

Traces
And
Trays
Of
Americana.

1982. I have no concept of race. I am as far as I know, just a human being. I enter my first school not knowing that I look different from the other students. Such concepts had not yet formed in my head. They had not crystallized as they would probably around four years later. I speak english. I speak it well. Communication is not a problem. I get along. Lots of friends. We all get along. Perhaps it was this idyllic pre-puberty time that offered nothing but good memories. Absolute peace. There was no cool or not cool at this time. We were all the same. I had not yet learned that people might be different. I had no existing expectations, thoughts or hesitancies. But I know now. I was different. I eat the lunch school has provided for us. It was I believe 75 cents. Or a dollar. I eat it everyday because my parents were busy. And more so, perhaps we were not sure what to pack exactly for lunch.

So I eat this everyday. But I was confused. For all its negative portrayals in media at this time, I was confused because I actually liked it. As an immigrant child, this was my daily meeting with Americana. A time for me to step into America. For an hour a day. A time to eat mashed potatoes. Green beans. Biscuits. Spaghetti. Things I never would see at home. Things I could and I would only experience at school. And during this time, almost everyday, was a first. A first time for everything. I remember

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eating what was called a burrito for the first time. It was called a burrito but resembled barely the concept of burrito we hold now. It was a tortilla that encased some kind of bean and meat combination. I believe the beans were refried and thus tasted amazing. And the meat, well, it did not matter what the meat was. I could not tell, and did not place much effort to tell. It did not matter to me at this time. The tortilla wrap was a golden, slightly yellow color. Not the white tortilla shell we know now. I believe this might be because these were also slightly deep fried. But not too greasy. Crispy. With a bit of grease. This is a town, 45 minutes north of Seattle in 1982. I believe we had, at best, an extremely small Latino population and I had never seen a Mexican restaurant before. But this burrito. This interpretation of the burrito. It was magic. Absolute magic. I am still not sure to this day what that magic moment was. Was it the tortilla, and the pure efficiency of the eating experience? It was so easy. Was it the refried beans? I keep mentioning these wonderful beans. So it very well could be just that. I remember years later being taken by some American friends to a Sizzler[®] for the first time and at the salad bar were all you can eat refried beans there. And I just kept going for seconds. I was fascinated by these beans that looked nothing like beans. Later on, much later on in life, I had experienced

real Mexican food and concocted most likely by generations upon generations of human knowledge. I knew this first experience was far from Mexico. But it did not matter. I was mystified. Joyed. Sometimes the kids at lunch would want to trade things. We would trade some items if we fancied some things more than others. These poorly constructed burritos were the only items I had ever traded for. I gave up items for them. I loved them.



An American chain restaurant. A common first chain experience for many at this time. We were impressed.