

Recollection: Bette Davis on 60+ Years in Mount Pleasant (cont'd) by Bette Davis

Our friends were the people we got to know in school and in the neighborhood; the Wilsons, the Traceys, the Cammocks, the Richardson, the Browns, the Deanes, and the Youngs all on Park Road; the Harrises on Monroe; the Fletchers on Brown Street; the Powells on Ingleside Terrace; and the Johnsons on Walbridge.

During our teenage years we played tennis on Powell's tennis court off 16th Street. We were allowed to go to parties and have parties at home. When Petey and Mickey came home on semester break from college, my parents always welcomed the friends they brought home with them. When we came home from a party, Daddy was always there to open the door to let us in. He was watching out to make sure we got home safely. On one occasion my older sister, Tootie, recalls quietly entering the house without being seen because she was late getting home.

My mother was a woman of great faith in God. She could often be heard to say, "God is so good." She instilled into each of us Christian principles and values. We were taught by our parents, teachers, the elders in the family, neighbors, and other influences we were being prepared for life. We regularly attended Canaan Baptist Church and Sacred Heart Catholic Church on 16th Street. At breakfast, lunch, and dinner we were taught to bow our heads to say grace.

In this house we learned many of the lessons of life. We learned how to respect our parents, love one another, and how to treat others. After school homework was done at the dining room table. On TV we watched all the dance shows—American Bandstand, the Milt Grant show, Lawrence Welk, Arthur Murray—a lot of cartoons and The Ed Sullivan Show, Ted Mack's Amateur Hour. We went to the Tivoli theater and the Savoy to see cowboy westerns and love stories.

Mama also rose up early to prepare Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas dinner. We were there to help cut up the bread, celery, and onion for the turkey stuffing. We watched her make those delicious home-made rolls, and we were allowed to partake of the cake batter from the bowl with our fingers. Believe it or not, none of us who sat there and watched Mama make all of those home-made rolls ever learned how to make them.

When dinner was ready, we all sat down at the dining room table to enjoy and celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner together. I recall Daddy crying at the sight of all of us together at the table. For Easter we went to Canaan Baptist Church, dyed eggs, and had jellybeans for our Easter baskets.

Our home was not without some controversy among siblings. My mother and father would discipline us when necessary. When differences arose among the siblings it was my mother's practice that we apologize, shake hands, and hug.

We were taught to dust, vacuum, sweep, wax floors, wash and hang clothes on the line, and wash the dishes. The girls were assigned days of the week to wash dishes. Tootie's day was Sunday, Ora's was Monday and Thursday, Regina's was Tuesday and Friday and mine were Wednesday and Saturday. Ora didn't like her days because Thanksgiving always fell on Thursday when more dishes, pots and pans needed to be washed. Anyway, we all chipped in and helped wash the dishes on Thanksgiving. I was known for breaking dishes, so someone helped me wash on my dish day.

Petey was in college and the military, Johnnie worked a lot, and Mickey helped in the house to paint, wash dishes, and wax and buff the floors. All three of my brothers worked at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda. If a room needed to be painted, we painted it, if the floor needed to be waxed and polished, we did it with that big buffer we had, if beds needed to be made, we were taught how to make up the bed. This was all done in the spirit of love.

Lastly, unlike today there was only one phone line in our home; however, everyone managed to talk on it without creating a problem. Mama talked to her two sisters early in the morning, evenings, and at night. Petey was able to sweet talk to his girlfriends without interference, and the rest of us had no problem talking to our friends on the phone.

Bette Davis will write more about her life in Mount Pleasant for the Village newsletter.

Alex Kramer: Running a Cafe for Mount Pleasant (cont'd)

by David Arnold

The business model was to serve fresh and affordable meals to young newcomers who were renting \$200 rooms in group homes up the hill from the nation's capital. They committed to serving the neighborhood in all of its racial and ethnic diversity by creating a bilingual menu that now looms large above the counter where customers place their order. "People were very hesitant and the mix grew slowly but it wasn't until 7-Eleven closed that we got a nice blend of customers."

"My intention was always to serve tasty affordable and healthy food. I value the fact that our food is simple," she says. "Those three things are very important to me. I'm a vegetarian, and this is not a vegetarian restaurant. I'm very happy with the diversity of our food."

But Alex recalls "the rough start" that baptized the café. First was the name. Was their little café just another step in the gentrification of Mt. Pleasant? And why do they call themselves Dos Gringos, which in some quarters is considered demeaning? "Robert Frazier had a listserv and before our doors opened up there was a lot of controversy. The thread was about 25 or 30 comments and about five were offended, but the others defended us."

Alex calls it a snug place. Half a dozen empty table tops fill the after-hours café decorated with mosaics protected by plexiglass. They were part of a makeover offered by a reality TV production company that wanted to dress up the café interior for a show that Alex has never chosen to watch. Then the Mayor's office offered a fresh coat of paint to some of the older businesses on the street. Alex chose the emerald green porch with brilliant pink columns they chose for Don Juan's restaurant.

She has adapted to a change. When Kenneth left, she began hiring part-time staff. They tend not to be temporary. The newest arrived two-and-a-half years ago. She rented the basement to an artist, but when the artist left Alex started selling ice cream there. When the Mt. Desert Ice Cream parlor opened, she closed her ice cream shop and The Greenery moved in to sell cannabis.

When Covid forced many restaurants to move into curbside lean-tos wrapped in clear plastic, Dos Gringos served breakfasts and noon sandwiches from their front porch and a raised veranda. In recent years, her café has become a weekly meeting place for eight to 10 Villagers who meet every Tuesday morning for coffee. Other patrons cluster as book groups, walking groups from other Villages, planning committees and neighbors who want to learn Spanish, French or Mandarin by speaking it together. Alex doesn't offer WIFI and prefers that if your cell phone rings you just take the call outside and let the rest of the customers enjoy each other and the food.

The café's nutritional standards don't extend to beer, wine or cocktails, but she has a cooperative agreement with The Raven Bar & Grill, which has no grill, across the street. You can pick up food from Dos Gringos when you want more than the Raven's selection of potato chips. Her personal tastes extend to a shot of Jameson's at The Raven and the menus and atmosphere at Don Juan's and Marx Café over the more recent high-end restaurants.

The walls testify to her sense of community. A poster for a February 24 appearance by Mayan Kaqkichal folk rock artist Sara Curruchich dominates the cork board of business cards for dog walkers, photographers, Pedro's foreign car service. The current gallery is prints of cityscapes by Francisco Berni. An Oxford Spanish Dictionary, and faded green 1935 edition of the Culinary Arts Institute's *The American Woman's Cookbook* rest in a small window shelf nearby.