

## Eddie's Restaurant:

### A Third Place Where People Stand By Each Other

While I follow a hostess to a sparkly-green booth, “If the sky that we look upon/Should stumble and fall...and darling, darling stand by me oh, stand by me,” begins to float through my ears. As I take in a large vintage poster of Marilyn Monroe, and the several records and band covers that are pinned up beside her. I begin to sing along. In addition to this popular 50's song by *The Drifters*, I listen as a silvery-locked woman cackles in response to one of the four sweater vested ladies amongst her. In their eavesdropped words, “those flavored creamers are just too dang sweet!” and little giggles hang around the air surrounding their table. Complementing the sounds emitted by the ladies in pastel attire was the faint ding of coffee pots being returned to their homes with some help of a dough eyed server. Off to the left of the burners is a very short server who in her booming voice clarifies an order with one of the line cooks through the long and metallic rectangular food window. Even further to the left, a different server smiles wholeheartedly as she listens to a frayed young man boast his latest hiking adventure. The smell of frying hash browns and toasting sourdough wafts through the air and marks the completion of another busy morning shift at Eddie's Restaurant.

In a society full of chain restaurants such as IHOP and Denny's trying to replicate the diner home-away-from-home appeal, it is clear that the family owned Eddie's Restaurant, with its many notable 50's themed characteristics, has achieved the status of being a third place for many people in Boise. The coined and defined “third place”, by sociologist Ray Oldenburg, is essentially a term used to describe a local institution or place that possesses the comforting and supporting powers similar to a worthy home (42). Third places serve as a space for individuals to turn off their stressed out thinking cap and power up the unwound socially free thinking cap.

Through many visits to this restaurant and with every experience showcasing a sense of family-like connection between everyone present, it is easy to see that Eddie's is unmistakably a "third place" that also creates intimate connections between people in the community. This can be determined by its satisfying of the majority of Oldenburg's criterion for such a space. It is with that satisfaction of specific characteristics that Eddie's can also be seen as a forger of strong ties throughout the community that translate to a willingness to stand by one another that is a major rarity in today's day and age.

Located in the Overland Park Shopping Center by a Cascade Bank and Outback Steakhouse, Eddie's does not necessarily stand out. It is a potential home-away-from-home for several people, camouflaged in plain sight. When taking in the restaurant's boxy, red and white exterior it is kind of hard to picture the homey-diner-like atmosphere that is created when you walk through the glass doors in the front of the building. The overall casual atmosphere coupled with the aged appearance of the building also contributes to the characteristic of a low profile within the restaurant, which turns out to be a feature of a third place (Oldenburg 36). While the inside has several charms such as records and posters lining the walls, the place ultimately seems plain or homey. To some the idea of a low-profile in regards to a restaurant may not seem especially important, but specifically for Eddie's it aids in creating a unique environment that carries a secretive appeal. Since this place is so tucked away in plain view, a low-profile allows for some mysterious allure to seep through to its frequenters. Also, within that charm an inclination for customers to support one another in lives endeavors is born.

While a rumbling tummy may be the initial reason for a trip to Eddie's, the main activity proves to be the conversation as, especially on weekend mornings, the food may take a while to exit the kitchen. Returning to my vantage point from a corner facing the rest of the sparkly

white-green booths lining the corridors of the restaurant, I check my watch and see it is about 10:30 in the morning. A key of importance is that the main action being done in the third place is supposed to be conversation and the act of conversing, within itself, is a “game that mixes well with many other games” (Oldenburg 30). As the restaurant is separated by an inner windowed-wall with booths on both sides, I watch as a burly man dressed in a Hawaiian shirt and flip flops slowly dodges his way all the way from the far end of the restaurant to the main side where he apparently recognizes someone. “Hey George! How have you been? I haven’t seen you in ages...,” he all but shouts at a man in a business suit. The two men then proceeded to discuss, for about thirty minutes, topics from why they thought the plague was showing up in vermin to how fun it would be to go kayaking. All the while Hawaiian t-shirt guy was standing sandwiched between two tables slouching down. If a man could stand so awkwardly for such a long time and still feel completely at home in carrying out his discussion with a long lost friend, then there is clearly something special about his surroundings and that uniqueness easily translates to the presence of characteristics that constitute a “third place”.

It was understandable from witnessing such a conversation that this place brewed up some banter that was certainly unique. This conversation was a clear example of how discussion remains the overarching activity at Eddie’s, and how it also acts almost like a game in its playfulness. According to an article put out by the Men’s Health Magazine, this type of conversation is what makes diner-type restaurants so appealing in that, “diners, despite their checkered reputation, remained as hideaways where you could eat a dinner like Mom cooked while talking about all the things she didn’t allow you to discuss over dinner,” (Stern and Stern). The opportunity to open up, share an opinion, and truly be listened to is becoming an exclusive happenstance in the today’s highly sensitive society. This concept of being permitted to discuss

the more difficult or controversial issues in a more laid-back way at diners than at the home dinner table was made evident at Eddie's from all the conversations that I keenly overheard. More specifically the principle characteristic of a third place upholding a main activity of conversation was made even more palpable at Eddie's when I overheard the spirited discussion of the two ladies sitting in the booth in front of me. From what could be discerned, one lady was inquiring about how church was for the other and then she followed up by saying, "you know because I find my religious solace in my sleeping in," and they both busted up laughing. A lot of the conversation encircling me was clearly for fun, which implies Oldenburg's point that in a third place the conversing is much like a game (30).

Relating to "game-like" conversation being one of the major happenings of a third place, another characteristic of Oldenburg's is that "the mood is playful" and he states "the magic of playgrounds is seductive," (38). On a weekend morning the lively mood is certainly made apparent, but the question lies in whether this uplifting atmosphere would be present on a slow night where there is a lack of customers. This question was surely answered when visiting on a Monday night. In the words of one of the quirky night servers, "the place is dead," but interestingly enough even though there was just a few customers there was still hints of amusement sprinkled throughout the air.

This time sitting at the counter, I listened to the banter between a server and a tall rosy-cheeked man who was planted a few stools away. "You think this lasagna is good?" the server asked, "Yeah, why? You think you could do better?" he retorted. "Well obviously, but lucky you won't ever get to try it," she threw back with him replying, "oh well if I wanted some Stouffer's hidden under some extra cheese I wouldn't be here." The server blushed and tried to hide her snort. In addition to this display of wittiness I swiveled around in my stool to witness two young

boys in the corner booth blowing their paper straw wrappers at each other and lightheartedly fighting over who gets a malt milkshake. Even with a scarcity of customers this restaurant still seems to manifest a joyful environment just like Oldenburg clarifies as to what a playful mood entails, it is true that “here joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation” (38).

The majority of those customers present on a late Monday night were definite “regulars”. Just as I downed my lemonade and was getting ready to leave, a man with weathered eyes and a half smile on his face took a seat in the chrome stool next to me. After a moment I soon requested to question him about the restaurant, to which he responded, “Why of course you can sweetie! I don’t see why not. Here let me buy you a cup of coffee, you have to try it because it’s pretty dang good! Unless of course it will keep you up,” (Johnson). If this does not speak to Oldenburg’s benchmark of “regulars” letting in new faces as a vital point of keeping the circle of third-placers going, little could (34). After asking him what made him keep coming back to the timeworn building he said, “Well let’s see, everyone who works here is so caring and down to earth. I feel like a lot of the girls that work here are like family and after my wife died a few years ago everyone here, including other customers, have really been there for me. I like that this place is real. There is no need for fake conversation,” (Johnson). If a man can frequent a place for over a decade and still have such love for it, it must play a role much deeper than providing him with food and drink.

Further evidence of this deeper role being played in the lives of the restaurant’s frequenters presented itself in quite a few ways. The first being a conversation that I heard between a server and a young woman about the condition of another customer who had recently suffered from some health issues. Both the server and the customer were not related in any way to the customer who had fallen ill, yet they expressed genuine concern for his wellbeing and

inquired if there was anything that either of them could do to help. This suggests that Eddie's Restaurant is not only a third place, but also a place of family-like support that is a unique existence in today's society and a space that contributes to the overall wellbeing of the people that frequent it. A diner-like restaurant such as Eddies provides people with a place to unwind, and a third place that will practically "beg you to relax" is sure to make people feel at home (Stern and Stern). It is with this feeling of at-home-ness that people become willingly compelled to contribute to an overall joyful atmosphere that is often seen at such places that hold a deeper meaning for their frequenters lives.

Another example of the meaningful part Eddie's Restaurant plays in people's lives is that it is often chosen as a place to celebrate some important moment in one's life over food; such as a birthday, promotion, or a game win. I myself witnessed two celebrations of birthdays that involved lots of love and the sharing of memorable thoughts. These examples solidify the idea that Eddie's is more than just a restaurant and a "third place", it is a place for sharing priceless moments with family or family-like people. In further support of this claim, I took the opportunity to ask the night supervisor a few questions. In response to a question regarding what she thought of the restaurant Lori Hendrickson's eyes lit up a little bit and she replied, "A diner-type of restaurant such as this plays a role in a community's life in that it brings people together in a comfortable area to socialize. I believe this place connects people in a way similar to how family could." If a seasoned supervisor can truly believe that the restaurant they are working at is important to its customers for a deeper reason than food, than that restaurant must play a positive role in the community. A key role that ultimately allows for people to come to the realization of how imperative being there for other people actually is as the journey of life continues. Furthermore, when people come to this conclusion on their own there is also a mentality of the

need to support others that becomes contagious and contributes to the overall wealth of life in the community.

As I walk up to the old register with my handwritten ticket for a cup of coffee and a piece of blueberry pie, I come to the conclusion that this place just might be developing into a “third place” of my own. After paying and snagging a mint out of the candy jar, I walk through the adequately spaced parking lot and start my car. As a song by *The Beach Boys* filters through the radio, my mind travels back to the first booth I sat in singing along to “*Stand by Me*”, and everything becomes full circle. Not only has the point been made abundantly clear that this restaurant is a “third place” as defined by meeting a greater half of Oldenburg’s criteria, but also it has been made apparent that Eddie’s Restaurant serves as a place for deeper connections between people in the community. While Eddie’s may not seem like a third place for everyone who walks through its doors, there is definite potential for it to become exactly that and even more. The potential to gain a third place that also plays a strong role in the creation of family-like bonds in the community. Eddie’s Restaurant offers a chance for the people in our community to realize the importance of being there for other people, and truly in captures the rare existence of a stand-by-each-other mentality in a society full of people lacking a sense of togetherness.

## Works Cited

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