



the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

Some people remember their first date. Some their first long pants. I remember my first pizza. When the Army sent me to Fort Devens, Mass., just in time for a Massachusetts winter, they confirmed my good judgment in choosing to be a native Californian.

Just before winter hit, I got my first pass, and in the company of a couple of other recently minted soldiers, I headed for the village of Ayer.

Ayer, (pronounced "air") is not much of a town, but it had something new to me—pizza.

Now you would think that someone with an Italian mother, and someone who had spent most of his young life in Santa Rosa, which is practically a suburb of North Beach, would at least have heard about pizza.

But I had not. Pizza was new to me. And delicious. I fell in love with pizza. That melted cheese—that hot tomato sauce—the melted flavors of salami, or pepperoni (oh, my heartburn) or sausage.

I assumed that pizza was a dish known in the east but not the west—like milkshakes without ice cream, the kind they serve in New England.

Little did I know that pizza had been in North Beach for years, brick ovens kept hot supplying the in crowd who knew what a mouthwatering treat really was.

I had stumbled on the beginning of the pizza phenomenon. A few months later, while I was overseas, the hunger for pizza swept the country like hula hoops, but it has lasted longer.

After that first time, I found pizza in lots of places. Even near the medieval wall of the old city of Nuremberg in the heart of Franconia, West Germany, an enterprising Italian set up shop peddling pizza to occupation soldiers and hungry Germans.

Only in northern Italy did I find pizza hard to find. Pizza is from Naples, and as far as a northern Italian is concerned, if you want a Neapolitan specialty, you can go to—Naples.

By mid-1954, when I got back home, pizza was booming all over northern California.

The market for anchovies, mozzarella, salami, pepperoni, sausage, tomato paste, and mushrooms hasn't languished since. I think every variation of pizza has been tried. Most died deservedly, and fast. A few, like PP's pizza with pineapple and canadian bacon, are great, but the kind of people who insisted that monterey jack was just as good as mozzarella or who didn't treat the dough with loving care have long since been put out of business.

It didn't take long before every ethnic group was making pizza. In Pacifica we have Persians, Frenchmen, and even Enrico Romano, who has been peddling pizza for years to a happy clientele.

In fact, the biggest problem you have in getting good pizza in Pacifica is deciding which restaurant to visit. You can get good pizza all the way from Pacific Manor, where Tribune staffers enjoy good pizza either at the Manor Room or at PP's with a 30 second walk, to Pedro Point, where a homesick former firefighter has redecorated with the bucket brigade in mind.

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