

Street Eating



I attended the first *Taste of Chicago*. It took place in 1980. I was young and enthusiastic.

The city and organizers blocked off a couple of blocks on Michigan Avenue in front of Water Tower Place and set up some of the most amazing food. It was a grand affair. Classical music. The whole bit. They really tried to do it up right. I can recall lots of white table cloths. I don't remember much about the food except that it was small portions. They were exotic things I had never eaten and you paid very small amounts of money just for these little "tastes." There weren't a ton of people there. It was a really nice occasion. It was a great way for a young woman like me to "test" out really nice restaurants so I could save my money and know where I wanted to go; or tell my date where I wanted him to take me.

The *Taste of Chicago* is returning this year for the first time since COVID. It will be in early September, when it's likely going to be blazing hot. There will be millions of bodies crammed into the area. Every grill restaurant in Chicago will have some kind of rib cooking and I wouldn't get caught dead there. The food is rumored to be expensive, but I suppose you get more than you used to. When I see people interviewed on the

news they seem to be having a really good time but they are covered in sweat and barbecue sauce. One year the featured grilled item was alligator. For several years since it's been turkey legs. Not my kind of scene.

I also attended the first *Taste of Madison* in Madison, Wisconsin. It was set up around the beautiful capital building with the streets around it blocked off so everyone had plenty of room to walk. They had bands set up around the capital so on each intersection you could listen to a different kind of music. The restaurants set up their booths and made their food. It took place over Labor Day weekend. I remember the food well. Not as exciting as Chicago and not as much variety but we had good friends with us, so we had a good time.

One thing sort of "set my husband off" though. There weren't white table cloths and places to sit like the first *Taste of Chicago*. There was nowhere to sit at all. At one point we bought a piece of pizza and decided we had to sit somewhere to eat it; mostly because our feet were tired but also because the slices were those huge triangles, so it was impossible to maneuver the pizza and a drink. Something had to be put down while you ate. We found curb space to sit.

My husband made the killer observation. He looked down and realized he was eating spread-eagle over a sewer.

He said, "Something is wrong with this picture. I'm eating pizza over a sewer."

We all laughed but we've never attended a "food fest" since.

Cheers,