

My Yogurt Jones

by Con Chapman

Like most addicts, I can remember my first time—over forty years ago—as if it were yesterday.

I was working the grill at a snack bar at the University of Chicago when a guy named Manny—who claimed to be a vegetarian despite a gut that impressed even the campus cops—offered me a hit.

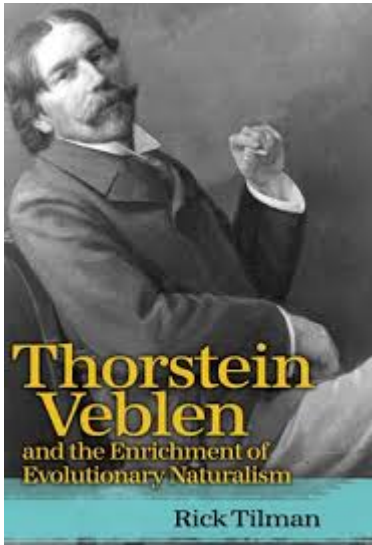


“This is good stuff,” he said as I fixed myself a cheeseburger.

“What is it?”

“Try it,” he said with a sidewise glance. He seemed to be sizing me up, seeing if I was man enough—as former philandering Chicago prof Thorstein Veblen observed, use of intoxicants is a mark of manly indulgence practiced as a form of emulation among primitive tribes and affluent Americans.

Or maybe he was thinking of me as a prospective customer, the way all “pushers” do. Probably had a lot of student loans to pay off.



Thorstein: "Take your wife—please?"

I said "Okay" and after filling up a spoon, I took a hit. To say that I was changed, changed utterly, as Yeats wrote in the poem we read in "Humanities 101: The Study of Literary Wholes," would be an understatement. It was as if my entire being had been transformed into *The Body Electric*—Whitman's phrase, not mine, but he's dead so I borrowed it. I felt as if I was standing under a warm shower, or wrapped in a down blanket.

Yes, yogurt will do that to you.

I don't know what it is about the stuff. Maybe it's the bacteria it provides, so essential to the functioning of the human body, which for millions of years used those friendly little micro-organisms to keep its intestines working properly. Mankind's innards have been out of whack ever since eating dirt went out of style.



"Sniff-is that yogurt I smell?"

And so began my love affair with a thick, semisolid substance. Sort of like Mary Van de Velde, the chubby girl who was assigned to me in my 6th grade polka troupe.

To paraphrase Bob Dylan, I started out on fruit-on-the-bottom but soon hit the harder stuff; plain yogurt, the kind the Turks and Bulgarians ate in those commercials that featured an English-language voiceover saying the village elders depicted in the film were over 150 years old. Of course there was no way to verify the claim, birth records in Bulgarian villages being somewhat deficient by U.S. standards, but it didn't matter. If you could eke out even another three score and ten years on top of your allotted time by eating something that tasted good—to me at least—it was a win-win situation.

And then there was the evidence of hard science; an experiment at MIT found that mice who were fed yogurt grew thicker fur and developed bigger balls that projected outwards, giving them a swaggering air. If I ate acidulous acidophilus assiduously—and try saying *that* five times fast—I'd be the king of the assisted living center when I was 80; head full of hair and a set of *cojones* that would draw lustful stares from the mah-jong tables.

What a bust.

Back when I was underemployed in a series of low-wage jobs in my twenties I even tried to set up my own manufacturing operation, sort of a yogurt meth lab, like the guy in *Breaking Bad*. I bought one of those home yogurt makers but I was no match for the drug kingpins. The stuff I produced was thin, watery—nowhere near as good as the high-quality “white lightning” the yogurt kingpins cranked out. I was hooked on the creamy, gelatinous texture they achieved. How did they do it? Who knows what they were feeding their cows.

Anti-yogurt hysteria movie of the 40's.

Of course you have to hide a yogurt addiction if you want to make it in the highly competitive world of business, so I resorted to easily-concealed yogurt snacks; yogurt-covered raisins, yogurt-covered malted milk balls, even yogurt-covered pretzels. The latter sound awful, but the mixture of sweet and salt added a new “kick” to my yogurt high. I needed it, just as every junkie has to keep increasing his dose to get the same effect he got with less heroin when he was a beginner.

As long as I got my yogurt I was okay—I got married, even started a family. I couldn't let my kids know—I didn't want them to go down the same bacteria-riddled road I walked every day. When one of them would throw a yogurt container that still had some left in it into the trash, I'd dig it out and give them a stern lecture about how my parents lived through the Depression and taught me not to waste food. Then I'd proceed to eat it, like George Costanza in the *Seinfeld* “clair” episode, drawing disgusted “Ewws!” from them. Little did they know what I was hiding.



“If you're a lumberjack, where's your lumber?”

I pass among members of non-yogurt society nervously. At quaint little New England bed-and-breakfasts you sit at communal tables for the first meal of the day, and my little bowl of yogurt and muesli looks lost among hardy Yankee types bulking up for a day of manual labor in the form of cross-country skiing by eating bacon ‘n eggs ‘n ham ‘n biscuits ‘n hash browns ‘n sausage ‘n pancakes ‘n syrup ‘n waffles. (I have to stop now, I'm out of apostrophes.) Inevitably some lunkhead in a black and red checked shirt and suspenders will say something like “That's not much of a breakfast, is it? Har-har-har!”

I plead ill health, or a “small is beautiful” philosophy, or say I'm going to spend the day wandering lonely as a cloud taking the road less traveled by so I can write some poetry. Mrs. Lunkhead usually chimes in at that point with “Oh, that sounds nice!” saving me from a potentially embarrassing revelation that, if it became more widely known would bar me from polite society and expose me to the obloquy of all right-thinking men:

I have a yogurt jones.

