

THE PALM OF MY HEART

Unchanged by the years, the Palm stands as a testament to East Hampton's history, tradition and one woman's childhood

I was only three years old when my family started coming to East Hampton. Back then, we called it "the country." We built our house on a plot of land surrounded by potato fields and woods. I still remember what a big deal it was when the next two houses were built on our street. Neighbors!

My summers as a child in East Hampton have an idyllic twinge to them: pony rides in Wainscott, beach cookouts at Georgica Pond, riding on the back of my mother's bike to the duck pond, outdoor showers in the fading sun, and waiting for my dad to arrive from the city on Friday evenings, my brother and I in matching robes and slippers on the front porch, our hair wet and freshly combed.

Mostly, I loved going into town. I adored tasting the powdered sugar of Dressen's donuts; buying knickknacks at the News Company; getting my Tretorns at the Village Shoe Store, where the coach of my summer soccer league worked; checking out books from Mrs. Rudersham at the East Hampton Library; buying rainbow candy dots on strips of white paper from Penny Lane; browsing through records at Long Island Sound after the movies; and, later, stockpiling my favorite corn muffins from Barefoot Connessa. The town was simple. Easy. Predictable and comforting.

But now, 35 years later, almost everything has changed. The look and feel of East Hampton remains the same, but of course the shops have all been displaced. The people have changed. It's a trendy locale, not a relaxing, remote enclave. Sometimes it's hard for me to adjust. I'm someone who feels the loss of a favorite lipstick color or a discontinued ice cream flavor deeply. I crave consistency and dependability. No matter how much my life changes, as long as I know there are certain tastes, textures or places that stay the same, I'm comforted.

That's why I cling to the Palm Restaurant in East Hampton as if it's the last bastion in



Zibby Right

the storm. The worn wood floors, the crisp white tablecloths, the bouncy banquettes, the wood-paneled walls, the predictable menu, the waiters in their white coats: these all persist. The plain pasta with butter

tastes exactly as it did back then. As I twirl the linguine around my fork out of my kids' bowls, I feel a sense of calm that no yoga class can deliver. I taste my childhood in that bite. Like the taste of a drink from my silver and red metal thermos. Snowflake chocolate dipped ice cream cones. Back dives into the pool. Baseball in the backyard with my little brother, my mother's red place mats as the bases.

As I walk through the restaurant onto the windowed terrace with my husband on Friday nights, I'm not a thirty-something wife and mother of four. I'm the 8-year-old girl celebrating her birthday at the big corner table, listening to the baritone voices of the waiters singing "Happy Birthday" to me over a cake in the shape of a tennis court. When I order the Monday Night Salad, I can hear my parents ordering it, asking for no anchovies. I taste the onion rings and forget that I'm responsible for so much. Instead, I'm the child eating with her parents, still married then, fighting over the scraps, waiting for my mother to say, "Oh, I shouldn't have eaten all of those!" I swing the wood-slatted door to the ladies' room and remember my childhood friends, all of us gossiping between courses and plotting the rest of our evenings.



The Palm bar

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The Palm is one of the last places in East Hampton that remains frozen in time. Preserved. Cherished. I look up at the waiter and don't see his face; I see my old babysitter Carrie's boyfriend, Fred, whom my mother helped get a summer job when Carrie wouldn't come back to work unless he came too. (By the way, the two of them broke up after college.) Fred actually ended up marrying Andrea, the daughter of the owner of the Palm, and building his career at the company. After raising three boys, they separated. Thirty years after those child-

hood summers of mine, Fred recently found Carrie again, also recently divorced. They just got married, with six sons between them!

I love the Palm in a deeply personal way. I love what it represents and all the memories it contains. I love that there are no kale salads. I can hear the Billy Joel songs playing on the radio, see the Chevy Caprice Classic wagons pulling up at the valet station. And now, I love that my kids love it too. We go

at 5:00 p.m. as the busboys finish lighting tabletop candles and the waitstaff adjusts their coats, ready to go. We taste the same bread as I had as a child. We order that same pasta and Monday Night Salads. We play Hangman, I Spy and 20 Questions. And I'm a kid again. I'm sitting on my dad's lap on his metal beach chair, my feet sandy and wet, the sun on my face. I'm playing tennis in my white tennis dress and visor, eating a FrozFruit or frozen Snickers from the snack bar as my mother laughs with the other moms. I'm playing Kadima with my brother in the yard, losing the ball in the dirt under our raised porch and fishing it out with a broomstick. I'm smelling honeysuckle in the bushes as I ride my bike, "Rusty," into town. All the worries of my crazy day-to-day life disappear, just for a moment.

So, this summer, you'll find me at the Palm, surrounded by my kids and family and acting like a responsible mother of four. But inside, you'll know where I really am. Lost in the summers of my childhood. Reliving them now. ♦

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