

# The Golden Arches

by Risë Rafferty

December of 1986 found me touring through Europe for a month with three other girls. Coming from a couple of weeks in the warmer, southern countries of Spain and Italy, we found ourselves in a very cold Hamburg late one night. Looking out over the dark unfamiliar city, we noticed a brightly lit, familiar sign: the golden arches. Hurray! Warmth! Safety! American!

We called a friend we would be staying with in the city and let him know we would wait for him at McDonald's. As soon as we stepped inside, however, we knew we had made a mistake. The place turned out to be a hangout for guys only. All eyes turned on us. We squirmed in our seats. McDonald's no longer seemed like a safe place to be. For other reasons, I still feel the same way.

According to research done by Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation, The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, fast-food restaurants have enormously transformed the franchise, cattle-raising, slaughterhouse, poultry-farming, food-processing, food-advertising, and teenage-employment industries—and in short, the way Americans eat. Obviously, we will only be able to touch on a few of the great details that Schlosser shares. It is a very interesting book.

To a large degree, cowboy-raised cattle and neighborhood butchers are fast becoming a thing of the past in America. "The billions of fast-food hamburgers that Americans now eat every year come from factories. Industrialization of cattle-raising and meat-packing over the past two decades has completely altered how beef is produced."<sup>1</sup> Consolidation and monopolization of the meat industry that have largely resulted from

the growth of fast-food chains have also severely changed the free market as well as the quality of meat consumed by the public.

Because cheap food is the name of the game at fast-food restaurants, keeping production costs low is a necessity. The end must justify the means. However, a description of the acute unsanitary conditions in slaughterhouses and of injuries and deaths that have taken place there is enough to stifle even a massive Mac-attack.

Dairy cattle are heavily relied upon by McDonald's for its hamburger supplies "since the animals are relatively inexpensive, yield low-fat meat and enable the chain to boast that all its beef is raised in the U. S." Yet, worn-out dairy cattle "are the animals most likely to be diseased and riddled with antibiotic residues."<sup>2</sup> In

addition to this, a single hamburger "contains meat from dozens or even hundreds of different cattle." Why is this significant?

Because one diseased or E.

coli-infected cow "can contaminate 32,000 pounds of that ground beef." And the cheapest ground beef is the most likely to be contaminated with pathogens as well as to contain pieces of spinal cord, bone, and gristle.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately cows are not the only victims on the tray. Because of public interest in "healthier" meat, such as chicken,

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McDonald's introduced Chicken McNuggets in 1983 and in one month became "the second largest purchaser of chicken" in the U.S. "The impact of McNuggets was so huge that it changed the industry," the president of ConAgra Poultry, the nation's third largest chicken processor, later acknowledged."<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately this innovation did nothing to benefit the health or waistlines of Americans. Chicken McNuggets "contain twice as much fat per ounce as a hamburger."<sup>5</sup> And today, chicken appears to be more at risk of being contaminated with feces and harmful bacteria than beef.

Potato agribusiness has not gone unscathed either and, ironically, the huge demand for French fries has not benefited the potato farmer. In order to keep the cost of French fries down, potato processors need to buy potatoes cheap. The potato farmer may see two cents out of the two dollars spent on that order of fries. The result? Family farms have had to sell out to large corporations. These immense corporate farms are, in turn, managed by the farmers who had previously owned the land. (Reminds me of the feudal system of long ago.)

The popularity of French fries stems from their flavor and possibly from the illusion that they are a healthier option on the menu. But many have not realized that for years French fries were cooked in a mixture of about 7% cottonseed oil and 93% beef tallow. They contained more saturated beef fat per ounce than a McDonald's hamburger until McDonald's switched in 1990 to pure vegetable oil with "natural flavor" to give their French fries their same "beefy" taste.<sup>6</sup>

As a result of the globalization of McDonald's, people all over the world have begun to eat like Americans. And adoption of our diet has also led to the adoption of our diseases and weight problems. "The United States has the highest obesity rate of any industrialized nation in the world. More than half of all American adults and about one-quarter of all American children are now

obese or overweight."<sup>7</sup> McDonald's made its entry into Japan in 1971. "During the 1980s, the sale of fast food in Japan more than doubled; the rate of obesity among children soon doubled too."<sup>8</sup> What a coincidence.

I learned many things from Schlosser's in-depth research. I was amazed to learn that brand loyalty

can begin as early as age two. The redheaded clown, Happy Meals, playgrounds, toy gimmicks and the familiar golden arches

are all calculated efforts aimed at children for the big dollar. Children all over the world know at least one English word: McDonald's. Kuwait, Turkey, India, Eastern Germany, Tahiti and Beijing have all been infiltrated. "Few places on earth seem too distant or too remote for the golden arches."<sup>9</sup>

But it is neither these golden arches nor the food provided there that I want to leave with you. The Bible says that the invitation to a heavenly banquet will go to "every nation, tribe, tongue and people." The invitation to walk beneath heaven's golden arches will be given to all. "And the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him who thirsts come. Whosoever desires, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 14:6, 22:17, NKJV).

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<sup>1</sup> Schlosser, Eric. *Fast Food Nation, The Dark Side of the All-American Meal*, Perennial – An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2002, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

