

Foodways Journal Entry by Eric Pereira

Sept. 20, 2017

The totality of my consumption of food and drink took place at my current residence which is a halfway house in central New Jersey. My first act of consumption began shortly after waking up, as my roommate was up and about to go downstairs; we discussed having some coffee. So at 8:15am, we each placed about a spoonful of Taster's Choice instant coffee in our large plastic cups we were given when we got here and proceeded down to the cottage house to drink our coffee. We added hot water and stirred with metal spoons, but I also added a vanilla Boost drink of mine from the community refrigerator that I had previously placed there. The Boost made the coffee a decent room temperature, which is my preference versus hot. That is the advantage of using instant coffee in that only a little hot water is needed. The resulting drink was not too bitter and lacked a strong coffee flavor as the Boost added a thick and creamy vanilla flavor. Being instant coffee with a boost (both processed foods), it gives me the very opposite impression to fancy coffee at a nice coffee shop. The atmosphere of my halfway house certainly contributes to that, but also the quality and aroma. It smelt a little bitter and a slight aftertaste does exist, but it is also what I have been accustomed to.

The discussion began about coffee and brought about a communal, morning ritual feeling even though we do not do this every day. Before we sat down, conversation began about his leftover food from last night, which he offered to a third party who declined. We all three sat down in the carriage house and the vibe was good, but then two other people were fooling around and drink was spilt on someone's shirt. The vibe shifted to serious and talk became mostly absent. This food talk very much indexed the prison atmosphere, which is always subject to change: from making the best of a situation to intense and on the brink of destruction. Coffee is usually

something that promotes positive behavior as it did here for a while. The fact that we used instant coffee and Ensure (similar to this vanilla Boost) in prison directly tells a story of where we have been.

At 12:37pm, I made my way to the cottage house and ate the remainder of a piece of salmon my grandma had brought me the previous week at visit. She bought it at ShopRite and cooked it at home and then brought it to me. I kept it in a communal refrigerator and finished the rest of it at this time. I ate by myself while watching football on television as the room was empty other than me. I thought about the salmon and the conversation I had with my grandmother. She told me she'd purchased wild salmon and asked me if I could taste the difference in quality, which I could. So I was again appreciative while eating this fish and thinking of my grandmother. I put sriracha on top and ate with a metal fork. It was a light pink color but cooked the right way as it came apart easily with my fork and was slightly fatty and oily. It pretty much melted in my mouth and tasted delicious along with the spicy chili flavor I added. I ate all of it except the skin.

My final and largest meal took place in the same cottage house except with two very special guests. My father and sister came to visit at 6:00pm, which is the scheduled visit time. My father shopped at ShopRite that day and cooked my steak, some chicken, and cut up a watermelon. We shared greetings and then I aggressively ate the steak with my hand as no knives are allowed and he forgot to cut it up. The steak was on a paper plate, the watermelon in a bag, and the chicken in tupperware. The steak was minimally seasoned but very juicy and cooked medium rare. They both asked sarcastically if I enjoyed it as I ate it very fast. It was rich and delicious. Next we all shared some watermelon sharing my metal fork and each ate a little chicken which was seasoned with old bay. My sister made a comment that she does not like such seasoning, and didn't even care for the smell of the poultry.

We haven't had a dinner consisting of the three of us in probably a month or two. The primary basis of conversation was how we were and what we have each been up to all week and especially that current day. When I was home before being in prison, conversation during family meals was very consistent, so catching up and maintaining friendly conversation was the norm. After leaving, they were going to drive home together and get ice cream on the way so they didn't eat much of the food they brought for me as they wanted to save it for me, for the week ahead. We also talked about when the next time we would be seeing each other. So the food talk consisted of the food on the table as well as primarily how our day and week had been.

Pictures are not available due to my inability to have a phone or camera at my halfway house.