

Coffee and Me

I never tire of the aroma of coffee brewing. Coffee and I were introduced to one another when I was thirty-seven years old. The first day of my first year in law school, I sat next to a woman about my age. We had drifted together toward a cluster of seated women. I held out my hand to her, “I am Sybil, glad to see someone my age.”

She smiled and nodded. “I am Carolyn, me too for sure.” The other ten women looked young and naïve to us.

At the noon break, we walked out to the gardens of the school and seated ourselves on a bench. She offered me half of her sandwich and from a large thermos, she had stowed in her canvas lunch bag, she pulled out a ~~ehina~~China mug. The smell was aromatic, the taste hot, steamy, bold and complex. It was a delicious black elixir. It quelled the day’s apprehension and took the chill off me. It felt like love at first scent.

“It’s Peets coffee freshly ground, signature, hand done, dark roasted blend. The shop is right here in Berkeley—a California treasure. Have you been there?”

I had of course not been to the shop. However, I had found two new friends, coffee and Carolyn. I never let either of them go. The other younger students filtered back to the quad with their lunches and steaming coffees in ~~styrofoam~~Styrofoam cups from pricey shops off campus.

Late that afternoon I was called out of the class to the office where I had an emergency telephone call from my neighbor who was watching my children after school until I returned. She had called to tell me that my 13-year-old son was being retrieved from a manhole in the center of our cul-de-sac by the fire department and that he was safe. Evidently, our sons had been playing together in the manhole and when her son and the other boy climbed out; the two boys had put the cover on the manhole as a joke and could not get it off for my son to scramble out.

She was in a mood and shrieked, "When will you be home?"

The next day at law school, I told my new friend what had happened and why I had left early the previous day. "Guess what," she answered, I have kids too, I completely understand. How are we going to get through three years of this?"

"Together, I imagine." I ~~said~~spoke. We both laughed and wondered if we would make the goals we had set for ourselves.

That week she brought the roasted coffee and we ate lunch together and soon a few other women joined us and the men, all 126 of them took turns meeting the twelve of us as the days went by.

The two of us soon decided that each week one of us would prepare the thermos of coffee and we would share our lunches. We were both divorced, with children and lived on tight budgets, with some child support. Mostly student loans

and work-study programs to pay the hefty tuition and provide for our children carried us. Gourmet coffee and eating out was a luxury we could not afford so we never indulged in the gourmet coffee shops around campus.

I began to cherish my coffee breaks with Peets and Carolyn. She taught me how to make coffee at home in a French press so I could begin my day with my newfound love.

By the time we graduated, my coffee was ~~necessary~~necessary, and our friendship deeply cemented. Time moved on and I eventually took a job in Miami where my coffee interests expanded, and I found myself at the walk up stands, which offered a variety of Cuban coffees. *Café Cubano* has a distinctive molasses-sweet taste with ~~carmel~~caramel-coated foam. This being the result of the first drops of brew pounded with sugar into syrup creating the foam at the top of the cup, which the Cubans call ~~espumita~~.

The first drops of brew mixed with sugar create a syrupy foam on top, which Cubans call *espundia*.

Cafecito, another type too strong for me, though it was only an ounce and a half. One of my favorites, the Cortdito was cut with steamed whole milk, which was delicious. But perfection for me was *Café con leche*, a Latin latte, of warm steamed milk with a shot of Cuban coffee *clarito*, or *mediano* for perfection, a pinch of salt and Voila!

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My coffee experience in Miami captivated me like a foreign lover where I planned each stolen moment, so I could sit peacefully on the beach drinking my perfect blend. This opportunity created a joyous balance in my life with duty and pleasure becoming equally as important to me in a way that had never been.

Too soon, my job transferred me to Washington DC where coffee was trending in all flavors and beans. I kept up with the beat. Now I purchased my coffee beans from a Barista and seriously studied the ethics of fair trade, direct trade and shade-grown coffee. My coffee taste evolved, again. I bought only the dark roast still using my French Press, grinding my own beans, checking the economics of properly grown coffee. Coffee from Ethiopia, Guatemala, the Americas and other developing nations were carefully scrutinized for their business practices while the coffee itself was smooth and balanced, the freshest and the best.

Coffee called to me again in trendy little shops. I discovered a new comer to the east coast called “Starbucks.” The product stole my coffee addicted heart. For years, I drank a tall latte with a double pump of vanilla and then branched out to more adventurous combinations; Sumatra, French roast, and Italian roast with caramelized sugar.

With my move to Arizona, I still loved my morning coffee, but the climate led me to explore the iced coffee flavors of White Chocolate Mocha and Americano. At the time, I also drank match green tea I ordered from Japan, but slowly they began to sell pure match tea in the states. I now find it at Starbucks and the green tea Frappuccino, with or without whipping cream, is pure heaven. The Starbucks recipe is on YouTube and I practiced making it until I had honed the recipe and could make a flawless replica.

Nevertheless, as time goes by I indulge myself with a Starbucks gift card and drink my green tea treats whenever I choose. It is a luxury compared to my days of sharing Peets coffee with Carolyn.

Yes, I still love my hot morning Joe, but I expanded my experience and amazingly, I gave up my French press and bought a Keurig one-cup coffee maker. Now I use prepackaged pods of java and have it instantly brewed. I don't buy Peets anymore but use San Francisco Bay coffee that I thought of using such an efficient mixture stings like the burn of an old love gone wrong.

The romance is gone; the steeping of boiling water in the French press, the waiting and the slow descent of the pressed grounds is a ritual I miss. The smell of coffee jogs my memory log with all the wonderful camaraderie of our study groups that began when I met coffee with Carolyn. Coffee, hot and dark fueled my energy, increased my endurance, and created a finely tuned focus on the legal issues.

Coffee nurtured me at night in my busied loneliness, when my children slept. My study breaks were filled with folding clothes and cooking meals ahead of time, early into the dawn. Mostly, those nights were spent reading case after case, after case, using the methodology for legal analysis, familiar to any first year law student using the acronym IRAC, issue, rule of law, application and conclusion. My faithful companion, through those long nights was always a pot of bold, dark roasted coffee in a favored *terra cotta* mug.

Word Count
1303

Class comments what happened to my children.