

Ta-Ta, RaChaCha!!

Fock 3: Pastry Poop

The Thruway will get to you one time or another though. Sometimes the rest areas just reach out and pull you in. They have nice aesthetics, with those big wooden almost-kinda-chalet-style buildings. But unless you need a download, the only allure is the food. And, sometimes, you just get something to eat just for something to do. Sbarro might grab you, or Roy Rogers, or McDonald's, or even Dunkin' Donuts.

Dunkin' Donuts has become a real pain in the ass. Why do they feel the need to now offer bagels and sandwiches and all this other crap? You used to be able to go into Dunkie's, grab a doughnut and a quick cup o' Joe, and be out in less than a minute. About the only slow down was when you hit the morons who needed to get the perfect assortment in their dozen: "I'll take one butter crunch, one honey dip, one chocolate honey dip cruller, one apple cinnamon, one peanut butter and jelly, one broccoli and cheese, one fricaseed squirrel innards, one spam egg sausage and spam..." and so on.

Now, God help us, we have to wait through interminable decisions, nukings, garnishings, and packagings of the various designer items. Calvin Fugging Donuts.

I had the misfortune of being in such a delay on the NY Thruway in one of my westward treks back to Rachacha. I had slept at a Holiday Inn the night before -- "at" of course, not "in" -- and kind of had a hankering for a doughnut after my early morning swim.

Hotels are a boon for the road-wise van-gabond. Their parking lots are never full, and some of the same strategies that apply to rest areas work at hotel lots too. If you're alert enough when you pull in to figure out which direction is east, you can use the building itself to block the awakening rays of hot summer sun, and give yourself a few more hours of coolness before the van roof begins to heat up.



Once you're up, the hotel offers amenities up the yin-yang (which is a fine place for amenities, don't you agree?). There is always a public rest room somewhere off the lobby or near the pool for the rise-and-shine routine duties. And the pool is a delightful alternative to a morning shower, especially if it happens to follow a short a.m. run. Often, free copies of *USA Today* are available at the front desk, the ice machines are well-stocked, and you may even score a free continental breakfast.

So, I'll put on athletic-looking clothing (or even do that short run, which makes things even more convincing), grab the appropriately-colored white towel and a plastic bag from the van, stroll out to the pool area, do my duties, then take my swim to cleanse *all* areas (very important) of my road warrior frame, dry off, saunter back through the lobby, grab a paper, snag a bagel or croissant, or even toast up an English muffin, traipse down the hallway, load up on ice, then just leave out a side door. And if

I'm ever challenged -- which has not happened yet -- what are they gonna do? Tell me to *leave*? I'm just about to do that anyway!

And, perhaps surprisingly, it works best at nicer hotels. Cheap motels are low on amenities as it is, plus the small ones usually know what cars don't belong there. But a good-sized chain, like Holiday Inn, or RAMada, or Hampton Inn, or Day's Inn, or any of those multi-story, 100-plus-room hotels, will have the proper extras, enough guests so nobody could possibly know who belongs and who doesn't, and the necessary do-not-diss-the-guests mentality.

Working at the Westin Hotel on Hilton Head Island in '93 taught me that. In training, we were specifically instructed never to challenge anybody about whether they were a guest or not. Any suspicious persons were to be pointed out to management, who would then approach them in the p.c. manner. This, of course, means that (a) somebody has to be stupidly conspicuous even to be pegged as a possible intruder in the first place, and (b) it will take some time to get approached. Anyone who simply

acts with the calm confidence that they belong there will never get picked out.

The Hyatt (photo, above) and the Casa Marina in Key West are two knock-your-socks-off, fancy-schmancy hotels. Three-million bucks a night in season, at least. Yet, The Hyatt's poolside restroom was a common relief spot during my five-month stay on the island, and the swimming pools at both places came in very handy after some of those humid, early-evening runs.

It was all a matter of just moving about with the casual, calm, confidence that you belong there. Little rinse in the shower, leisurely dip in the pool, hang out and chat with a few of the "other" guests for a while, and just enjoy the good life until it's time to dry off and move on.

HEY! What about the doughnuts, dood??

Soooooo, here I am at Dunkie's on this mid-morning. All I want is one plain doughnut. Not even the trademark gimmick dunking doughnut with the handle – just **one plain doughnut**. I mean, I never eat doughnuts anymore: they tend to just sink to the bottom of my stomach and squat there. But when the mood hits, you roll with it.

There were a few people in line in front of me, but with two counter people, no problem. After a couple of minutes of queue stagnation, I began to direct my attention forward to discern the problem: someone had ordered a croissant sandwich, and somehow it had become quite a project. Plus, one of the counter girls had decided to devote her energies to "cleaning up", and would not be servicing any more customers, thank you.

Several minutes passed, and I *finally* found myself second in line, behind this middle-aged woman in a blue Cape Cod sweatshirt. Well, her getting to the front of the line must have signaled the Gathering Of The Clan, because a half-dozen people came from all directions, each armed with creative and distinctive orders, using her as the anchor.

My impatience was palpable as I suffered through their stupidity. For some weird reason, the Cape Cod woman seemed to believe that all conversation with the counter girl had to be through her. Every question that the girl asked became an excruciating exercise in echoes.

The woman ordered a bagel. (How bad can that be, I thought.)

>> Would you like that toasted?

Ooooh, I don't know. Marge. Marge! Honey, get Marge. Marge! Do you want it *toas-ted??* No? They can toast it if you want. No? You're sure?? No. She doesn't want it toasted.

>> Would you like cream cheese?

Oh, ummmm... Marge! ... Marge! ... Do you want cream cheese? ... Do you want *cream cheese?* ... Cream cheese! ... On the bagel. ... You do? ... No, it's not extra. It doesn't cost extra, does it, dearie? ... No, it's free. ... OK, we'll take the cream cheese.

Then it was the same maddening process for the other five individuals, but worse.

I was numbed into an empty stare, my morning-after mind slipping into insensibility by it all. My vacant gaze drifted to the back shelves, where sloping trays were filled with dozens of fresh doughnuts laying on their blankets of white waxed paper. My mindless eyes wandered across the variety, noting but not recording the ridiculous diversity of doughnut flavors. Two trays of creme-filled doughnuts -- one vanilla and one chocolate -- had just been brought out, fresh and warm from the backroom bakery, with their large puffy plumes of pure artificial creme standing tall and heavy and proud atop their sugary pouches.

The droning of the Confusion Family continued, and my gaze dropped to an empty tray, when, with a sudden **thwupp**, a squashball-sized blob of dark brown squish fell thickly down from above onto the plain paper in that tray. Startled back to reality by the splatting brown pile, my immediate thought was, "Oh my God! One of the doughnuts just took a *shit!*"

A millisecond later, I realized that it was a too-heavy dob of chocolate creme which had dripped off an upper-level doughnut. But the damage was done: smitten silly by the absurdity of the whole experience, I was now fighting to keep from laughing out loud, trying vainly to stifle it, and drawing the puzzled looks of the other irked and impatient patrons. Attempts at suppression only made the task more impossible. I'm sure the Confusion Family felt that they were the target of my chortling.

I wanted to utter a "Did you see that?" to the irritated guy in line behind me, but I knew that even if any of them did, **none** of them would have speculated that it was Doughnut Defecation. And that just made me laugh more.

I couldn't deal with it. So I left. Who needs a fugging shitting doughnut anyway?? Walked right out, laughing my ass off, and headed off to points westward in a much better mood than anybody I left behind me there.

Especially that poor counter girl...

New York is a significant state. It ranks second in the US in population, mostly because of that Big Apple thing. Eighteen million people live in New York State, which ranks a mere 30th in land area. It's amazing that so many people cram into that concrete and steel metropolis, when there are miles and miles of lush, open, farm and forest country nearby.

Of course, that goes back to why the city was settled in the first place (the seaports) and why people flocked there (that's where the money was).

So, while I drive along (with the help of Rand McNally's stats at the top of the NY map page) I start whirlin' some math in my head. If you took 18 million New Yorkers, and distributed them evenly across that state's 47,224 square miles, well, first of all you'd have a lot of pissed off people. You'd also have 382 people in each one-mile-by-one-mile grid square. There are almost 28 million square feet in a square mile! Damn, that's a lot of square feet. Each of those New Yorkers would have about 73,000 square feet all to his or her lonesome. Now that sounds like a lot at first, but then you realize that's only a 270-foot-by-270-foot area (90 yards by 90 yards). So you'd have a person within a football field's length of you no matter which direction you faced. It would be hard to get things done that way, wouldn't it? Though, if four people all clustered in adjacent corners...

But you have time to think of such things are the highway miles groove on by. Once, on the way through South Carolina on I-95, I looked at the license plate of a car that was passing me – Louisiana, 933X655 – and viewed it as multiplication problem. Challenged by my “head for numbers”, I made it a quest to solve that problem in my mind. The miles rolled by as I tumbled the numbers around in my cranium like dice in a cup. Lining up the columns in my mind's eye was the toughest part. And I kept coming up with an answer that just seemed too weird: too many 1's in it. But when it came up three times, I locked it in as My Final Answer, and jotted it down. At my next stop, I did the pen and paper thing, and sure enough, 611,115 was indeed the correct answer.

New York is known as the Empire State: a very pretentious name, indeed. When I began to ponder the origins of that nickname [by the way, the only true nickname is Nick], I asked a few casual acquaintances if they knew from whence or from whence it came. One actually replied, “Because that's where the Empire State Building is.” And he was serious, as far as I could tell. Dumbass boozier.

Nobody knew, though. We surmised that perhaps it was originally named that as a tribute to the British Empire, but soon dismissed that thought as silly, since it was undoubtedly nicknamed after the Revolutionary War. And Roman Empire made even less sense.

Research turned up the reason behind the name: New York considered its wealth of resources to be so impressive and so self-sustaining, that it was as if the state was an Empire unto itself. Really. Doesn't that just make you want to puke? Typical freakin' New Yorkers, even way back when.

And since I mentioned the Rand McNally map page, that's another thing that irks me about New York: that state is always on the center spread of pages in the Road Atlas, with NYC usually being the direct midpoint. So, in time, as you flip your pages and fold your atlas back to read your various maps, those center pages always squirm lose, and New York tries to go its own damn way. It hangs out the side and gets torn as you try to tuck the book back in its pocket, or under or beside the seat. Or, if you toss the book loosely onto the passenger seat, and your windows are open to the summer air as you zoom down the Interstate, New York wiggles itself free and goes flappin' on out the window, taking northern New Jersey with it, which seems poetically just, anyway.

Yankees suck.