

Something new, something old and a lot of laughs: A good day in Longview

Written by BY TERRY MATHEWS, News-Telegram Arts Editor
Thursday, 21 June 2012 13:16

Spent my day off in Longview. Traveled down there to see "Bernie" for the second time and to try a Thai restaurant called Lil Thai House, located at 212 North Fredonia, in the heart of a refurbished downtown. Also wanted to see "Bernie" a second time to hear what I missed the first viewing, when I laughed over a lot of the movie's punch line.



Pat Lawrence and her husband, Trice, are quite the experts when it comes to Thai food, so Pat agreed to join me. We were not disappointed.

The tiny place packs in people (we had to wait for a table) and flavor. It's been open for 4 years and seems to be a real favorite of locals.

One of the many hand-drawn signs at the counter says, "This is not fast food. Please be patient." Everything is cooked to order by the owner's wife in the small, open galley kitchen right behind the cash register.

A nearby cooler had shrimp spring rolls (2 for \$5) that were so fresh you could smell the mint inside. They were served with a fish sauce that was at once pungent and sweet, and a "house specialty sauce," which turned out to be a tasty riff on traditional peanut sauces.

Of course, we ordered the Pad Thai (\$11.99), a dish that Pat says is as individual as the person cooking it. We asked for shrimp with ours (for an extra \$2), although it usually comes with chicken. The dish features rice noodles stir-fried in a sweet and tangy sauce with your choice of chicken, pork, or beef, egg, sprouts, and green onion. Pat said it was some of the best Pad Thai

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she'd ever had.

The owner, whose name I didn't get because he never had a minute to spare during our visit, suggested the pineapple fried rice (\$12.99) which was a stir-fried jasmine rice with chicken, shrimp, pineapple, cashews, onion and raisins. I've never had raisins - or pineapple for that matter - in my fried rice, but they worked in this dish.

The servings were oversized. If you and a friend had one favorite, one order would be more than enough for lunch, especially if you added two spring rolls and some soup, which we regretted not trying.

We'll go back.

Lil Thai House is open 11 a.m. until 2 p.m. Tuesday - Friday and from 5 p.m. until 8 p.m. on Friday and Saturday. Get there early. Be prepared to wait. It's well worth your time.

Call 903-236-0155 for take out orders.

Click [here](#) to check out their complete menu. And check out the raves for them on Yelp and Urban Spoon.

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Pat and I made the 1:30 showing of "Bernie." There weren't 10 people there, but everyone of us laughed from beginning to end.

One of the young employees caught us on the way out and said, "I just don't see what can be so funny about a murder. It really happened, you know." Pat and I just looked at her and

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laughed out loud. "Trust us," I said. "It's funny enough for us to drive over an hour to see it a second time." I don't think she got it.

An older employee, however, said, "That was me in there during my break. I've seen it three times and want to see it again." Maybe you need to be of a certain age to appreciate all the little nuances of small town life brought out in the film. Or maybe the young thing just couldn't appreciate funny so close to the bone.

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After the movie, Pat and I headed to my all-time favorite East Texas restaurant, Johnny Cace's, located at 1501 East Marshall (Highway 80) near downtown.



My family's been going to Cace's since I was a little girl. I don't remember it, but Mother says we started going there when the family-owned place was downtown next to the railroad tracks.

My parents went to Cace's every weekend and our family went for special occasions. I felt like such a grown up, going in, being greeted by name by the man himself. I don't think he ever forgot a face. The last time I saw him, he was suffering from the effects of a stroke, but his eyes still lit up when he saw my mother and me.

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"Hi, Madeline," he said. "And who is this? It can't be Terry? She's so grown up." (I was 45 at the time.)



Mr. Cace himself served my first platter of raw oysters. I liked him so much that I couldn't refuse to eat one, especially when he stood there, watching to see my reaction. I'm sure my parents put him up to it, it being my 16th birthday and my having sworn for years that I would never let one of those ugly things past my lips.

Of course, it was love at first bite. I've eaten oysters all over the planet and NONE compare to Cace's. I'm proolly all kinds of prejudiced, but, to me, the oysters cultivated in Cace's Gulf Coast beds are the sweetest, plumpest, juiciest morsels ever. And, they made their red sauce just like my mama's.

His son, Gerard, runs the place now. Saw him working in the kitchen, not out on the floor like his daddy used to be. The place is not as elegant as it once was. It is in serious need of a facelight and a deep steam cleaning, but I can't help but get that a warm feeling when I walk through those doors and see Mr. Cace's stately oil portrait on the wall.

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