

School Lunches

By

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There's an interesting phenomena that scientists are just starting to discover. Apparently, time actually moves slower for the high school student in the class period just before lunch. I, myself, have experienced this and know it to be true.

I recall learning of this 27 years ago. I was a junior in high school, in the middle of some class—it might have been advanced math, possibly geometry, or maybe it was gum-chewing 101, who can remember? I'm sitting, legs nervously bouncing, eyes firmly locked on the slowest clock ever invented by man. Finally, the hands read 11:25, a bell rings, and I shoot off to the cafeteria.

As I enter the lunch room, my eyes scan around, looking for who I want to sit with, and I see my good friend Nikki, who is already looking back at me, as if she was waiting. She smiles, and looks down at her plate, then back at me. My God, there's yogurt on her plate! It's yogurt day. I race to get my tray, knowing the ritual is about to begin.

You see, back then, there were five flavors of yogurt; there was banana, vanilla, strawberry, blueberry, coffee, and plain. I know, that's six, but let's be honest—is "plain" really a flavor? The school seemed to think so, because given the different varieties of yogurt, they thought that 17 year-olds would most prefer plain. This perturbed Nikki to no end, and so she always sought to help the school invent new flavors.

As I sat down, I dropped my tray on to the table and heard, "Carrot yogurt; carrot yogurt coming up!" I knew what I would see, and I was correct, floating in her yogurt were some of the

soggiest carrots I had ever seen. Nikki was happily mashing them in, turning her yogurt a sickly orange color. It was a good move. A shrewd move, but I was not to be one-upped.

Grabbing a handful of salad from my plate, I thrust it into my yogurt. Yes! A combination of lettuce, cabbage, AND carrots.

“Salad yogurt! Salad yogurt coming up”, I shouted.

Nikki’s eyes widened at my triple play. She quickly glanced around the table. Spotting her neighbor’s lunch, she grimaced determinedly. In one beautiful move, she had nabbed an Oreo from his plate, unscrewed it, doused it with salt and pepper, screwed it back together and, looking at me, dropped the cookie into her yogurt.

“Oreo yogurt, Baby.”

I stared back at her, and all was quiet, except for one voice.

“Dude. She took my cookie.”

I looked down to her plate, and then began to laugh. The cookie had dropped down and nestled between two carrot slivers. It was standing up, and only half covered. At the sound of my laughter, Nikki looked down.

“Dammit,” she yelled.

I plunged my fork underneath her cookie and shot it into the air.

“Incomplete play”, I shouted as the cookie came crashing down into the peas and carrots of its previous owner. He looked up at us from the bits of food now lying in his lap.

Getting up, he said, “Why do I keep sitting with you two?”

Thinking quickly, I pointed to his tray.

“Hey, are you going to eat this Salisbury steak?”

I took his silence for a “no” and grabbed the steak, scooped up a big dollop of gravy, and plunged it into my tray.

“Intercepted! Gravy with some sort of meat-like protein yogurt coming up!”

I thought she was beat, but Nikki had one more move up her sleeve. The near-impossible to pull off “mouth grab”. To properly make this move count, you had to have lightning reflexes and impeccable timing. At the time, being heavy pot users, Nikki and I rarely had good timing, but she was determined.

Next to her, a freshman had forked a piece of steak, and touched it to her lips, but then froze in terror as Nikki pushed her seat back and towered over her. Nikki’s hand shot out, and she snatched the meat away, leaving only a little brown bit of juice on the freshman’s lower lip; the only proof that the steak had ever been there at all.

Nikki threw the meat at an angle, and it slammed into my yogurt, causing spillover.

“Recycled yogurt coming up,” she said, triumphantly.

I had lost. There was no counter to this. I looked at Nikki, and watched as her grin dropped. I heard someone clear their throat behind me.

I turned and saw our principle, arms behind his back, staring at both of us. There was a large yogurt stain on his trousers. I looked up at him.

“Do you want to hear a funny story?”

Apparently, he did not.