Munch goes to Breakfast at Shelly's

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What Do You
The kielbasa breakfast sandwich with loaded home fries at Breakfast at Shelly's in the city's Allentown section.

By Dan Gigler / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A headline last month on none other than The New York Times website was as distressing to this correspondent as anything related to the 2016 presidential election. It read: “Sorry, There’s Nothing Magical About Breakfast.”

The thrust of the commentary by Dr. Aaron E. Carroll, a professor of
pediatrics at the Indiana University School of Medicine, is that recent studies touting the power of the morning meal — that skipping it can cause heart disease and obesity, as well as elevate cholesterol and attention deficit in kids — is based on flawed and/or biased research. In empirical terms, Munch — who fell into this career because of a laughable paucity of any science acumen (and overcompensates for that by using words like “paucity” and “acumen”) — is in no position to question the analysis of an accomplished and learned man like Dr. Carroll.

Having said that, pump the brakes, sawbones. Let’s be clear: Breakfast is magical — metaphorically speaking, anyway.

A hypothetical: You stayed up late watching the game last night and crushed a few beers to soothe your severely jangled nerves from lapsing into a coronary event every single time Doc Emrick yelled, “HIT THE POST WITH THE SHOT!” You wake up feeling like you just went into the corner against Patrick Marleau, and that “hangry” headache is setting in. A plate of dippy eggs, crispy bacon and home fries is an instant salve to the mind, body and soul in said situation. It’s like a greasy affirmation of life. In short: it is magical.

That’s the kind of grub at Breakfast at Shelly’s, among the latest additions to the Warrington Avenue corridor in Allentown, opened in March as part of the methodical revitalization of that neighborhood. As the name indicates, it specializes in daily breakfast (and lunch) by Shelly Moeller of Carrick. Ms. Moeller and partner Sean Coley took over the space that was Michelle’s Diner, a neighborhood institution for nearly 40 years before it closed last year.

If you’re seeking a menu with the words artisanal, boutique, pasture-raised or heirloom on it, then shuffle on back to whatever suburb or gentrified East End neighborhood from whence you came. This place is quite literally not for the faint of heart, as it’s a greasy spoon of the first order, where everything is made to order, and the back and forth banter wisecracking, like that of a Yinzer Flo Castleberry.

“We want to be on a first-name basis with our customers and have a fun, homey feeling, like you’re eating at your mom’s house,” Ms. Moeller previously told the Post-Gazette. A fitting sentiment, as she learned under her own mother, Cheryl O’Leary, who runs the longtime O’ Leary’s Diner on the South Side.

However, the staff’s T-shirts tease, “This ain’t ya mama’s kitchen — get to tippin’” and a sign on the door cracks, “Eat here — or we’ll both starve!”

Thirty unpretentious breakfast items — combos, omelets, sandwiches — comprise the bulk of the menu. And, while it could stand to have some fresh fruit, this place is all meat, potatoes and eggs.

“Hot Breath” is not exactly an appetizing name for an omelet, but with hot sausage, banana peppers and pepper jack ($8) it was an apt descriptor and
pretty darn good, too. Another favorite was the kielbasa breakfast sandwich, with fried eggs, spicy mustard and grilled onions on Texas toast ($7.50). A side of the loaded home fries with green peppers and cheddar cheese was delicious ($3).

The peanut butter bacon cakes are as decadent as they sound: pancakes with rich peanut butter and crispy bacon in the batter, then hit with powdered sugar ($8). They could enter a glycemic index cage match against the French toast roll ups — sausage links rolled in bread and dipped in French toast batter, then grilled ($7).

The lunch menu is pretty standard: burgers, grilled cheese, gyros, hoagies. Nothing costs more than $9. God bless ’em, there’s also a fried “jumbo” sandwich listed as such on the menu — one of the best Pittsburghese words that no one seems to use anymore (and if you have to ask what it is …), but in my mind’s ear, I can hear my gram saying it.

Finally, don’t leave without one of the hand-spun milkshakes ($3.50), because that is one magical way to finish a meal. Even if it’s breakfast.

Breakfast at Shelly’s: 740 E. Warrington Ave., Allentown; 412-245-6785; facebook.com/BreakfastatShellys.

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