

4/11/06

**“A Senior Perspective”
by
Tom Holbrook**

As per my norm this column will contain a hodge podge of miscellaneous exquisite thoughts designed to jog your mind and titillate your imagination. Just bits and pieces of brilliance from the recesses of my computer like brain.

I was recently approached by someone who asked the question, *“How many bites does it take you to finish a hot dog... 4 or 5?”* Can you remember when anyone ever asked you that question? Why do I get all the good ones? Never have I been asked that question by anyone so I had no immediate answer. (Another first) I immediately wrote the question down because I knew it would make a great article idea to bring before you and solicit your input. I have certainly eaten my share of those beautifully shaped missiles of mystery meat and have my opinion as to what makes the best topping for such a delicious sandwich. Okay, I admit it, I have opinions about everything.

I’m amazed at how geographically diverse the toppings used on hot dogs range. The typical West Virginia hot dog is usually covered with a fine line of catsup and mustard, followed with a layer of homemade hot dog chili, (no canned imitations and no beans, please,) a layer of chopped sweet onions, and a not too generous layer of cole slaw. Of course, this mixture is often reduced to the individual parts of its whole with some eating only mustard (ballgame style;) mustard and onions; mustard, chili and onions; chili and onions; chili and slaw; mustard, chili and slaw; mustard, onions and slaw; or the grand kid’s favorite... catsup only.

New Yorkers I have spoken with say hot mustard, pickle relish and sour kraut is good but their favorite is New York Vendor “Red Hots” which takes a special sauce comprised of:

2 large onions (sliced thin and quartered)

1/3 cup bottled chili sauce.

1 tbsp. water.

1 tbsp. distilled white vinegar.

3/4 tsp. sugar.

Put that sauce over your favorite mustard and hot dog and any New Yorker, be it Up Stater, Long Islander or Manhattanite, will swear they’ve got the best “dog” anywhere.

Those from the home of the White Sox and Cubbies would differ, naturally, and steer you toward their Chicago Dog consisting of the weird concoction of Yellow Mustard, Bright Green Pickle Relish, Fresh Chopped Onions, Two Tomato Wedges, Kosher Pickle Spear, Two Hot Sport Peppers, and a Dash of Celery Salt... a true mouthful, and it’s delicious.

In my opinion... and we all know it's the one that really matters here... the chili sauce is that which makes the difference in all the hot dogs, regardless of where you live. It should be sweet, a little runny, and have a slight bite to it to make it a sauce of memorable quality. Too many grab a can off the grocery shelf, plop it in a pan and think they've got it covered... get outta the kitchen. It's home made chili or none at all. Of course, even with the best chili made a hot dog is not a hot dog without a deliciously sweet, properly chopped, Vidalia Onion out of Georgia, spread all over the top of it.

I say properly chopped because the pieces can't be too finely chopped because then all you get is onion juice. Each piece must be big enough so that each bite will give you several good size chunks of crunchy onion to bring all the other tastes together. Remember, it truly is blasphemy to eat a hot dog with out onions.

Can you imagine there are actually people who will not eat hot dogs because they happened to take a tour of a hot dog factory? They said once they saw what was in a hot dog's innards they couldn't bring themselves to eat another one. Wimps! What difference does it make what's in them... heat will kill anything left that's not good for you. Some of my best friends are hotdogphobics but I still love them... even in their ignorance... especially the ones from Ohio.

You might ask just where did this phenomenon begin and from where did the name "hot dog" come. I'm glad you asked. My dear and closest friend Barry Popik of the American Dialect Society researched this information so I hope it is accurate. It seems the contents of sausage links in the mid 1800s led to some thinking there was a link to missing dogs, in some way. In fact Mr. Popik even found a popular song of 1860, of which you may know another version:

Oh where, oh where has my little dog gone,
Oh where, oh where can he be?
Now sausage is good and baloney of course,
They make them of dog, they make them of horse,
Oh where, oh where has my little dog gone?
I think they made them of he.

So much for the sandwich Americans love... may you find the perfect hot dog and may it be a foot long. Of course, if it was, it would drastically change the answer to how many bites it takes to consume one of these delicious critters. Let me know what your average consumption count is if you please and we'll report on it in a future article.

See you next week!

#

