

S O A P B O X

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Dreaming of a Drive-Through World

By CLAUDIA GRYPVATZ COPQUIN

NOT far from Pittsburgh, men on the go can polish off a fast-food meal and then zip over to another sort of drive-through, this one just for dessert. The single item on the menu: fresh cheesecake. Yep, real girls taking their clothes off in something akin to a department store window. At 20 bucks for two minutes, not exactly a cheap thrill, but try to match that for convenience!

The owners of the establishment have contrasted this live-action ingenuity with that of a South Carolina businessman who offers harried mourners the option of a drive-through viewing of their dearly departed.

Since 1975, when McDonald's opened its first drive-through in Arizona, the idea has been cleverly embellished throughout the country. For example, in parts of California a sugar craving can be squelched by zooming into a Baskin-Robbins; the ensuing stomach ache cured by driving up to a service window at a Walgreens pharmacy.

Nobody seems to know how many drive-through businesses we have here on Long Island, but whatever that number is, speaking on behalf of all of us who are energy challenged, I say it's not nearly enough. And why can't we be as progressive as, say, Dallas, where cash-strapped motorists can drive through pawnshops?

Claudia Gryvatz Copquin lives in Northport.

Oh sure, we have our banks and our fast-food places. And I do cherish those, believe you me. I'll never forget my utter delight and disbelief at discovering my very first drive-through convenience store. This was years ago, after relocating to the suburbs from Queens, where you can't even drive through your own street.

"Let me get this straight," I said to my friend in dizzy incredulity. "You can buy milk without getting out of the car?" Never mind that said establishment was 12 miles from my house. From that day forward, I was a convert on automatic pilot.

She would definitely brake for sushi.

The appeal exceeds the obvious convenience factor; drive-through service seems deviously extravagant, a ludicrous indulgence for someone like me — a middle-aged mom who is neither handicapped nor feeble and perfectly capable of getting in and out of a car with only minor complications. Still to me any drive-through opportunity is cause for celebration and a road trip. Indeed, a party on wheels: "Hey kids, there's a new drive-through Starbucks in Farmingdale. Let's go for dinner!"

I weep with envy when a Krispy Kreme drive-through grand opening

makes headlines — in other states. And I giddily daydream about the wealth of untapped opportunities for us Long Islanders, for in the future, I foresee a drive-through in every — well, in every driveway.

Imagine a drive-through Staples. "I need some copy paper, black pens, oh, and a Pentium 4-2.6GHZ 512KB 400MHZ FSB."

Or how about a drive-through bakery? "I'll have two loaves of French and a peach pie, supersized."

A drive-through Hallmark shop would certainly save us all time. "I need a birthday card for my 6-year-old stepdog and a 'Sorry you got demoted' sentiment for a co-worker. Her name is Ethel." Followed by, "Are you sure you're out of Ethels? Then I'll take a stock-loss condolence card for a day-trader named Bill."

Dry cleaners. Sushi. Post office. The possibilities are intoxicating. And by the way, did you know that daiquiris are available at drive-throughs in New Orleans? O.K., we'll put the brakes on drive-through liquor, but what about drive-through toy stores? Say goodbye to tantrum-inspired impulse purchases at the checkout.

I think these ideas will catch on. In fact, a brilliant visionary with an eye toward the past just opened a photo development drive-through in my county. Delirious with joy, I grabbed my rolls of film and went for a spin. Just before the clerk had a chance to thank me for the business, I rolled my window all the way down, looked him sweetly in the eyes and gently held his face in my hands.

"You," I whispered, choking back tears of happiness, "complete me." ■



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LETTERS

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ideology. The electorate has become more sophisticated in making choices. To borrow a line from Wall Street, now no one can depend on pri-

touch and construct these bones into a unified skeleton, and we saw for ourselves that they actually are con-