

Beating the Check



Mick Shaw

Beating the Check: How to Eat Out Without Paying

by Mick Shaw

Loompanics Unlimited Port Townsend, Washington

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Preface

The Intent of This Book

I have little doubt that the publication of this book will bring my job to a swift end, but after years of waiting tables to put myself through college, I also have little doubt that booksellers will not be able to keep this book on the shelves. I have written this book because I have grown weary of confronting the che

apness of Americans, and rather than spend my days and nights waiting on tables for the occasional customer to break the habit of cheapness and leave me a decent tip, I have decided to give this book to America's cheap bastards as a peace offering and reap the benefits of that cheapness rather than fight against it. Let's face it: middle-class America is the most Scrooge-like sect in the world. I'm part of it, and since you're reading this, you're a part of it, too. Let us cast aside our inhibitions and celebrate our cheapness as our main weapon against the heartless multinational corporations that pay us what amounts to crumbs from their overflowing tables, and let us never forget that if they could, they would deny us even that if they didn't rely on us to be consumers as well as employees/slaves. We are at war, my children, and since we lack the weapons of mass destruction that these multinational corporations have, we must resort to random acts of robbery. I am the Robin Hood of the restaurant industry.

Let me tell you about this restaurant industry. When my manager's mother died, the corporation tried to stiff him on what was supposed to be paid leave for the funeral because they thought he would be too upset to complain about it. On several occasions, I was told by management not to throw away expired food in order to minimize the store's food cost. When a cook I worked with burned the skin off the top of his hand on the grill, he wrapped a bandage around it and continued to work because he didn't know that he could stay punched in if he went to the hospital, and the management refused to tell him this and threatened me when I tried to tell him. One by one, our benefits are being taken away through a gradual introduction of technicalities designed to exclude people from being eligible. I have seen Little Hitlers who gave some of these orders, some of whom spent as much as thirty years with the company, fired without reason in order to fill their position with younger employees who were willing to work for less. I have heard of a certain manager who refused to throw away a bag of lettuce that was said to possibly be contaminated with Hepatitis A, hospitalizing several customers. I have seen food dropped on the floor and then served to customers in order to minimize food costs. I was once reprimanded for soaking an iced tea vat that had never before been soaked because it took too much time to rinse it out. (I never drink iced tea at restaurants for that reason.) I have slipped and fallen several times on a wet floor because our district manager decided that the risk of having to pay off a lawsuit was worth taking rather than pay a plumber to fix a leaky pipe, never considering that someone might split his head open. Several employees were systematically fired at another store in our chain when they suggested forming an employees union. The list goes on and on: the restaurant industry as a whole is a self-perpetuating holocaust on its own workers and customers, and if it could save five dollars a month by butchering your whole family, it would hold a board meeting to decide what it was going to do with the five dollars. I do not owe the restaurant industry anything, and therefore, I have no regrets about teaching you how to defraud it, as you should have no regrets about defrauding it. Their mountain of capital has been built by stepping on the backs of working class individuals like you and me, so feel no remorse at snatching a few dollars off the top when the dragon isn't looking.

My Background

As I mentioned, I am a college student. In high school, I worked at a fast-food style pizza restaurant in the Detroit area, and I currently work as a waiter at a family style restaurant geared mostly toward senior citizens (or "Gum-Food Restaurant" as it is called in popular slang), and through patient observation, I have learned every dirty trick in this book and invented a few more using the formulas I have elucidated. Beyond this, I have grown up in a senior citizen populated suburb of Detroit, and have become acquainted with several masters at the art of ripping off a restaurant as well as spoken in detail with many waiters, waitresses, and bartenders who have enlightened me with their stories of how people have ripped off their restaurants as well. I am an observer by personality, and I am now pleased to present to you my observations. You are about to learn from

a master.

Ethics

I am not an unethical person; in fact, it's very much against my religion to take what does not belong to me. However, it is also against my religion not to take back what has been taken from me, and the restaurant industry has taken much from me. I will now offer it to you. I would much rather you, my fellow middle-class Americans, have what I sweated for than a corporation that is already rich with the pennies of the working class. I want to make it perfectly clear, though, which restaurants deserve to be ripped off.

First of all, many restaurants in this country are not part of a chain but, rather, a single proprietorship run by a family or a single person. It would not be ethical to take from these "Mom and Pop" style restaurants, as the owners probably have invested their every penny as well as their children's college education in the operation of this restaurant. Whether or not they can make their house payments, their children get Christmas presents, their parents can go to a decent nursing home, etcetera, depends on whether or not you pay for your bacon and eggs. These are not the villains; they are our friends and neighbors. Please do not use any of the schemes in this book against them. As a rule, if you think the owner might be in the restaurant, the restaurant is too small for you to scam.

Additionally, your server is either a) a single mother trying to feed her children and keep a roof over their heads, b) a student trying to pay his or her way through college, or c) someone with nothing in the world to their name who is just trying to survive. Please do not be malicious to these people, either. I have endured several insults and had food thrown at me; an old manager of mine was punched in the face; these actions are all understandable, but the rage of the customers was misdirected in all of these cases. The waiters, waitresses, bartenders, cooks, and even managers are people just like you, and the people with whom you are at war with are miles away from your restaurant working in an office building and sleeping with each other on their lunch breaks. If you do manage to eat free, please remember to tip your server, and remember that these people probably have as little regard for whether or not the company makes money as you do. They can often be your best ally when you are trying to beat a check.

The third caveat is more of a safety measure than an ethical issue, but don't hit the same restaurant several times. It's a common misconception that employees don't remember faces, but especially if you pulled a little something the last time you were at a certain restaurant, I assure you everyone in that restaurant will remember you even if you wait six months before returning. If you return to the same restaurant a second time within a year, you open yourself up to the embarrassment of being challenged by a restaurant employee, and you also make it more difficult to pull off some of the schemes in this book, and that isn't exactly fair to the other cheap people who might try to rip off the same restaurant. Remember: we're all in this together.

Chapter One

When and Where to Attack

What Kind of Restaurant to Choose

Here is probably the most crucial decision you will face in developing your plan to think someone out of a dollar. Before I tell you the best choices, you should know the restaurants that you should absolutely not attempt to screw. I don't mean to sound racist, but ethnic restaurants are never going to let you beat them out of a check. First of all, most of these restaurants are owned by a single family or person, and it would be unethical to beat them out of a dollar. Additi

onally, though, the owner of a restaurant is going to fight you much harder than a manager who hasn't forgotten that the owners tried to screw him out of a check when his mother died. Foreigners tend to regard Americans for what we are, money-grubbing, spoiled people, and they could care less if they lose your business; they don't want cheap people like you returning to their restaurant again, any way. In all of my experience as a waiter, I have never heard of a check being picked up by an ethnic restaurant. I am reminded of a story about a woman who threw an absolute temper tantrum at a Chinese restaurant when they had run out of fortune cookies. After she demanded that the price equivalent to a fortune cookie be removed from her bill and the bills of her friends, the waiter replied, "You big fat woman, anyway! You no need fortune cookie! You fat enough! Pay bill and leave!" much to the amusement of her dining partners. I'm afraid this game of conning someone out of a dollar is a game we Americans play only with each other. Don't try to drag a foreigner into it; he won't want to play, and I guarantee you will lose.

You also don't want to try these techniques on a particularly expensive restaurant. Restaurants like these are used to upper-class clientele, and as much as you think you might be able to pass for one of these people, you can't. Even if you dress in your most expensive suit, you'll still look like a blue-collar schmuck trying to pass yourself off as an upper-class person, and your server will become even more convinced that you are what he thought you were when you try to avoid paying the bill. These restaurants are not interested in playing games with you; you will pay the bill, or they will call the police and apologize to their upper-class clientele for mistakenly allowing your working-class ass access to their restaurant. Even if they thought your complaint was legitimate, they know that you don't have the kind of money it takes to frequent their place of business, and as I said previously, it's all about money. They don't care if you vow never to return because you probably couldn't have afforded to return anyway. In general, restaurants that serve fine wines fall into this category.

Restaurants where the owner might possibly be present are also very difficult to scam. Owners owe their livelihood to the fact that you are going to pay your bill before you leave, and they are not about to let you tell all of your friends how you can eat there without paying. You might want to eat at a restaurant once for reconnaissance before you attempt any of the methods detailed in this book, or you might want to scan the business section of your newspaper to see if this restaurant is on the stock market to determine if there is an actual owner.

Again, you don't want to hit the same restaurant more than once in a year. While I do not give a damn if the company's stock price rises or falls, I will tend to not work with a customer who has tried to beat a check before and is trying to do so again. There is a principle involved here. I don't like it when people think I am stupid, and neither does any other server in this country. Some family friends were once told by a restaurant owner, "You have come in here three times in the last two months, and each time you have tried to avoid paying your bill. You say your food tasted bad. I am going to give you a bill for your soups, your salads, your drinks, and half of the meal because you ate half of it, and I expect you to pay it. After that, I don't ever want to see you in this restaurant again." Ouch! How embarrassing! Don't let this happen to you; pick your victims wisely.

Now that I've told you who not to target, here is who make easy targets:

All-American burger-and-fries style restaurants that are part of a large chain are very simple targets. Some examples are Big Boy's, Cracker Barrel, Bill Knapp's, Shoney's, Mr. B's, various "Steakhouses," Pizza Hut, Ram's Horn, T.G.I. Friday's, Applebee's, etc. These restaurants know that no matter where you live, there's going to be one nearby you, and your decision to never return there (and most certainly tell several of your friends about your bad experience there) will h

ave a negative effect on the entire company. If they have to lose twenty dollars so that you'll give them a few back over the course of your life-time, they are happy to do it. They also don't want you to go around telling other potential customers about your bad experience there. In fact, most of these stores have a policy in which a manager is told, "If a customer seems upset, you must pick up the check even if the customer is wrong." They want you to like them at all cost; so taking advantage of their friendliness is very easy to do.

Restaurants that tend to be very busy are also easy targets. Your server will not spend fifteen minutes trying to appease you with other methods if he or she has ten other tables on which to wait. It's far too quick and appeasing to just tell his or her manager that your check should be picked up by the house, and he or she also knows that if the other tables go ignored long enough for your complaint to be handled, they may not leave a tip if they feel neglected. Busy restaurants simply want you to shut up and leave. Your bill is much less expensive than the cost of shutting down long enough to placate you by other means. Again, I recommend a reconnaissance session to determine when a restaurant is busiest; almost all of the techniques recommended in this book will work better in a busy restaurant.

Fast-food restaurants are also easy targets. Their food costs them pennies on your dollar anyway; what do they care if you get a free hamburger? Additionally, the manager is probably some pimple-faced teenager who can be easily intimidated by you and your angry voice, and he's not about to get into a fist fight with you for the minimum wage he's earning. Fast-food restaurants also lack a waiter or a waitress, so there will not be anyone there who has been watching over you from beginning to end who can confirm or deny anything you say. In fact, a friend of mine who once worked at a fast-food joint once told me how people have received refunds when they were never really there in the first place. This method will be discussed in detail later.

Restaurant Employees Who Are on Your Side

Another thing you want to notice when on a reconnaissance mission is the type of employee you see. If you find that the employees are middle-aged women who seem to have stepped out of a Hollywood movie called *Al's Diner*, you will have little success playing any games with them. First of all, they are probably lifetime restaurant employees who have seen every trick detailed in this book and then some. Also, these tattooed, overweight, ex-biker women named "Marge" or "Ginger" have a bizarre loyalty to their restaurants. These waitress jobs are all they have in life, and they aren't going to turn their backs on their restaurants for the likes of you. Your best bet is to seek out a restaurant in which all of the employees are upper-middle-class teenagers who are working at the bidding of their parents for cigarette and beer money. They could care less about the companies they work for and probably will only work there for a week or two before they quit because their managers wouldn't give them prom night off. Pissed off college students like myself are also good allies for you. We're all too worried about our calculus exam Thursday to care if you are lying about the hair in your food or not.

Employees like these are usually in school during breakfast and lunch, so your best bet is to strike during the dinner hours, usually between six and eight o'clock when the dinner rush is at its peak. This is also the time when the restaurant will be busiest and therefore most vulnerable. Restaurants are busiest in the fall and spring; the winter is too cold to leave the warmth of a house, and the summer lends itself to outdoor barbecues and picnics and such. The best time for a beginner would be on a Friday or Saturday night between six and eight o'clock during the spring or fall, particularly when college students might be home from school and working for only the duration of that break. It's rather like throwing a tomato at someone far away at Times Square during New Year's Eve; he'd ne

ver be able to find out who you were and get even with you amidst all the confusion.

An employee's loyalty to his or her company is directly proportional to how much that employee gets paid, so I have included this to help you understand who is there and how loyal they are to you.

Managers: The manager is at the top of the food chain, at least in that restaurant. Managers are paid a salary, but they often receive bonuses and such when they do things that make money for the company or prevent the company from losing money. A manager is on your side only if he or she thinks that helping you out will make money for the company.

Assistant Managers: Assistant managers are usually cooks or waitresses who have accepted extra duties in exchange for a little extra money. They usually don't take their assistant manager positions very seriously, unless they think they're working toward being the president of the company, so they're usually on your side.

Servers: Servers actually make less than minimum wage. Here's how it works: The government sets minimum wage standards, currently \$5.15 per hour, but then the government allows the restaurants to take from that what is called a "tip credit." A "tip credit" is a legal amount of money that a company can take from an employee's paycheck if that employee is getting tips as a substantial part of his or her income. (Apparently, they found out that waitresses were making enough money from tips alone that they'd work there even if the company didn't pay them, so the companies got together and convinced lawmakers to create a "tip credit" so they wouldn't have to pay them.) A tip credit is actually about fifty percent of minimum wage, and when minimum wage goes up, the tip credit goes up, too. Yes, the government actually thinks that you customers are going to leave bigger tips because you know that minimum wage has risen.

Therefore, servers are paid practically nothing by their employers, and are making less and less every time the minimum wage rises. Unless they're brainwashed company robots, and some of them are, servers are loyal to no one, but since you pay them and the company does not, they do like you more than they like the restaurant they work for.

Hostesses: Hostesses greet you at the door, show you to your seat, and often run the cash register. They are paid minimum wage.

Cooks: You will probably never see them, but they are paid minimum wage unless they have a lot of experience and they work at an upper class restaurant. When business slows down, the manager sends them home to save money, so cooks never really know how much money they make in a week. They have little or no loyalty to their companies because they know they can get work as a cook anywhere in the world and can simply get another job if they don't like the job they have.

Food Runners: A food runner is someone who takes the food from the kitchen to you in order to keep the servers less busy. They usually make minimum wage, and the servers usually share some of their tips with the food runner. You will see this person only when your main course comes. Basically, they couldn't care less about you. If you don't bother them, they won't bother you, but they're really not going to help you get your food for free.

Bussers, Dishwashers, and other such scum: These are people whose primary duty is to clean up after you. They hate you, don't even bother trying to get anything from them.

Dishwashers are paid usually a little bit more than minimum wage simply because

nobody would want to be a dishwasher when there are plenty of other minimum wage jobs available that aren't so degrading. However, bussers, or "bus boys" for those of you who abhor political correctness as much as I do, have the same tip credit taken from their wages that waitresses do. In theory, the waitresses give the bussers ten percent of their daily tips... but they don't. Every waitress I know kept that extra fifty cents or so from the busser, and with twenty servers, that's about ten dollars a day that the busser is losing, and believe me, he hates the other waitresses for doing that to him. If you show a bus boy a shiny dollar bill, he just might do anything for you... especially tell the manager on one of the waitresses. Understand, however, that the busser is usually treated by all the other employees much like a servant is treated in a king's house. ("Oh, drat! I dropped something. I'll get the bus boy to pick it up for me.") He has no power there and no friends at the top, so he's not going to be able to do much for you even if he wants to. If you're looking to do something really devious, though, he can be bought very cheaply.

Other employees: There are a thousand other people who might work in a restaurant. Maybe there's a musician, a sommelier, a hat check girl, etc., but my advice to you is that if you are at a restaurant with these characters, your chances aren't very good of scamming them. These restaurants are too upper class to fall for anything you might do.

Chapter Two

The Simplest Scams

Complaining

Unless you've forgone the preceding chapters, you must have realized by now that restaurants care about one thing and one thing only... making money. The only reason that a restaurant will pick up your bill is if a) they think you might not return if you are not placated in some way, and b) if they think you would have returned, otherwise. The manner in which you complain has to communicate these two things without actually saying them, and as you might guess, this is the most difficult part of executing an effective complaint.

First of all, you must dress and carry yourself like a decent, moderately educated, upper-middle-class-person. But second of all, it must be inconceivable to you that you are wrong about the angle of your complaint. If you seem like a stupid piece of trailer trash, nothing you say will matter to the restaurant employees but will seem, rather, like the mindless ramblings of an idiot. You have not convinced the employee that you had any intention of returning, anyway, because you don't look like the kind of person who eats out often. A manager would be likely to take the chance that you might not return and make you pay your bill. However, if you seem like someone who could potentially return several times if the food is good, then you will find that the restaurant employees will do everything possible to make sure you are satisfied with the manner in which you were treated.

While I don't suggest you make a fool of yourself in public, I do suggest you act angry. Yelling is an indication of a lack of education, but a restrained, rhythmic monotone illustration of your point, incorrect though it may be, is a sinister enough display of anger to get you what you want. When speaking, know that your server has been trained a) never to interrupt you when you're speaking, and b) never to argue with you. Winning an argument with a server is a remarkably easy task. Simply interrupt him or her when he or she tries to explain (I'm just going to refer to your server as "she" from now on if that's okay with you), and she will stop talking and allow you to talk. Do this three or four times, and she will get a manager for you. You may treat the manager in the same way. Whatever you do, do not give any indication that you intend to stop talking any time so

on; your manager will pick up your check before he or she will submit to a one-sided conversation for too long.

At most restaurants, your server does not have the authority to pick up a check. The management is afraid she will abuse this power and let her friends and family eat for free, so remember that when you're talking to your server, your only goal is to get her to send the manager. It is the manager who will make the final decision.

Your other decision is about what to complain. This part is easy: complain about anything, but try to keep it relevant to the main course of your meal. As I mentioned previously, the manager has been instructed to pick up your bill even if you are dead wrong. Here is a list of things to complain about and not to complain about:

Do complain that....

1. The food you received doesn't look like the picture in the menu.
2. Your food is not cooked properly (as long as you can do this in such a way as not to get some poor cook fired).
3. The store has run out of something.
4. There is a foreign object in your food.
5. Your food simply doesn't taste good.
6. The menu didn't clearly indicate something. The manager would rather pick up your check than call you an idiot for not being able to understand the menu.
7. You think you got treated in this way because of your race/color/gender/ethnic origin/sexual orientation/military experience/income level/age. (Watch how fast they jump at this one. The manager knows that his waitress would never treat someone poorly for reasons like this, but he knows that you don't agree, and he doesn't want to end up on 60 Minutes defending himself when he knows that you'll shut up for the price of a twelve dollar meal.)

Do not complain that...

1. The food costs too much. You knew the price when you ordered it, and the manager knows that you're not just paying for the food; you're also paying for the lights, the labor, the heat or air conditioning, the delivery of the food, etc. You won't get any sympathizers on this one.
2. You were treated poorly by an employee. Let's get our free food without keeping some poor waitress's kids from having food at all.
3. Your food doesn't include a particular side item that you think should be included in the price. Again, you knew this when you looked at the menu and ordered anyway.
4. It took too long for your food to come. Again, this will get someone in trouble.

An example might be if you were to order your steak extra well done, eat half of it, and then complain that it is burned. Both your server and the manager will try to explain to you that this is how you ordered it, but this is the time for you to play dumb. Your constantly interrupting conversation should revolve around the three points: that you are unhappy with the quality of your steak, you do

not want another steak because being exposed to this inferior steak has ruined your appetite, and you can only be happy if you do not have to pay for it. Let your rhetoric go in complete circles without progressing anywhere for minutes on end if you have to, but never let it leave those three points. This plan is completely foolproof: if you are angry, you will get ... something. It may not be the whole check. Many times the manager will offer you a free dessert or a free baked good or a percentage taken off of your bill rather than picking up the entire check. If this happens, run with it. Your likelihood of raising the stakes after something of this sort has been offered is drastically lowered, and anything is better than nothing. The important thing is to remain as vague and as angry as you know how to be.

Letter Writing and Phone Calling

The art of letter writing and phone calling are even easier than complaining on the spot.

Why? No one remembers you being there, and there is no one to inspect the food about which you complained. Most restaurants have comment cards that can be mailed into the company headquarters, but I find that you are best off to simply take the address from the back of such a card and write an actual letter. In a letter you can claim all sorts of crazy things, and it's okay to say that an employee treated you rudely as long as you say that you don't want to mention that employee or don't remember who it was. Since it's the talk show decade, say that an employee used a racial slur at you or sexually harassed you. This will get you a personal phone call from the president of the company and a thousand free meals; no one wants to be on 60 Minutes for being the restaurant where matters like this are taken lightly, and no one will want to take the chance that you were making it up. Sure there will probably be a massive employee meeting where the manager says, "No one is leaving here until someone confesses to having been the one who called this customer a filthy wop dago nigger-loving kike faggot," but what do you care? You got a free meal coupon, and no one is going to confess to having done something he didn't do. Be creative with these. The more outrageous your claim, the less the chance you will be ignored. You had to wait at the door for ten minutes before anyone approached you because all the employees were smoking cigarettes. Somebody put a hot coffee pot on your baby's hand. There was a cockroach in your/vegetable soup. A bunch of dishwashers gang raped you in the bathroom. The company executives will try to throw all kinds of goodies at you rather than have you call a lawyer. Try it and see.

You will not want to end your letter with, "I will never return." If they already know that you'll never return again, then there isn't much point in sending you a coupon for a free meal, is there? Try ending it with, "Tell me why I should ever return to a filth pit like your restaurant again." Or... "I'll bet that investigative reporter from channel 6 would like to hear about this." You might get the president of the company to invite you over to his house for dinner.

Phone calling works best at fast-food restaurants. Want a free hamburger? Observe the time when a local drive-thru burger joint is busiest, and call later that evening saying, "I went through your drive through about three o'clock today and ordered a Mongo burger with no onions. When I got home and unwrapped it, it was a fish burger with EXTRA onions! I'm very upset." You are most likely talking with a sixteen year old punk kid who is only interested in getting you off the phone so he can talk dirty to his coworkers some more, so he will take your name and phone number and tell you that next time you return, you may have a free Mongo burger to make it up to you. Fast-food restaurants have little rolodexes in which they put names and phone numbers of people who call and complain (which also means that they will eventually catch on if you try this too many times). When you return, they will look you up in this Rolodex and see that you have a free Mongo burger coming. While they usually have a rule that only managers can add to

this Rolodex, sixteen-year-old employees will do it anyway because they have no intention of making Mongo Burger their careers and could care less if they get fired. (They also don't mind telling you to fuck off, either, especially if you're on the phone and not really a threat to them. Try to remain cool enough to let them think you can be easily placated with a free Mongo burger. If they tell you to fuck off, though, try threatening to come down there. Someone did that to me once when I was sixteen, and even though he never made good on his threat, it certainly had me thinking.) If you do end up on the phone with the manager, simply stick with your story. They might talk to you for a minute and try to make you believe that they can look you up on the computer or something, but they can't. No matter what they say, all you know is that you didn't get what you ordered and you are very upset by this. You'll eventually win.

This becomes more difficult when we consider fast-food places, usually pizza restaurants, that ask you for your name when you order. These people actually do have you on a computer somewhere, so while you could defraud Mongo Burger without actually having gone there, you have to buy a pizza to get a free pizza at Tiny Pharaoh's Pizza. What you say in the phone call is also more refined. If you claim to have received the wrong pizza, they know you are lying because someone else would have received your pizza. Complaints must be confined to the shoddy manner in which your pizza was made. Remember that the manager is not about to actually come over to your house and see it for himself, and he'd much rather get you off the phone than save the company the cost of making you a new pizza. I remember a woman who ordered a pizza and came to pick it up about an hour and a half later. When she got home, she called us to complain that her pizza was cold. Of course the pizza was cold! She let it sit there for an hour and a half before she came to pick it up! Do you think the manager told her she was stupid and let the company be known as a restaurant that insults its customers, or do you think he placated her with a pizza and took the twenty-dollar loss company-wide?

You may occasionally get a manager on the phone who has the same bizarre company loyalty that the tattooed fifty-year-old waitresses have for Al's Diner. This is just as simple to overcome, as well. Wait for the manager to feel like he or she has almost won this little conversation, and say, "Well I can see this is going nowhere. May I have the number for the company headquarters, please?" The manager might be loyal, but he or she is also not stupid; the company will fire some disposable manager in a minute if people start calling the main headquarters. If he still doesn't back down, call the main headquarters! The trick is to never give up. If you're willing to spend that much time on the phone, no one will believe that you're making it up. Just like it says in the book of Proverbs, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. (I learned that from one of the pamphlets I got instead of a tip.)

It should be advised, though, that phone calling does not work so well at "sit-down" restaurants. Managers will wonder why you didn't complain when you were there. The obvious exception to this is the golden complaint, "The food was wonderful; the service was beautiful, but when we got home, my whole family began throwing up all over the house. Are you trying to poison us?" Remember what I told you about the expired food I wasn't allowed to throw away and the steak that was dropped on the floor and then served? ...or the guy that hospitalized people because he was too cheap to throw away a bag of lettuce? No manager in the world is going to believe that what you are saying is impossible, and if he thinks there is a remote possibility that you will be happy with a free meal and might leave it at that rather than calling a lawyer, he will offer you anything in his power. These people are taught damage control, you know.

Complaining Review

I know I've covered a lot of material rather quickly, so I'm going to include a review of the main points here:

□ You are very, very angry... but not out of control.

□ You are educated, but you still do not understand all of these fancy words this manager is throwing at you. All you know is that you aren't happy, and the only way you can be made happy is by getting a free meal.

□ Do not complain in a manner that will get someone fired.

□ Phone calls work better at fast-food restaurants. Letters work better at sit-down restaurants.

□ End your letter with, "Tell me why I should ever return after having been treated like this."

□ ALL of the complaining techniques work best when the restaurant is busy.

□ No matter what... no matter how obvious it is to the manager that you are lying, do NOT back down. All managers are instructed to give you whatever you want if you are angry, even if you are wrong.

Leaving Without Paying

This one is just as simple as it sounds. Get up and leave. If you just get up and walk out like nothing is out of the ordinary and nod and say "Have a nice evening!" to the cash register girl as you leave, no one will question you. The only thing to remember is to not leave anything there. If you do, you will have to let it go and hope your name and phone number aren't on it. As long as you don't start looking around sneakily for an escape route, no one will really believe that you are sneaking out. As I mentioned before, however, who you are is very important. If you are a teenager in a restaurant run by Marges and Gingers, forget it! They're watching you like a hawk. The same goes if you're a black person in a white restaurant or a white person in a black restaurant. (It shouldn't be that way, but I'm just telling you how it is.) Basically, if you stick out, you're being observed.

However, if you're a sweet little old lady or a cute little old man, you can do just about anything you want. I once saw an elderly woman tear up her bill and throw it in the garbage right in front of us and proceed to the door. When a coworker of mine asked the manager if she should say anything to her, he replied, "Just let her go. It's really no big deal." It would have been a big deal if she were a teenager or an African-American, but a sweet little old lady could stab a baby through the eye with her cane and be forgiven for it by the time she reaches the door. Figure out what you are to someone else at first glance, and go to a restaurant where you will be with a bunch of other people like you. Your actions will go pretty much unnoticed... at least until after you've left. As I hope you've gathered by this point, however, don't return for quite a while, and this will work best when the restaurant is busy.

This gets more complicated when you are at a restaurant where the bill is brought to your table and you pay the waitress. The hostess behind the cash register is not keeping track of everyone in the restaurant, but the waitress is keeping track of everyone in her section. This is an obstacle, but it's a welcome challenge to a seasoned restaurant scammer. By law there must be an emergency exit. There may be some sort of sign reading, "If you open this door, an alarm will sound," but nine times out of ten, there is no alarm. Look for some kind of a wire or sensor on the door. If there is no sensor, you are home free to walk out of the emergency exit when your waitress isn't looking or is too busy to care. Remember, though; act like you're doing exactly what you're supposed to do. This can often buy you that extra second that you need to get out the door. People don't us

usually leave without paying their bills, so no one will really believe that that's what you're doing, especially if you don't act like you believe that's what you're doing, either. I once heard about a gentleman whose act was to go into a department store, load up a shopping cart full of expensive items, and walk out the entrance door. The trick to his act was that he would smile and nod at the security guard on the way out and say, "Have a nice day." The security guards would feel reluctant to question him because he wasn't acting suspicious, and he only got caught when he did the same thing too many times at the same store. We can all learn a lot from his story.

Of course you can also say to your waitress, "I left my wallet/purse in my car. Will you please make sure the bus-boy doesn't clear my coffee away while I go get it." She probably won't believe you, but it's not like she can tell you "no," and by the time she realizes you're not coming back, you can be miles from there. I hate to sound like a broken record, but remember, don't return and don't leave anything.

What to Say If You Get Caught

This is the only time that you want to back down if you get caught. You're not in any trouble if someone catches you while you're still in the store, but if anyone approaches you in the parking lot, you have just shoplifted, essentially, and if the police are called, you are in it deep. Be as polite and gentle and apologetic as you know how to be and say, "Oh, dear. I almost forgot to pay my bill.

That wouldn't have been very Christian of me, would it? I'm so glad you caught me before I accidentally did a bad thing," and pay the bill. You have lost, but not really... everyone else has to pay, you just risked nothing to gain a free meal. Again, though, make sure you are in your element with the person to whom you are speaking. Marge is not going to be so understanding with you if you are a teenage boy; you're the one out of a hundred they catch, and they want to make an example out of you. Other racial and class wise discriminatory practices are at work here, also. They were just waiting for someone like YOU to pull something, which is exactly what you did. Now they're calling the police! I don't mean to sound like a Nazi or anything, but that is how things go, and I really think I should tell you this before you find out the hard way. This is probably the most risky way to beat a check, so be very careful!

Chapter Three Penny Shaving

There will be some people out there who are willing to fight you for the sake of your entire bill, but almost anyone can shave a few pennies off the top. What's the point? Well, like I said in the beginning, I work in a gum-food restaurant geared toward senior citizens. Senior citizens are forced to live on fixed incomes, and they know that a nickel a day equals eighteen dollars and twenty-five cents a year. Eighteen dollars and twenty-five cents a year equals ninety-one dollars and twenty-five cents in five years, and that's a round-trip ticket to the summer home in Florida. I don't guess I need to explain too much. You bought this book; you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Anyway, working with senior citizens for five years has given me new insight into this sport of penny shaving, and I'd like to share with you some of the most effective and most interesting methods they have inadvertently taught me.

Nonsequential Ordering

Your waitress, especially if she is young, is only very good at her job when it is repetitive and stereotypical. She has been trained that the meal has the following steps, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it goes exactly like this:

1. Say hello; get a drink order.
2. Take the main order.
3. Bring soups and salads and beverages.
4. Bring the main course.
5. Ask if the customer wants dessert.
6. Bring the dessert and/or the check.

Your waitress also has a routine that she follows concerning when all of these things are to be written down and added to the bill. This means that if you wait until she brings the soups or the main course to ask for a cup of coffee, she might not remember to write that down. As you're probably thinking right now, and should be by this point, this works much better when your waitress is very busy.

Obviously, you aren't going to get anything too expensive here, but remember the nickel. Some common tricks are:

1. Wait until late in the meal to order drinks.
2. Ask for a cup of coffee after the dessert has arrived.
3. Ask for anything after the bill has already been brought. A lot of times it's too big of a pain for the waitress to change a bill that's already been calculated, especially if the bill was made on a computer.
4. Ask someone other than your waitress for something. Many times another employee will bring you something thinking that he's doing your waitress a favor.

Your waitress won't be constantly checking the contents of your table against the bill, and even if she did, she won't risk being rude to you by inquiring. This is especially effective if you tell the other employee that you think she wrote it down but forgot to bring it. The waitress's friend won't want to insult her by telling her, certainly won't tell on her, and will think it's already written down. It's not his/her problem anyway.

This is one of the tricks that is easier to pull off at a restaurant where there is a computer involved. Waitresses, especially new ones, tend to be intimidated by the computers, so if you do anything out of the ordinary, she may choose to pretend she forgot to put it in the computer rather than try to figure out how to do it while she's so busy. The computer will be your worst enemy for some of these tricks, but for this one, it's your best friend.

Theft of Store Items

Restaurants have more items available for you than food. They have napkins, silverware, sugar, saccharin, Nutrasweet, salt and pepper shakers, butter packets, toilet paper, paper towels, and probably a thousand other things that I haven't thought of. Hey, these items are all there for your use, and no one said you had to use them all there.

The beautiful thing about this is, again, the hospitality factor that restaurant employees have drilled into them via training videos these days. No one is going to offend you for the sake of any of the above items. We currently have a regular customer who literally opens up our cabinets right in front of us and helps himself to napkins, styrofoam containers, sugar, saccharin, Nutrasweet, crackers, butter, coffee creamers, margarine, and probably more that we don't see him take. The point is, he will do it right in front of everyone! He knows that we have

e been trained to let a customer do pretty much whatever he wants unless it is seriously causing a problem, and as badly as I want to grab him by his puny little neck and scream, "How dare you bitch about the cost of the food when you're getting all this free shit, you cheap bastard!" I would lose my job if I insulted a customer. This kind of behavior will fly at any chain restaurant, but again, I warn you not to pull it at Al's Diner; Marge will sucker punch you and say, "What do you think you're doing, Bub?"

I recommend that ladies bring extra large, empty purses, and that men be accompanied by a lady with an extra large purse. If you are a man and really get into this, I have heard that many men will purchase pants a few sizes too large, cut out the pockets, and sew in a large sock to replace each pocket. This way you can have the kind of storage space a purse offers without having to carry a purse. Large purses and surgically altered pockets also open up the playing field to ketchup bottles (not to mention mustard, A-1, Tabasco, and Worcestershire sauces), plastic honey bears (a favorite of mine), silverware, glasses (be careful not to shatter one if it's in your pocket!), and coffee mugs. Let me ask you a question: do you think waitresses at chain restaurants buy their silverware at a department store, or do you think their silverware collection grows one piece at a time for several months? Remember, we, the working classes, are all in this together against the Man, the industry. If you get good enough at this part of it, your trips to the restaurant will pay for themselves.

Playing Accountant With the Bill

Employees have to be paid minimum wage during the training process. That means showing a new waitress a one-hour video costs the company a minimum wage hour rather than the fragment of an hourly wage usually paid to servers (at least at the time this book was written). Do you think they waste their money teaching the hostesses what the waitresses do? Of course not! That would be a waste of money, wouldn't it?

(Now would be a good time to test your restaurant scamming skills. Before you read on, ask yourself, "where is he going with this?")

This works best in restaurants where the bill is written out by hand, and you pay at a cash register rather than paying the waitress. If the bill is written out by hand, it will most likely contain several abbreviations rather than full words. Example: A quarter-pound burger with lettuce, tomato, mayonnaise, cheese with a side of fries would look something like:

S-1/4 Del, Che FF

The hostess has no idea what this means, and you can use this ignorance to get her to change it for you, especially if the restaurant is very busy and there are twelve people behind you in line shooting intimidating looks at her. She could call over the waitress to have her explain it to her, or she could call over a manager, but she probably won't. These take too much time and effort, and she doesn't need all those people behind you complaining that it took too long to pay their bills. Say your waitress charged you for one too many coffees, or nobody had this Ruben sandwich here; it must have accidentally been written on your bill instead of the bill of the person who ordered it. At first, you'll want to pick something that you can easily get out of if she calls the waitress over, but you can do that pretty easily: you can simply say you didn't understand the abbreviations. "Oh, Fre Fri means trench fries. I thought it meant french fried potato pancakes, and I certainly didn't order any of those." They'll both know you're lying, but so what? You gave it a shot and didn't lose anything when you got caught. You can only win. This one isn't foolproof, but if you try it enough times, you will come out ahead.

Using Children as Pawns

A screaming child utterly destroys the atmosphere of a restaurant. Consequently, the wait staff will do whatever is necessary to make your child shut up. No restaurant wants to be known throughout its town as the "screaming baby restaurant." Teach your kid to yell and scream for something, and he will get it. As a child, I once accidentally knocked my plate off the table, and, as any seven-year-old might do, I started to cry. The waitress felt so bad for me because I was clearly a child who had been in a car for several hours (I was on vacation) and would have to wait several hours before I was able to eat again that she quickly got me another breakfast without charging my parents. How can you take advantage of the generosity of a waitress like her?

Well, first of all, don't teach your kid to scream, "I want daddy to have a T-Bone steak cooked extra rare without having to pay for it." That's a little too obvious, but you could have your kid order something, eat pretty much all of it, spill the remaining portion on the floor, and then scream and cry until he gets another one. Then you can eat the other one. Kids' menus have several delicious items on them: kiddie burgers, chicken strips, little pizzas, spaghetti, fried chicken, the list is endless. If the waitress questions why you're eating it, just say, "Kids! He screams for it and now he doesn't want it. I couldn't let it go to waste." Hopefully, needless to say, your waitress went out of her way and now has to clean up the mess your kid left on the floor, so please leave her a nice tip. She's on your side, remember?

Depending on the age of your child, you can get him just about anything for free if he or she is old enough to leave alone. Get up and go to the bathroom, and while you're gone, have the kid say to the waitress, "My mommy/daddy said I could ask you for a super large mega-colossal ultra sundae with extra hot fudge and an extra cherry." Make sure you return when your child is half-way finished with it and say to the waitress, "What the hell is he doing with that? I never said he could order that! Why are you letting him order things without asking me first? I certainly hope you're not charging me for that!" I assure you, your waitress will feel very stupid and take it off of your bill for you.

Kids can also be trained to steal store items that you might not be able to steal for yourself, if they're in places that a child can reach. Especially if you look like some kind of a child abuser, the waitresses wouldn't dream of telling on your kid even if they saw him do something. Waitresses love kids.

As a side note on this subject, do not ever strike your child in a restaurant. Don't think that every employee in that restaurant doesn't know you just smacked your kid, and I have seen unspeakable things done to the food of people who didn't have the common sense to restrain themselves. Contrary to popular belief, it's been my experience that employees spitting in food and such is a very rare occurrence, but exceptions will be made if you can manage to make an employee HATE you, and this is one way to do it.

Playing Dumb

Like I keep saying, the employees have been trained not to insult you, so if you pretend to be simply too stupid to understand, many times they'll give you the benefit of the doubt and let you chisel a few cents off of your bill before calling you a chump. Using poor vocabulary throughout your meal will help convince your waitress that you really are an ignoramus, and it won't be at all surprising to her that you don't understand that french fries cost money. In your best southern accent say, "Lookee here on this 'ere menya. Picture's got a burger with fries, but yer bill 'ere's got me chargin' for each'n sep'rit. Why'ya cheetin me?" Your waitress will try to patiently explain to you that the picture is one of many possible ways you could order something, but you're going to cut her off an

d say, "Don't use nunna dem fancy schmanzy college werds at me, missy! 'Ere's a picture with fries... 'ere's a bill with yah chargen for 'em. Ain't nuthin' you say gonna change that." No matter how hard she tries to explain, just keep repeating that same statement over and over again with different words until she gets tired of trying to explain calculus to a monkey and takes the fries off your bill. Understand, though, you're not going to be able to do this with the burger, too. This will only work with little extra things like that, and that's why I have included it in this penny shaving chapter, which, consequently, is now over.

Chapter Four More Difficult Scams

The Missing Phone Number

I don't know about this one, but a friend of mine who travels the country in a van and scams restaurants out of food as a primary source of nutrition swears to me it works. I'm not suggesting it for a beginner, but it is very interesting. It only works when the person behind the cash register is either young, naive, or simply stupid, but that happens often enough that I thought I should include it.

To do this one, you will need two twenty-dollar-bills. On one of them, you must write a phone number. When you first order, tell the waitress that you are in a terrible hurry and would like the check immediately so that you can pay it before the food comes and leave the second you are finished eating. Take the check to the cash register and pay the bill with the twenty with the phone number. Half way through your meal, approach the hostess, or whoever is behind the cash register, and say that you accidentally gave her a bill with a phone number that you needed and would like to trade for the other one. If the hostess does this (and she may not... some of them have actually read the handbook), then before you give her yours, doing your best imitation of a rich person, say that you will let her keep five dollars out of your twenty for all of her trouble if she'll just bring the other fifteen back to the table. This is the tricky part. Let me explain. Let's say your bill was ten dollars, and you paid with the phone number twenty and received ten dollars in change. You're now left with thirty dollars, the ten dollars you received in change and the other twenty dollar bill. Now when she gives you back your original twenty, you now have fifty dollars, but you have to give her back the one without the phone number, leaving you with thirty. However, when she keeps five and brings the other fifteen back to your table, you now have forty-five dollars. If you can get out of there before anyone realizes, you will have made five dollars and eaten dinner for free.

All of this depends, however, on the person behind the cash register being stupid enough to fall for this, but I promise you it will happen more often than you think. The hostess, or other person behind the cash register, will be thinking about the five dollars she's getting and not about the money the cash register isn't getting... at least for long enough that she'll bring the other fifteen back to the table. She may realize what she's done within seconds of giving you back your fifteen dollars, but by then it's too late, and she's going to feel responsible since she made five dollars off of it, so she's not going to tell on herself to a manager, either. I do suggest you make good on your plan to leave as soon as you're finished, though. Remember: if you get caught play dumb. "Oh, you're right, I almost ripped you off for fifteen dollars. That wouldn't have been very Christian of me, would it?"

This one is complicated and very easy to goof up, so be careful. The math is a bit difficult as well, but remember that your total bill has to be less than twenty dollars for this to work. The beautiful part of it is that since the profit margin is exactly fifteen dollars, if your bill is less than fifteen dollars, you can walk out with more than you came in with. Do the math.

Rolled Coins

Quarters and nickels are about the same size. I have heard of many people who were in the habit of making their money go further by taking advantage of this little piece of knowledge through coin rolls. The coin rolls with one end already made for you are the better ones to use. They are thicker and harder to feel the subtle differences between a nickel and quarter through, and they have that nice little window at one end where you can leave a quarter sticking out for good measure. I do not suggest filling an entire quarter roll with nickels; it is highly illegal, and if you are caught, you will go to jail. However, if you had almost all quarters with one or two nickels thrown in, you could save forty cents out of every ten dollars and still be able to insist it was an accident if you got caught. Don't forget about my couple that pays for one of their plane tickets to the Florida condo every five years by scamming a nickel a day. You're getting forty cents!

Some places will ask you to put your name and phone number on them. Needless to say, do not use your real name and phone number, although I used to call people from them and tell them they were a nickel short just to see if they would really come in with the extra nickel. No one ever did.

And, as I'm sure you've guessed, don't try this twice at the same place and try it when it's busy.

Dine and Dash

This one has been a favorite of teenagers for centuries, I'm sure. Eat your food, wait for a good moment, signal to the rest of your party, and hold your hands up in the air screaming "Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" while you run out the door. The wait staff will be so confused that they won't know what to do until you have already left. The only trick is to make sure you can clear the parking lot before someone thinks to call the police.

I was eating at a twenty-four-hour restaurant on the fourth of July one evening, and I observed a drunken man knocking over a pie display. We heard the manager tell him that he had just destroyed thirty-seven dollars worth of pie, and that if he didn't pay for them, he was calling the police. The man replied, "Call the fucking police, then! I'm not paying you thirty-seven dollars for pie!" I unfortunately lost a ten dollar bet with a friend of mine when I bet that the police wouldn't come. Three police cars arrived within minutes and actually caught his two friends who ran the moment the pies fell. Don't think your government is too smart to send out three cops for twelve dollars an hour apiece in forty-five thousand dollars worth of cars and four dollars worth of gas to investigate the destruction of thirty-seven dollars worth of pie. Your government is that stupid and much, much more. The moral to the story: the police will come if they're called. Leave FAST.

The Extra Bill

This one is one of my favorites. It only works at restaurants where there is no computer and you pay a cash register rather than the waitress, but it's about one hundred percent effective. All you have to do is ask the waitress for separate bills and only pay one of them when you leave. Take the other one home with you. A clever hostess might be able to figure it out, but hostessing like waitressing is boring and repetitive, and she's not looking at what you ate and counting the number of people you have with you when you leave. She's just looking at the total, and it's probably not even going to strike her that the number seems small. I once gave a bill for a hundred and twenty-nine (dollars to two elderly ladies who each had tuna sandwiches. Why? I pushed the wrong button on the calculator.

ator, and I wrote down the number the calculator said without even considering if it made sense or not. It's a mechanical job, and I seriously doubt a hostess bothers to think about hers that much, either.

Of course, if there are twelve of you in your party, you will have to pay for more than just one bill. In my opinion a good rule of thumb would be to pay for just over half of the total number of people in your party so as not to seem suspicious. Ask for seven people to be on one bill and five on the other. You can pay the bill with seven people, and five of you eat for free. This is going to be the last time I say these things because I'm getting sick of writing it, so please just assume it from now on. Leave IMMEDIATELY; don't try it twice at the same place; this will work best when the restaurant is busy; and please tip your waitress what would have amounted to fifteen percent of both bills.

This is another good time to use a child to pay the bill so that the hostess doesn't suspect him of such cunning. And remember, children lie the best when they don't know the truth. When I was five, I once told a minister that my dad was thirty-five and my mom was eighteen.

The Fake Injury

No restaurant of the "All-American Burger and Fries" variety is going to make you pay your bill first if you're on your way to the hospital. I will never forget a certain incident where I was approached by a fellow server who said to me, "Since you're the only male that's working today, could you go check the bathroom for this lady's husband. She says he's been in there for forty-five minutes." When I opened the door, I completely expected to see some thousand-year-old guy dead on the floor, but instead he was standing with a wad of bloody paper towel in his mouth and screaming something about how he had cut his gums on his dentures and it wouldn't stop bleeding. Personally, I think he just soaked a bunch of paper towels in ketchup and pulled off a scheme, because he immediately took off with his wife for the hospital without even offering to return and pay the bill. Well, maybe I'm being cruel; they probably really did go to the hospital and he probably really was injured.

However, you're not really going to be. This one can be a lot of fun if you enjoy the art of acting. The easiest way is to order something that you know damn well contains nuts, eat everything else, and at the end of your meal take a bite and fake an allergic reaction. While you're laying on the floor writhing in grotesque paroxysms, someone else from your party is screaming for the world to hear, "Oh, no! That had nuts in it, didn't it? He'll die if he eats nuts! No one told him! You've killed my husband/brother/father/son/uncle/whatever!" Now that you have everyone's attention, the same person says something like, "I'm taking him to the hospital. I'll be back to deal with you murderers later!" The two of you then leave with the sick one limping, or the other one limping if you want to make this even funnier. The biggest limitation to this one is that you can only pull it off if the number of people in your party can believably fit into one car. The good thing about this one is that you can get several people to eat for free rather than just one.

If you have a bulimic in your party, you can have a good time by having her vomit all over something rather than go into the bathroom to do it. Spasms are a personal favorite of mine, with allergic reactions running a close third. This one's probably one of the most fun scams in this book.

Getting Kicked Out

Well, I take it back. This is the most fun scam in the book, and it's simple, too. All you have to do is act in the most disruptive manner you can. Going in as a couple and pretending to get into a fight involving screaming, profanity, and

graphic sexual references in front of children usually works. Sexually harassing your waitress will get you kicked out as well, as will being very loud and obnoxious in general.

You must be careful of two things, however. First, don't be scary. I once witnessed a biker gentleman in a small restaurant in some fishing village in northern Michigan screaming, 'They're all Devil-worshippers! There's something wrong with their heads! They all need to be punished!' over and over again. None of us had any idea what he was talking about, but you can bet that no waitress wanted to be the one to ask him to leave. Your goal is to get a free meal, not to scare anyone. If the wait staff is too afraid of you to tell you to leave, then you will not get kicked out, and that's what you want to do.

The other caveat is not to do something that will get the police called. While it will certainly get you kicked out if you whip out your schmeckel and proceed to run around the restaurant slapping elderly women in the face with it, you will probably go to jail. Use just enough restraint to keep this from happening. You want to do something obnoxious, not illegal.

The impression you want to create is that of a mentally ill or just plain uncultured person who doesn't really realize how annoying he's being but needs to learn. You should be aware, though, that while the concept is simple, it's not easy.

At my restaurant, I don't recall anyone EVER being thrown out, and I remember some pretty obnoxious people. At one point, a woman stood up and threatened to kill a coworker of mine because her broccoli was cold. When I asked my manager if I could ask her to leave, she replied, 'That would be against the company's new hospitality policy.' I asked if it was also against the hospitality policy to let our waitresses fear for their lives and a room full of other customers to hear death threats while they eat... apparently it wasn't. In this day and age, when someone says, 'I'm gonna kill you...' you have no choice but to take them seriously; they just might mean it. The restaurant, however, was willing to take the chance that my young coworker might be murdered so that they wouldn't have to cover the cost of the woman's broccoli. (Why are you customers such assholes, anyway? We restaurant employees don't go to the factory you work at and threaten to kill you if you make a mistake! Some things aren't funny ... death threats are one of them. People take eating too seriously.)

Anyway, the moral to that story is that it is very difficult to be thrown out of a chain restaurant that has a burger named after it. Here is where Marge and Ginger become friends of yours. You will certainly be thrown out of Al's Diner, but a death threat won't even get you thrown out of Hungry Boy's, Inc.; they don't want to be impolite to any murderers.

For this scam, almost everything works the opposite of what I have said before. It works best when the restaurant is moderately busy but not too busy, and you have a much better chance of being thrown out by a tattooed ex-sailor waitress than you do by a teenager. Male waiters are also more likely to throw you out, as are restaurants with pissed off Italian managers with slicked back hair who roll their sleeves up so you can see their muscles. This is another situation where it works to your advantage to be out of your element. If you're a teenager, go into a restaurant geared toward old people. If you're black, go to a restaurant full of lily white cracker eating honkies. If you're an elderly person, go into a restaurant geared toward horny, middle-aged men (like Hooters). Of course, you will be perpetuating any stereotypes that have been applied to people like you over the years, but there's something more important at stake here, free food! This is your chance to take any prejudice against you and translate it into dollars.

Remember, this one isn't just about free food; it's about fun! Pull out all of the stops and become the first-class asshole that I know you can be.

The Object in the Food

This one, too, is completely foolproof. All you have to do is yank a hair, stick it in your food when you are almost finished, and act very offended. People use d to do this to me for the longest time when I had long hair. (Actually, it wasn 't any longer than any of the girls' hair, but reverse discrimination is still o kay, isn't it?) Anyway, these old people would yank one of their short grey hair s out and stick it in their food and pretend they thought it was one of mine. I would show them to the managers and say, 'This gentleman thinks this short grey hair might be one of my long brown ones or the cook's curly black ones.' The ans wer was inevitably, 'Well, what are we going to do? Call him a liar? Give me his check.' This one is foolproof, but much too easy if you're an adventurous type.

I suggest killing a mouse, taking a portion of its head with you in a Ziplock b ag, and dumping it into your soup. When you're sure the waitress will be looking , bring it up with your spoon and scream like hell. This will certainly get you some immediate attention. Other good items are insects, pieces of paper, shards of broken glass, staples, metal shavings, or anything that could have conceivabl y gotten into your food that would have been potentially dangerous. Ten times ou t of ten, you will leave without paying for anything... except that tip, of cour se.

Chapter Five Scams for True Danger Seekers

All of the scams listed in this section are completely illegal, immoral, or plai n old evil. I do not recommend that you try any of these, and they are included simply for your reading enjoyment (wink, wink).

The Dry Cleaning Bill

It happens from time to time that something gets spilled on a customer, and the manager will almost always offer to pay for the dry cleaning if the customer wil l bring in the bill.

This one is great. A certain couple hit our restaurant as well as every other re staurant on the same road one year, and by the local chamber of commerce's estim ation, they made approximately three thousand dollars. They obtained a dry clean ing bill that said thirty dollars, either by getting something dry-cleaned for t hirty dollars or by buying a roll of blank bills from an office supply store. Th at's the first step. The second step is to approach a cashier, especially when i t's busy, and tell an incredibly vague story about how someone spilled something on your something, and someone else said to bring in this dry cleaning bill so you can get reimbursed. The cashier will ask you specific questions, but you don 't know the answers to any of them. Your waitress was a young girl with blonde h air, but she's not here today. The manager that spoke to you about it is also no t here, or at least you don't see him or her (you want to have a gender in mind. .. this is where reconnaissance comes in). The manager never took your name or a nything, he/she just said to bring in the bill and say that he/she said it was o kay.

Unless the cashier completely does not believe you (although she probably will; you're not the first person to have something spilled on him), she will probably feed you names. Take them. It could go something like this:

"Well, who was your waitress?"

"She was kinda young... blonde hair... I think she had brown eyes..."

"You mean Sherry?"

"Yeah, I think that was her name."

"Well, what manager did you talk to?"

"This young fellow... dressed kinda nice... I really don't remember his name..."

"You mean Steve?"

"Yeah, Steve was his name. He said to tell you that he said it was okay to reimburse me."

"What day were you in here?"

"Oh, it was a couple weeks ago... I'm not exactly sure when it was to be honest..."

Where I'm going with this is that you don't know anything except what you get the cashier to say; be as vague as possible about any details. Many times, if there are enough people behind you in line, the hostess will simply pay you right out of the cash register without even asking a manager first. Usually, a manager will be called, but remember that hospitality thing, again. They would rather risk giving away an undeserved thirty dollars than insult a customer by calling him a liar. Whatever the situation, your two greatest weapons here are your poor memory of the incident and your uncontrollable anger at having been lied to by this Steve guy if the people in front of you won't give you your money.

You do want to make this a believable dollar figure; I wouldn't try for any more than thirty dollars. They may also try to scare you by making a copy of the receipt, asking for your driver's license... blah, blah, blah. They're never going to do any investigating; don't worry. If you are really going to get into this, though, I suggest getting a fake driver's license and making the name on the laundry receipt match it. You can make up to three thousand dollars with this scheme, I hear.

The Bank Envelope

I just kinda stumbled onto this one. A lady called on the phone saying she had left a bank envelope in the smoking section that contained two hundred and fifty dollars and asked if we could find it and hold it for her. We all looked, and I found an empty envelope from the National Bank of Detroit crammed in between the boothing and the wall. I showed it to the manager on duty, who probably thought I took the money out of it, and he said he was going to have to give her two hundred and fifty dollars out of the safe. I told him we had a sign that said, "Not responsible for lost or stolen items," but he was ready to give her the money, anyway, just to keep up the store's image. The lady eventually ended up calling and saying that she found the envelope, and it was in her car the whole time, but the point is that if she would have shut up about that, she would have been two hundred and fifty dollars richer. Well, I don't guess there's much more explaining for me to do here. Leave an empty bank envelope at the restaurant in a place where it will have to be looked for, call an hour later saying you lost it, and when it's found, the manager will think an employee cleaned it out and reimburse you. I would keep the dollar figure confined to a realistic amount, as well. Two hundred and fifty dollars is even pretty high, I wouldn't try going over a hundred and fifty. You want to try this one at a chain restaurant that is busy enough to have that kind of cash in the store, but this one, too, is one of the few that will work better if the restaurant was busy earlier but is slow when you call. Reconnaissance, people!

The Good-Guy Volunteer

Go to your local flea market and buy a used jacket that says something like "Volunteer Fire Dept." or "Emergency Rescue Team," and a set of sophisticated walkie-talkies. All you then have to do is go into a restaurant like a serious good-guy, eat the vast majority of your food, and have your friend go into the parking lot with the other walkie-talkie and say some official sounding stuff like, "Calling all volunteer units, we have an emergency situation developing at 2242 West Pine St. Please report there immediately." Then run out of the restaurant blabbing something about how "I'll come back to pay the bill." Who would dream of telling you that you can't go save those burning children until you've paid it?

The Beauty of Pencil

Most waitresses in handwritten check restaurants will write out the bills in pencil rather than pen due to the fact that you customers simply love to change your minds. (They also have us write our time cards in pencil. I wonder why.) I'm sure that by now you have an idea where I'm going with this.

You could probably do it right in front of everyone. As you've probably figured by now, nobody is going to want to offend you by accusing you of something, so that makes it okay to walk all over them. The one you need to fool is the hostess or cashier, and here's the trick. If you just change the total at the end of the check, you will get caught. The hostess types the subtotal into the cash register, and the cash register adds the tax.. If the check says something other than the cash register total, she will assume that the waitress made a mistake adding the bill. You have to be able to add your sales tax to your made up subtotal in your head, or you have to bring a calculator with you. If you are not very good with math, you may want to take the check into the bathroom with you to do your handiwork.

If you want it to look believable, I suggest erasing items rather than changing prices, and then adding up the total of the remaining items. They'll figure out that you were lying later on when they audit the checks (yes, they actually do pay someone five dollars an hour to figure out if they got gypped out of three), so don't pay with a credit card. They might get you then.

This trick is quite effective if you can find a restaurant where checks are handwritten in pencil and then paid to a cashier, but it's not quite as fun as the others. You might experience a feeling of self-loathing as you sit on a dirty toilet seat recalculating a bill so you can save four dollars. Good. Remember, I didn't write this book because I like you. I'm a waiter; you're one of those cheap bastard customers who almost NEVER left me the full 15% of your bill. I don't care about you and your feelings. I hate your guts! I just wrote this book because I want your money.

ChapterSix

Other General Considerations

What to Do If You Get Caught

Stand in front of the mirror in your bathroom and practice the most sinister, "Are you calling me a liar? I did not come here to be called a LIAR!" that you can manage. This is the phrase that will get you out of just about anything you could possibly get called on. Whoever you are talking to will instantly back down and become apologetic at this one. Remain calm and dignified and self-righteous, but make sure that your demeanor indicates that if the employee is to even suggest you are a liar once more, there will be dire consequences.

There is a time to accept failure, but you will have to be handcuffed and thrown into the paddy wagon before you will reach that time. No matter how sure you are that this manager or this waitress is onto your scheme, do NOT back down. Diligence is your strongest weapon. The longer and more intensely you insist that you are right, the greater the chance that the manager or waitress might second guess herself. Why would you be willing to act like such a fool if you weren't very sure of your righteousness in the situation? Threaten to call the police. Threaten to call the Better Business Bureau. Threaten to take out a full page ad in the Times telling the world about the horrible injustice that is being done to you. They will appease you if it will make you shut up. Even if they're sure you're full of it, they don't want to go through all of that when they know they can make you shut up for eight dollars.

If, however, you begin to realize that you are not going to get what you want, take down everyone's name that you have talked to, for the sake of intimidation, but then leave quickly. You don't want the police to come. You can probably write a letter when you get home, and the company headquarters will always figure that if you took the time to write a letter, everything you say must be true. A good portion of my childhood was spent writing letters to companies complaining about their goods just to receive coupons for additional free items. Sometimes, I never even really purchased the original product. I once got a free plane ticket to Orlando by writing a letter; you could even get a free meat loaf dinner.

Intimidation

This is a key factor in much of what I have told you. If you are a grizzled veteran, don't even worry about this; you're intimidating enough as it is. If you are black, white people are intimidated by you. If you are a foreigner, non-foreigners are intimidated by you. If you are a redneck, upper-middle-class people are intimidated by you. If you are tall, short people are intimidated by you. If you are a young person, old people are intimidated by you. If you are an Italian mobster looking type, everyone is intimidated by you.

When being confrontational with someone, make sure you have chosen someone who you think will be intimidated. Of course, I do not advocate violence, but it never hurts to let someone think that you might consider it as a last resort if you don't get what you want. I say this because Marge and Ginger are not intimidated by anyone, but the pimple-faced sixteen-year-old is intimidated by everyone. Make sure you know who you are talking to, and don't be reluctant to take on an intimidating tone and say something like, "I'm only going to say this once..." No one is going to take the risk of seeing what would happen the second time for the sake of your twelve dollar bill. Don't try this with Marge, though. She will jump over the counter and punch you in the face for even thinking she might be intimidated by you. And take it from me, I don't care if you're the heavyweight champion of the world, Marge can easily kick your ass.

Asking for a pen and paper to take down everyone's name is another good technique. People like to remain anonymous, and if they think you're serious enough about your issue to try to copy down everyone's name, they just might be scared enough that you're going to write a letter or find out where they live that they'll change their minds at the last minute and give you something.

The Quiz

Now that you have read all of the information, I will present you with a quiz to see how much you have learned. The answers are listed after the quiz.

1. You walk into a chain restaurant that prints the checks from a computer, and you see that most of the workers are teenage kids. Which scam will NOT work there?

e?

- A. Ordering something after the bill has been brought.
- B. Getting thrown out.
- C. Complaining that the food doesn't taste good.
- D. Leaving quickly without paying.

2. If you have a mind-set that you want to order something and then complain that it was no good until you get it taken off your bill, at which of these made up restaurants would you be most successful?

- A. Hungry Bob's.
- B. Chez Montague's.
- C. Pakistan Food Palace.
- D. The Russian Room.

3. Which foreign object will NOT be effective if you stick it into your food?

- A. An insect.
- B. A staple.
- C. A shard of broken glass.
- D. A tiny pebble.

4. In which of the following situations would it be a good idea to have a child pay your bill for you?

- A. You are paying one of several bills.
- B. You have erased items from the bill.
- C. You want the child to pretend he doesn't understand why something had an additional charge.
- D. You want the child to pay with a quarter roll containing several nickels.

5. You are writing a letter to the main headquarters of a chain restaurant complaining that you had to wait forty-five minutes to be seated, and once you were seated, the employees all treated you rudely and called you racial slurs. Which is the best last sentence of the letter?

- A. I will never return to your horrible restaurant again.
- B. I'm going to blow up your stinking restaurant with an enormous bomb!
- C. I want you to tell me why I shouldn't address this issue on my weekly editorial at a local TV station.
- D. I could cook a better steak with my ass.

6. You have eaten a reconnaissance meal at a restaurant in a small town and found it to be manned by college-aged kids. Which would be the best time to eat an

d run out without paying?

A. Early on a Tuesday morning in October.

B. Midday on a Saturday in March.

C. Midday on a Thursday in early June.

D. A Friday evening in late August.

7. Which of these tricks will work better when the restaurant is SLOW.

A. Leaving an empty bank envelope and calling to inquire if your money was found.

B. Leaving without paying.

C. Pretending you don't understand the bill.

D. Teaching your kid to yell and scream about something.

8. You are a redneck who would like to act like a fool until you get thrown out of a Big Boy's restaurant. Where would you have the best chance of doing that?

A. New York City.

B. Fancy Gap, Virginia.

C. Boca Raton, Florida.

D. Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

9. Which kind of restaurant can you easily defraud without ever having been there?

A. A fast food restaurant with a drive-thru.

B. An "All-American burger and fries" restaurant.

C. A pizza restaurant.

D. A restaurant that serves wine.

10. Which are NOT good things to complain about to a manager?

A. It took twenty-five minutes for your food to come.

B. The food doesn't taste right.

C. The food costs too much.

D. There is a hair in your spaghetti.

Answers:

1. B. getting thrown out. Teenage kids will not have the audacity to ask you to leave.

2. A. Hungry Bob's. The rest are either too ethnic sounding or too expensive sounding.

3. D. A tiny pebble. It is not believable that this could have found its way into your food by accident.
4. A, B, and D. C is not a good idea because the hostess wouldn't expect a child to understand anyway, and the child will be too intimidated by an adult to question an explanation he has given. With A and B, the child's cuteness will distract the cashier from the scam you're pulling. With D, if you are caught, you can slap his hand and say, "Bad, Billy! How many times have I told you not to try to pass off nickels as quarters. You're grounded!"
5. C. A makes it sound like the coupon still won't bring you back. B will get you arrested, and D is too undignified to deserve a response.
6. D. A Friday evening in late August. The restaurant will be very busy, and the college kids won't care if you leave because they're all leaving for college in a few days, anyway.
7. A. They will be more likely to find your empty bank envelope if there is nobody sitting where you were. B and C work better when the waitress is busy worrying about other customers, too. D is a bad choice because waitresses are immune to the sound of screaming children and only care when other customers are getting annoyed, but it can't annoy customers if there are not too many customers to be annoyed.
8. C. Boca Raton, Florida. There's nothing you could possibly do in New York City to compare with the dancing flasher by the door. You're not the only redneck in Fancy Gap, and they know what your American ass is up to in Canada. In Boca Raton, however, they've never seen a real live redneck before, and they're probably very intimidated by you.
9. A. A fast-food restaurant with a drive-thru window. It's the only one that will have no record of your ever being there, no employee who remembers you being there, and no expectation for either. You can perform your dirty work over the phone.
10. A and C. A will get somebody in trouble, and C will win you no sympathy because the manager can't change the price just for you.

A Summary of the Main Points in This Book

I have given several specifics, but here are the main points that you should always keep in mind when attempting any of the schemes illustrated in this book.

- You are the customer, and even if you are wrong, you are right. NEVER back down.
- Managers have been trained to avoid a confrontation by picking up your check even if he or she believes that you are lying. You do not need to try too hard to be believable.
- Your best weapons are intimidation, diligence, and stupidity.
- You are too thick to understand what the manager is trying to explain to you.
- Please do not try to get some poor person fired, and if you do manage to get your meal picked up by the house, please tip your waitress. They only make twenty-five an hour from the company, so their loyalty is to you, the one who pays them.

- Often, a reconnaissance meal can help you develop a foolproof plan suited to the particular restaurant you are targeting.
- It's probably not a good idea to carry this book into the restaurant with you.
- You are scum, and I hate you. Sorry for saying this one so much, but I can't say it to you at work; I'll lose my job and my kids will starve. I stay awake at night fantasizing about what I'd like to say to you, and here I can finally say it. That's the other reason I wrote this book.

Closing Thoughts

Well, I hope you have enjoyed my insights into the loopholes available to you in the restaurant industry. I have only scratched the surface of the endless possibilities available to you as a seasoned restaurant scammer. Let the seed I have planted in you germinate into a mighty oak of cheapness, and have no mercy for the tyrannical industry which crushes its own supporters. It has no mercy for you.

If you invent a new technique for restaurant scamming, I encourage you to let me know about it by e-mailing me at BeatTheCheck@antisocial.com. The restaurant industry will most probably begin making it difficult for most of these techniques to work from the moment this book is published, and if they don't put a hit out on me immediately, I will begin collecting updated techniques for this book's second edition. When the last restaurant closes its doors because of its inability to defend itself from the thieves who drive its prices up and still don't pay them, and every man, woman, and child in the world has to cook his own food... I will be satisfied.

To the restaurant executives reading this book and trembling in fear at what is sure to be the undoing of the entire industry, I have this to say: I'm a very vengeful person. You made me cut my hair when I was eighteen. NOW FEEL MY WRATH!!!

BACK COVER:

BEATING THE CHECK

How to Eat Out Without Paying

Pissed-off restaurant worker Mick Shaw lets fly at the restaurant industry in this heart-felt manual, and reveals all the techniques for Beating the Check he has learned in his years of low-paying wage slavery. Here are a few of the schemes and scams he reveals to you:

- When and Where to Attack. The best restaurants to use these tricks against, and the best times to use them. Which restaurants you should never try to scam.
- The Simplest Scams. How to complain and what to complain about. Letter writing and phone calling How to scam a restaurant you've never even eaten it
- How to leave without paying, and what to do if you are caught.
- Penny Shaving and Playing "Accountant" with the bill. "
- How to use children as pawns when you are eating lot free.
- The Missing Phone Number, The Fake Injury, Getting. Kicked Out, and the Object in the Food: More difficult scams.

□ The three best weapons for restaurant scammers to use.

□ And much, much more.

Beating the Check is a book that can greatly reduce your food costs □ plus, it's fun, and you will have great stories to tell! So take a tip from Mick Shaw and devour this book today. Sold for entertainment purposes only.

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