

VARIATIONS ON A JOKE

There is a joke I have told lots of times, which usually gets a laugh. Of course, I tell it when it is a propos. If you don't know what a propos means, you can look it up. To me, it means whenever I think I can sneak a joke into the conversation:

A man walks into a library, goes over to the librarian and says, "I would like a hamburger, a small fries and a large Coke." The librarian looks at him in surprise, and says, "Sir, this is a library." "Oh," he replies. And, moving closer to the librarian, he repeats, in a whisper, "I would like a hamburger, a small fries and a large Coke."

Of course, it is better told, than written, and if told right, the teller (me) is unable to finish the joke, being drowned out by gales of laughter as the audience gets the joke.

This joke came back to me as I was driving down Harvard Street, passing School Street. For many years, at the corner of Harvard and School, there was a Chinese restaurant. In fact there were two Chinese restaurants. After the first went out of business, a second opened up. It faced the same fate as the first: it too went out of business. It is now a pre-school day care center.

It seems they are a more lucrative enterprise than Chinese restaurants. These centers have sprung up everywhere in my neighborhood. Wherever there was an empty store, a day care center has taken over. And whenever you drive through our Brookline Village neighborhood, you see lines of 2 and 3 year olds, holding onto ropes, with an underpaid and inexperienced "teacher" in front and behind, leading them from their school to the library. (Forgive me. I did not mean to carry on about day care centers. This piece is supposed to be about a variation of the joke about a man ordering a hamburger in a library.) Here goes:

A man who had been away from the neighborhood, and who had fond memories of the Chinese restaurant on the corner of Harvard and School, walked into the reconverted building, sat down on a little chair in front of a little table, and when someone walked over to him, he said he would like some wonton soup and chicken fried rice. The person who approached him, a pre-school teacher, looked at him in surprise and said, "Sir, this is a children's pre-school." "Oh," he replied. "Then I will have a bowl of Cheerios and a glass of milk."

Ta daa!

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