

Craving the Caf

“When I was a teenager, there was no such thing as McDonald's or even pizza for that matter.”

“I grew up on chicken, cornbread and beans, and potatoes.”

“During the summer we ate vegetables and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.”

I sat there listening to this unfathomable news as Grande (my grandmother) let me into the world of her childhood and teenage years without fast food. She spoke of things like unprocessed foods and what beef “really” tasted like. She even told me she needed to “enlighten” me on what real chicken tasted like, that only the kinds of meat you can buy from “organic” food stores or friends you knew who don’t raise their cows or pigs or chickens steroid style, those types of meats are the ones she grew up on. As I sat there listening to Grande talk about her childhood nutrition, it unfortunately, reminded me of my recent writing project. Up until week ago, I had never kept a food log.

This past week the food log as been my enemy! For one, I did not really want to remember what all I had eaten, nor did I want to take five seconds out of my eating time to take a freaking picture of my meal so that later in the day I could glare at the picture and think myself an idiot for putting the vile cafeteria food that taste ‘oh so good’ into my stomach. The log actually made me hate myself a little bit. Before the educational process people call “college” entered my life I was eating quite healthy and working out 6 days out of the week. Now instead of a fiber bar and a protein shake for breakfast, I either have nothing or I have biscuits with gravy, three pieces of sausage, 2 scoops of scrambled eggs, and 2 pancakes with a river of syrup. Now in the mornings instead of getting up and going to the fitness center and working out for a hour and half, I sleep until 30 minutes before class begins or I get my “exercise” in for the day

and drag my lifeless body to the cafeteria for some good quality bonding time with my taste buds. For the past two weeks I have uncannily decided to stray from the whole working out and staying in shape thing; it seems like all I ever do is sit in class, eat, and then gaze idly into space as I try to gather some mental strength to use my 500 dollar books. But what I have found to be true, is that the cafeteria always provides a blissful environment to prolong your studies and most importantly stuff your face with 'all you can eat' buffet of heaven.

The UCA cafeteria, or what the students refer to as the "caf" has become a vital organ in my social and nutritional body. When I enter the cafeteria I am overtaken with the aroma of sweet and savory smelling foods. My mind tells me that I must try everything the caf has to offer my stomach for that day. And you know what? I do! Just about everyday I eat a little bit, well more than a little bit of everything the caf has to offer. The cafeteria turns me into some form of a food gremlin. After just one week I feel like my stomach has gotten twice as large as it used to be. Just last night at dinner I was talking to my friend T-Sun about how he and I couldn't seem to get full. For dinner last night I had a gyro, one burger with cheese, a hot-dog, four servings of fries, seasoned potatoes, a veggie tamale, a piece of chicken terriyaki, and then two scoops of cookie dough ice creme. Not since the end of football season when I burned 4000 calories a day had I eaten that much. The sad thing is we were both still hungry and you know what? We went back for more and returned with two slices of pepperoni pizza!

Before college started my dinner every night consisted with grilled chicken that had no seasoning, half a cup of beans, steamed veggies, and three glasses of water; for lunch I had a turkey and ham sandwich on fiber bread with fat free cheese, 80 calorie yogurt, 90 calorie granola bar, and either an apple or banana. My whole lunch had a grand total of 6grams of fat and under 500 calories. The protein shake that I drank throughout the day added .5 grams of fat

and one 100 calories. On an usual day with out college I took in about 20 grams of fat and usually around 1300 to 1900 calories a day with lots of protein. Along with a hour and half weight workout in the morning and a 45 minute cardio workout in the evenings called “Insanity”. However, presently that is not the case; I would say that I take in triple the fat triple, triple the calories, and triple the carbs while half the protein of what I used to take in prior to college. The scary thought is, what is going to happen to me? Am I going to get fat again? Or do I try and find the healthy foods in the caf, which I might add are quite scarce. I do know that if I don't do something quick about my eating habits and workout habits, I to will be a victim of what is now the “Freshman 25”.

Another aspect of my overall health that has changed is the new liquids I have recently decided to put in my body at unkind amounts. Right now it is two in the morning and I am drinking a 20oz Red Bull, which surprisingly is not the worst liquid I have put in my body this week. Out of the 20 days that I have lived on the campus, I consumed a fairly large amount of an assortment of alcohol on ten of those days. Apparently, when one consumes to much alcohol and does not drink water before passing out or falling asleep, the morning brings bliss feelings of a pounding headache with a side of dried throat and weariness. Luckily given my experience with these feelings, I know exactly how to cure such side affects...greasy fried foods with six cups of water and two cups of chocolate milk. Where does one go to get these magical ingredients? The caf, of course! Lately the caf has had all the answers to my problems; boredom, hungry, hungover, you name it, the caf has the solutions.

“Yes I had fast foods available to me; however, your memaw made sure that every night my sisters and I had a nice home cooked meal on the table,” responded my mom to my food questions.

“She told us it would be wrong not to use the vast amounts of food available to us and being the smart lady raising four girls, she told us that we would become “quite plump” if we began to join the “fast food crowd.” “Every day I had my servings of fruit and vegetables and most of the time meat; we didn't eat meat every day, but during the summers we ate lots of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.” After speaking with my mother on her foods, I didn't notice much of a difference from her eating habits and my Grande's eating habits. They both ate tons of vegetables and potatoes and they both stayed away from the fast foods (well my Grande did not have a choice.) What I thought was odd, was that both of them told me that they ate lots of peanut butter jelly sandwiches in the summer. Why? When I asked they both had the same general response, “we had to work and making the sandwiches was an easy dinner on the go.”

This made me think, what did I eat a lot of in the summer? and I came to a similar conclusion; everyday for lunch I either consumed a turkey and ham sandwich or a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Why? Because I had a full time job and those were the easiest to make in the mornings, just like my Grande and my mother. Unfortunately, my eating habits now do not correlate with either of their eating habits. Usually I can go two, sometimes three days without eating some form of fast food. It seems like every night I crave a double cheeseburger from McDonald's or in the mornings I want a bacon, egg, and cheese toaster from sonic. Fortunately, the lack of parking on the campus causes me to really appreciate my spot; henceforth, I never leave campus unless I absolutely have to. What does this mean? Will I always crave the greasy fatty excellence of the fast food industry? Or, will I wake up one day and crave a red apple with egg whites and wheat toast?

This whole experience has actually made me quite pissed off; pissed off at myself for falling into the “fast food crowd”; pissed off at the caf for not providing a larger assortment of

healthy foods, and pissed off at the human race as whole for allowing these industries to ruin and run our lives. Did you know that McDonald's alone can be found in 119 different countries and serves 47 million people each day (wikipedia). We cannot get rid of the fast food industry even if we tried. It seems that inevitably we are doomed to fast food and processed food for the rest of our lives. Everywhere I go to eat I see boxes and boxes full of food. Food that isn't real. Food that is cheaply made, cheaply shipped, and cheaply bought. Each day I walk out of Hughes and venture to the caf, fill my stomach, put my plate up, and walk back to Hughes. Each day I walk past the dumpster and plug my noes with the most repugnant smell and look over to see the boxes, the boxes of processed meat and fake vegetables and the same cheap food that didn't make the cut that day.

The question now is, what am I going to do about it? Sure ,I could vow to never eat fast food again, but lets be real - it wouldn't last ten days. Plus, processed foods are a lot cheaper for the broke college student and the caf is defiantly not going anywhere anytime soon. Right now, my answer is, I have not freaking idea. If you read this and came to the realization that your pissed off at the food industry in general, this includes fast food industries, the companies that change the genetic make up of a tomato just to lower shipping cost, the companies that sell Walmart and Kroger and Freds and gas stations and supermarkets shit for us to eat, then help me out a little bit. How do we stop from buying the double quarter pounder with cheese? Or the box of meat full of antibiotics and steroids. In the end, we have to make a choice, and with all choices; right or wrong, good or bad, there are consequences.