

EDDIES SNACK BAR

(John West: about 2009)

I was sitting in class gazing out of the window. It was one of those Winter afternoons when it got dark early and the fog was already descending over everything like a thick yellow blanket. The bell rang. It was 4 o'clock, time to pack up and leave. The bus stop was about a mile walk uphill. It was cold and the fog was getting thicker. In fact when I finally reached the High Street I could not see to the other side. Luckily there was not much traffic so I crossed easily enough and started to wait for the bus. One bus after another came and went, but not mine. It was eerie because the buses ran on electricity and were virtually silent. Because of the fog and the dim gaslight they arrived at the bus stop like ghosts. Another one crept by. I was getting colder and hungrier. It happened that the bus stop was right outside Eddies Snack Bar. I don't know what was with the place but none of us from the School was allowed to go there. I was told by some of my friends that they served the most delicious hot meat pies. And I was getting colder and hungrier, and no sign of the bus.

In our School we all knew there were 3 things we were not allowed to do. We were not allowed to smoke. play football in the street, and we were not allowed to go into Eddies Snack Bar. But I started to think seriously about Eddies Snack Bar. People going in and coming out looked like ordinary people, nothing funny about them. Each time the door opened the smell coming out was wonderful.

I began to be tempted. I thought about God and I think he was telling me that if I go in there I might be punished because I knew I was not allowed to go in there. That did not help much. I was hungry and freezing cold and I had been waiting outside for over an hour.

Before I knew what I was doing I opened the door and went into Eddie's Snack Bar. It was warm in there and the smell really made me dizzy with pleasure. The man said to me, "what can I get for you?"

"A meat pie please, sir" I answered, my voice wavering.

"Here you are, son," he said, handing me a hot meat pie in a paper napkin. "You know you are not supposed to come in here," he added, looking at my School cap. I was eating the meat pie and keeping my eye open for the bus. "Yes, I know," I replied. "Please don't let on that I came in here" "What do I care?" he said.

Just then a bus came and I shot out of Eddies Snack Bar straight into the arms of Mr Metcalfe, our Vice Headmaster who was also waiting for the same bus. It was ours and we boarded together, "I'll see you tomorrow," he said with a grim look on his face as he sat down. I scurried upstairs and thought about what I was going to say tomorrow.

Next day I was in class as usual. One lesson after another passed by. Nothing happened. Maybe, I thought, he's forgotten. I was beginning to get a bit more comfortable. Lunch went by and then back to class. We sat down. The teacher came in and immediately told me that Mr. Metcalfe wanted to see me. My heart sank and my stomach too.

Mr. Metcalfe was a very formidable man. He was not tall and he was not stout. He had a pointed face that was always serious. He rarely laughed and when he smiled it was not a smile that meant he was happy. His nose was sharp and his eyes shone like black stars out into the world around him. He had shiny red cheeks, black hair and big bushy eyebrows. He was always dressed in a suit, mostly light grey, a pressed white shirt and a plain tie. He taught Latin when he took a class. And when he was teaching the words would come out of his mouth as if he was in a hurry to get rid of them. Bellum, bellum, bellum, belli, bello, bello. But he would say "blum, blum blum, bli, blo, blo". Later in School life we would refer to him as Bert.

I stood before him and he looked at me in his severe kind of way. At least I did not see much in his look that gave me much hope.

"Well," he said "what have you got to say for yourself?". There was a sparkle in his black eyes. He knew he had me, and he seemed to be relishing my discomfort.

"Well, sir, I know I am not supposed to go in that place, and I never have been there before." as if assuring him of my previous loyalty to the School rules," but I had been waiting for that bus for over an hour, it was freezing cold and I was hungry," I said. "I see. So you knew that place is out of bounds and yet you still broke the rules?" he asked.

"Sir, before that I asked God about what I wanted to do".
He looked at me with renewed interest. "So you spoke to God, did you? And what did God tell you?"
" God did not tell me not to go in but he told me that if I do I might be punished"..

Mr. Metcalfe looked down at me and his thin lips displayed a hint of a smile.
"Well," he said "you had better take your punishment then" turning away to take a leather strap from a drawer behind him. The dreaded Tolly as we all called it
"Hold your hands out," he said, and proceeded to give me 2 strokes on each hand. It stung like hell and the sting lasted for hours, long after I had stopped crying.

They told me I was lucky, he usually gave 3 on each`

(I heard that Eddies Snack bar no longer exists. During the war it was a life saver for many who enjoyed its hot meat pies)