

A Memorable Misnomer



Summer is here and I'm in the mood for a cold refreshing egg cream. The name is a misnomer as this beverage contains neither eggs nor cream. There are various theories as to the origin of the name, but these seem to be speculation at best. I suppose a more accurate name would be a "seltzermilkchoco" drink.

I have read that egg creams were once so popular in New York City that author Elliot Willensky wrote in his book **When Brooklyn Was the World: 1920-1957** - "a candy store minus an egg cream, in Brooklyn at least, was as difficult to conceive of as the Earth without gravity."

The ingredients of a New York style egg cream are as follows, no variations or substitutions please:

1. One half cup cold whole milk
2. One cup bottled or preferably fountain seltzer
3. Two tablespoons Fox's u-bet chocolate syrup

Instructions:

1. Pour one half inch of milk into a tall glass.
2. Add seltzer to one inch from the top of the glass and stir vigorously with a long spoon, causing the mixture to become white and bubbly with a good head of foam.
3. Gently pour two tablespoons of Fox's u-bet chocolate syrup slowly down the inside of the glass then briskly stir only at the bottom of the glass where the chocolate sits. The resulting drink should have a dark brown bottom and a one inch high pure white foam top. If you mix it too much the foam disappears.
4. Drink Immediately!

Some small independent companies have tried to bottle premade egg creams. Nice try but don't bother. They taste nothing like the real thing. Enjoy and you're welcome.



The True Origins of the Egg Cream ***by Daniel Bell***

In a recent letter to New York Magazine, an innocent lass from California asked, "What is an egg cream?" and was answered by The Underground Gourmet that like the Hapsburg Holy Roman Empire, which was neither Holy or Roman, the egg cream contains neither egg nor cream but is simply a combination of chocolate syrup, seltzer and a dollop of milk invented at a small candy store in Manhattan. Not so. I happen to know that the egg cream was invented by my Uncle Hymie. It did have egg and it did have cream. And when I was ten years old, I worked behind his soda counter serving egg creams. Uncle Hymie had a candy store on Second Avenue and Eighth Street, on the northeast side of the avenue, not on the corner but a few doors, directly opposite the old Stuyvesant Polyclinic and the Ottendorfer Library. Second Avenue then was the great promenade area of the Jews of the Lower East Side, akin to the Champs Elysees of the Second Empire. In the affluent effulgence of the 1920s it had become the great entertainment and restaurant area from the embourgeoisement of the Jewish middle class. The old anarchist and socialist tea houses of Rivington Street had vanished with the disappearance of the radical movement. The immigrant Jews had come out of the lower depths of Attorney and Sheriff Streets to enjoy the bustle and gaiety of the newly widened Second Avenue as it ran from the foot of Houston Street to the small parks at 15th Street. Second Avenue then had four Jewish theatres: a roof garden theater on the building on Houston Street which breasted Second Avenue; two theatres at Third and Fourth Streets for musicals; and the great new Yiddish Art Theater, uptown at 12th Street across the way from the Cafe Royale, the combined Deux Magots and Flore of the New York Jewish theatrical world and literary intelligentsia. It was the generation after Tomashevsky and Jacob Adler. At the Yiddish Art Theater the great Maurice Schwartz would play Yoshe Kalb or Sholem Asch's God of Vengeance. But farther down there was less serious fare: for those seeking the nostalgia of the shtetl there was Aaron Lebedeff singing "Rumania"; across the street Molly Picon would be acting the gamine and mugging her small little face as she sang wry songs; for the lachrymose and lugubrious there was the tragedienne Jennie Goldstein wringing her heart

and wracking her sob-filled voice as she repeated the travails of the innocent immigrant girl seduced by the villainies of the cruel and heartless New York sweatshop world. (Oh, how my mother would sigh over the play in which Jennie Goldstein had her illegitimate child taken from her and confronted a dilemma, twenty years later, when she discovered her daughter just as she was on the verge of marrying the young doctor: Should she reveal herself or not? I leave it do the reader to decide what happened.) On Saturday night and Sunday matinees (Saturday afternoon was still the Jewish Sabbath) Second Avenue was thronged with people coming to the theaters and dining out in the meat restaurants (featuring "Rumanian broilings") or the dairy restaurants (Second Avenue then was called "the great bite way") and stopping off afterwards at the candy stores to have a chocolate soda the way a London theatergoer would have an "angel on horseback" as a savoury. One need only look at a French Impressionist painting to capture the spirit of the promenade and spectacle of Second Avenue in the 1920s. For Uncle Hymie Second Avenue was, as he used to say to me, the creme de la creme. He felt proud to be able to open a candy store on Second Avenue, even if it was only wide enough for one aisle and a counter, and he wanted to be worthy of that achievement. Like many Jewish immigrants who had never found their metier, Uncle Hymie was a frustrated man. His wife, my mother's sister, vaguely wanted her children to read books. But Uncle Hymie was uninterested in learning. He was not very religious, and he was dour towards people. He was an artist manque and felt frustrated by the candy store. Yet having worked himself up to Second Avenue from Avenue C, he now wanted to do something distinctive. Like most candy store owners, his chief item was the chocolate soda, made of one part syrup and two parts seltzer. Unlike most candy store owners, Uncle Hymie disdained the commercial syrup, which could be bought in one-gallon bottles - it was too thin, he complained. He preferred to make his own in fresh batches on the little stove in the back of the store. While the syrup was boiling, Uncle Hymie would sip a chocolate ice cream soda with chocolate ice cream, his favorite combination. But as he became engrossed in making the syrup, the chocolate ice cream would melt in the small heated room, and he would soon be sipping a creamy chocolate soda that was so rich he would have to

dilute it with more seltzer. And suddenly was born the idea of a chocolate cream soda made with syrup and melted chocolate ice cream. With great enthusiasm he dreamed of sweeping Second Avenue with his concoction. He had a sign made heralding the Chocolate Cream Soda. But there was an unforeseen difficulty. When the melted ice cream was mixed with the syrup in large batches, it would not distribute evenly through the syrup but would settle to the bottom. As Lord Kenneth Clark said of Civilisation, quoting Yeats: Things Fall Apart/The Center Cannot Hold. Uncle Hymie tried to whip the batches together in his malted machine, but after a while the cream would again begin to settle. Then came the stroke of inspiration. One of the esoteric items Uncle Hymie dispensed across the counter was an egg malted. What unknown genius had created it is a story for other chroniclers to tell, but the logic of it was clear. For many years the medical sage for all Jewish mothers was a certain Dr. Dubovsky who conducted a health advice column in the Jewish Daily Forward. For growing boys Dr. Dubovsky had one prescription: raw eggs. (For middle-aged Jewish mothers who wanted to stay healthy, it was Greek salad.) But how do you get a Jewish boy to suck raw eggs? That was where the unknown genius came in: drop the raw egg into a sweetened malted. It was a brilliant case of political accommodation between the warring generations. (As one of the Odets characters used to say: Some women have children; I have enemies!) The Jewish boys got the malteds they wanted; the mothers got the satisfaction of seeing the raw eggs consumed. The egg malted was in great demand on the Lower East Side. In making egg malteds Uncle Hymie had noticed, of course, that eggs thickened the malteds. Why not the same with the chocolate cream? He tried it. And thus the egg cream was born. The chocolate cream soda sign went down, and in its place rose the new one: Hymie's Egg Cream - syrup and cream held together by real eggs, plus seltzer. It was an instant success. From all over the East Side people flocked to drink Uncle Hymie's egg cream. And, inevitably, competition arose. On Seventh Street and Second Avenue Pop Auster opened a store and advertised Auster's Egg Cream. But something more diabolical happened. Diagonally across the street, on the southwest corner of Eighth Street and Second Avenue, where now stands a successor store that has become the turf of all the

East Side hippies, a competitor opened a candy store. His name, too, was Hymie (or so he claimed), and he set up a sign which said: Hymie's Egg Cream. Uncle Hymie went into a rage. Unable to patent his concoction, he put up a new sign: "The Original Egg Cream." On the East Side the meaning of such a sign was clear. It was a claim that fraud was being perpetrated. It amounted to throwing down a gauntlet. Many years before there had been a famous restaurant on Second Avenue called Moscovitz's. People came from all over to eat the mush steak and to hear Moscovitz play mournful songs on the cimbalon. Subsequently Moscovitz sold the restaurant, and the new owner kept the name on the marquee. But then Moscovitz opened another restaurant and called it the True Moscovitz. Whereupon the owners of the old restaurant put up a sign saying "The Original Moscovitz." (For years the battle raged, and in high dudgeon Moscovitz would go up and down the avenue saying, "How can they call themselves the Original Moscovitz when I am Moscovitz?") In this fashion Uncle Hymie sought to protect his claim. And for a short while he did. Word spread up and down the avenue that my Uncle Hymie's was the original and true egg cream. But then came disaster: the Depression. And with it a price war, and then defeat. For years the chocolate soda on Second Avenue had been 5 cents. But since Uncle Hymie had added some expensive ingredients, the egg cream commanded 6 cents. With sales falling off everywhere, the false Hymie cut his egg cream price to 5 cents. Reluctantly, my Uncle Hymie followed suit. But then the final, low blow. To his horror, Uncle Hymie found that his competitor (who was never referred to by name but only as the parech) had adulterated the product. The false Hymie had found that he could dispense with the egg and the cream and, by putting in some milk and reversing the spigot of the seltzer machine, concentrate the pressure in a narrow, powerful carbonated stream so as to fizz up the liquid into a frothy drink which, to the unwary and the innocent, tasted something like the original egg cream. Uncle Hymie, as a matter of pride, refused to follow suit. He really couldn't compete at 5 cents anyway, and he would not adulterate his artistic creation. He took down his sign and stopped selling egg creams; only chocolate and plain sodas. On Second Avenue, the creme went out of the creme de la creme.