is allegedly the reason. Well, heck, let's have some of those people shipped over to City Campus, and quick.

Maybe they can explain to us what Mulligatawny soup, Much More Than Mushrooms, kielbasa, and Johnny Marzetti are. (Johnny supposedly gave his life to the food service so others can eat. And I bet you thought it was hamburger in that dish.)

Maybe they can think of something new to call the mystery meat. Aren't people tired of chicken fried, salisbury and swiss steak? Let's call it La Viande Mysterieux or steak surprise.

Ah, what a joy to return to my old dining hall and complain about the food. What a joy to bring my half-eaten food to the conveyor belt and watch it slowly disappear into the gaping hole. Memories flood my soul.



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