

Nick and Choose { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

GLUTTON, PUNISHED

Nick triple-dog dares you to beat his record.



Read more at improper.com/blogs.

FOOD CHALLENGES HOLD A peculiar allure. Events like the Nathan's Hot Dog Eating Contest or shows like *Man v. Food* have earned real followings, and as they require physical exertion and stamina, parallels can be made to traditional sport. But perhaps the biggest difference, among many, is that sports can inspire the onlooker. A child watches David Ortiz smash a homer and vows to become a ballplayer. No one watches a man ingurgitate a wheelbarrow full of pulled pork and thinks, one day, that's going to be me.

Yet there I was, staring at the Tasty Burger Challenge. On the menu, it reads like a provocation: three half-pound hot dogs topped with a split cheeseburger, chili, cheese sauce and bacon, served on a sub roll. Thinking of it as a schoolyard dare may be the key to understanding why someone would choose to pack their esophagus like a musket. If someone calls you a chicken, sometimes the only proper recourse is to eat a family-size bucket of extra-crispy.

Knowing I'd need help, I turned to Belmont native and competitive eater Crazy Legs Conti. The record holder in such prestigious categories as beef brisket and Twinkies, Conti told me to eat the toppings first in order to save my strength for the frankfurter Cerberus. But what about chugging water beforehand to stretch my stomach? "Don't chug anything except mental awesomeness," said my seasoned guide. "Maybe listen to some pump-up music. Something good, like Air Supply or early Menudo."

Of course, I'd need a partner, someone to share in the pain and potential glory. Thankfully, I know many men with voracious appetites. Barrel-chested heroes who can destroy a hoagie, sub or grinder without pausing to belch. Regretfully, they were all out of town.

So on the big day, I arrived at Tasty Burger with my girlfriend Susan, a compact young blonde annoyed at not having been considered my first option. I'd paid for this gaffe with a barrage of trash talk, but once we learned that no woman has ever completed the challenge, we came to an understanding. We would support each other through this test, and I would witness her smashing chili-covered meat into her face and still find her attractive.

Contenders have one hour to complete the challenge. Once the timer begins, things progress in a gaseous haze, but these are moments of clarity I've been able to scrape together:

HOT DOG #1: As tracks from the *Rocky IV* soundtrack hit your ears (part of chef Greg Weinstock's special challenge mix), your mind begins to open to the notion of beating Matthew Hummel's record of 17 minutes, 31 seconds. Your empty stomach is already on board. And, initially, your tongue raises no protest. When you're facing 4.5 pounds of food, flavor is a vital factor, and Tasty Burger delivers. First one down in eight minutes.

HOT DOG #2: Crazy Legs' advice helped my speed, but his plan was abandoned out of necessity halfway through round two. The frank's flavor, at first meaty, turns salty, then altogether noxious. Chili, bread, lashings of hot sauce, they were all mixed in to cloak the flavor. Second down in 17 minutes.

HOT DOG #3: Susan hit a food wall. Sitting by the corpses of her massacred wieners, I entered a horrible fever-dream. Paying for my sinful gluttony, the last devil dog seemed to extend into infinity. Swallowing turned to choking down, and with each bite, Satan taunted me with the forcemeat's tumescence. Gathering my strength, I knew that, like Orpheus and Eurydice in their jaunt through the underworld, Susan and I would make it through together as long as I didn't look back. Finished in 58 minutes, four seconds.

Your body has a lot of questions after a victorious food challenge. The most pressing is, "When can I throw up?" The calorie count is of course a morbid curiosity, but it's the salt that gets you. Just one hot dog holds about 1,800 milligrams of sodium. I wasn't hungry for two days after, but I've never been thirstier.

It's achieving this kind of hideous benchmark that makes the experience worthwhile. I'm only the fifth person to complete the Tasty Burger Challenge, and that does give me some level of pride. More importantly, I know that, should my heart pop now or I live the extra 60 years I have planned, I will never eat a bigger, unhealthier meal. I extended myself and found one of my life's boundaries. It's not a first kiss or a graduation, but it's a place I've seen and can now never return to, and I'm richer, and slightly fatter, for the experience. ***



Impersonals

LE HORREUR

SHOPPERS BEWARE: There is a French home decor store in the South End whose owner harassed my mother this weekend. He's a present day Soup Nazi and a complete maniac. My mother was perusing some tablecloths when he shouted that she belonged "in a mall." Apparently, this is how he seduces potential customers. An online search turned up plenty of similar experiences; my personal favorite involved a woman wearing her newborn in a baby carrier—they had to call the police on him! This man shouldn't be allowed to own a store and to continue to harass his customers. Do not go to this store! *Tour de force*

To the girl at Regal Cinemas Fenway's July 17, 7:10 pm

screening of Harry Potter: Sobbing hysterically through three-quarters of the film made it like the setup for a Monty Python sketch. Eric Idle bawling and babbling like a ninny for three minutes: funny. Paying \$20 to listen to an hour and a half of bawling and sniveling while trying to enjoy a film: not funny. Next time, wait until Netflix, or sob quietly. *Harry Potter's flying circus*

To the inhumane photographer:

I hope you passed your crappy photography class after you took all those pictures of the sleeping homeless man on Gloucester Street on July 4. You took shots from all angles like a regular Nigel Barker. That man has had some bad luck and perhaps made some poor life decisions, but he's still a human being. I hope that he finds you, steals your \$1,000 camera and takes pictures of you crying.

Karma will have its vengeance

Unrequited crush? Bad hair? Need to vent? Send your e-mails of love and spleen to impersonals@improper.com, or visit

Send your stories and suggestions to nick@improper.com.