

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

GUESTWORDS: Bette-Jane Raphael

So Long, Snowflake

On summer evenings the line snakes out the door of the somewhat ramshackle building standing alone in an unkempt parking lot on Route 27, about a quarter of the way between East Hampton and Amagansett. Business is brisk at Snowflake, where couples and families, grown-ups and kids, whole Little League teams, and birthday parties wait their turn to order cold treats on a warm night.

The wait gives people time to pet one another's dogs, look over one another's orders, comment on the

weather and how apropos it is to ice cream and decide whether to have a cup or a cone, a sundae or a dip, two scoops or one. The possibilities are many, the contemplation of them pleasant, and the final choice, in one's hand and on one's tongue, a satisfying end to a summer day.

Rainbow Sprinkles

Satisfaction is Snowflake's stock in trade. It has been for the past 50 years. And when the market forces of real estate cause it to close its order window for the last time in a couple

of weeks, it will be sorely missed by many, among them my family and me.

We go back quite a way together. My 26-year-old stepson was taken to Snowflake for bowls of chili and cups of soft ice cream on the long-ago nights his dad and I had a date for dinner. My 16-year-old son fell asleep in the car on many a bygone Sunday night, covered with rainbow sprinkles after a farewell visit to Snowflake on our way back to the city. My 4-year-old daughter already thinks of it as a warm weather given, as integral a part of summer as the beach.

Notes From Madoo

ROBERT DASH

Some plants make it. Some not. Some rise in the world's affections, indispensable fixtures of fine gardens, scripted on the lists of every landscape and designer, the thoughts and aspirations of every eager gardener, offered in multiple varietal forms by nurseries and garden centers, carried through the seasons by florists. Artists and sculptors draw, paint, and model them, couches, chairs, and window settings eventually wear them, a whole publishing industry is devoted to their care while hybridists hasten to their improvement as avidly as butterflies to buddleias.

As you read this, probably 20 or more new daylilies have been named. From ocean to ocean, shipments of them find harbors in the city, town, and hamlet, while local, regional, and national societies chorus their many charms. And then surfeit and overkill follow avidity, and taste fickles elsewhere. Case in point is the carnation, which at one time took the heart, mind, and eye of the Western gardener. In Japan at one time, the maligned dandelion was hybridized to an astounding 600 varieties. There was even a black one. Not one remains except the wild form, which, on a spring lawn, has its momentary cachet, while forms of carnations are now severely reduced in array and number and many cultivars no longer exist.

Certain flowers have never left the affections. The rose everywhere remains in high regard, so much so that when one mentions the garden, most everyone thinks of roses in a most Pavlovian manner and there are societies and gardens devoted entirely to them as well as to boxwood and begonias, rhododendron and lilies, orchids and African violets. At one time I belonged to the Northern Nut Growers Association and thought to orchard pecans when the nut was, to

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Staying Unsticky

From April until October, year in and year out, Snowflake has always been there for us when we needed it. As a reward for good behavior; as an outing to look forward to on an otherwise disappointing, perhaps rainy, day; as a final Sunday night stop, the cherry on top of a great weekend.

On most visits we get our orders and traipse outside balancing cups and cones, spoons and napkins, straws and more napkins, and perch at one of the worn wooden tables set out on patches of crabgrass under the unromantic sodium streetlights. There, my husband and I hand the sundae we are sharing back and forth, our son savors his latest creation (currently nonfat mocha chip ice cream with chocolate fudge on top), our daughter delicately nibbles the chips off her Chipwich, and our dog laps up the fallen drops of ice cream congealing on the ground.

Conversation isn't a strong point on these outings, no more than atmosphere. As we taste and comment on one another's goodies and try to keep ourselves relatively unsticky while wiping ice cream off small arms and lips, it's more a matter of sharing

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the experience.

Although it may be a bit run down for a Norman Rockwell, Snowflake is as quintessentially American as a Thanksgiving table. One look at the line on a Saturday night confirms the fact that we consume more ice cream than any other country in the world.

And talk about your democracy! Snowflake is nothing if not democratic, ice cream is being a great leveler. East Siders and East Enders wait in line side by side here. Service is strictly on a first come, first served basis. Even on a Friday night in July, you don't need a reservation. And when the order window is shut unforgivingly at 9:50 sharp, not even Ronald Perelman could get the staff to open it.

Just how small-town-America Snowflake is became clear to us last summer, when we went to the Adirondacks for a week. As the four of us traveled from place to place, we marveled at the fact that each tiny town had its own ice cream stand.

Saying Goodbye

Some even had two of them — not franchises of nationwide chains, but locally owned and run businesses, each with its own name and speciality (like hot fudge so thick it had to be chewed, and butterscotch so rich you could smell the Highlands). We tried a new place every day, and often remarked that we'd be sorry to leave all this bounty, but that it would be okay; when we got home, we could go to Snowflake.

Not any more, though, not after Oct. 19. The time has come to say thanks for the memories, and to wave goodbye to this little island of real life in a sea of Hamptons hype; this small slice of family-friendly civilization; this tiny outpost of pre-sushi taste; this icon of innocence; this simple spot; this happy place; this Snowflake.

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