

Don't Judge a Book by Its Cover

By Cindy Peters

It was the summer of 1976. I was working at a summer job at Howard Johnson's Restaurant in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. I was working as a waitress the late night shift from 11 o'clock until 7 am in the morning. During these hours it was just the cook and me working. I really was a terrible waitress as I was always mixing up orders and Rees the cook could never read my handwriting on the orders. Despite my lack of server finesse I received very good tips because I was very friendly and I really hustled. The customers received their orders right or wrong quickly and no one ever went away hungry. Also, once the bars closed the band members came into the restaurant next door along with many drunks to have breakfast. They were all great tippers and in the morning the families with messy kids gave great tips over guilt about the mess that was left.

Two learning experiences at this restaurant come to mind. The first was the night our air conditioner broke during a Baptist Convention at the hotel. There about 60 Baptist that came into the restaurant to order ice cream in order to beat the heat. The restaurant was filled to the brim with these Baptists. I not only needed to serve the ice cream orders but I needed to make the fancy ice cream dishes. Some of my friends stopped by and jumped in to help me, along with the cook. However, it was to no avail as the ice cream dishes were over flowing with melted goop as we tried to serve the Baptists. Some of the Baptists became angry and swore like sailors. Some of the words I had never even heard before. About half of the Baptists left in a huff without their ice cream. Some of them ate their melted ice cream but refused to pay.

Another learning experience that same summer at Howard Johnson's bears repeating. My friend Peggy was just off work from her summer job as a cocktail waitress at a nightclub. She stopped by to visit me and to have breakfast. The place was empty when she arrived except for two scraggly, tiny men in a corner booth drinking coffee. Peggy sat across from them and struck up a conversation. As I was serving them more coffee Peggy excitedly introduced me to one of the men who turned out to be the famous singer Sergio Mendez and his manager. I thought the men were joking as they looked far from rich or famous so I blurted out sarcastically, "Oh, yeah, well I am Carol Burnett." The men did not seem amused and they left soon after my remark. A few minutes later Peggy ran up to me and showed me a signed Sergio Mendez album which she had been given by Sergio Mendez. Also, a week later to add insult to injury I saw this tiny man called Sergio Mendez on the Johnny Carson show.

My learning experience in both scenarios was not to judge a book by its cover.