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Even though I'd been vacationing in New Hampshire for decades, when I took up permanent residency I discovered more than a few things. Or maybe all those years in Switzerland made me forget some of the quirks of life in New England. Anyway, I was soon reminded that it was really humid in the summer and really, really cold in the winter. (Yes, colder than Switzerland.) After a blunder or two, I figured out the national holidays and that cocktails and dinner shouldn't start at eight. And I learned that people in New England have an uncanny fondness for the dump.

And so I adapted. I learned to live with bad hair for three months out of twelve; bought a down parka; invited friends for six-thirty and celebrated Martin Luther King Day. But when it came to the dump, I was stumped. Still am. In all the time I called Geneva home, the dump was never a major topic of discussion, fond or otherwise.

Okay, maybe I shared a few of my misadventures at the recycling center. Most notable was the time a neighbor scolded and threatened to call the police on me for recycling on Sunday afternoon. It was hardly my fault. Opening hours, Monday through Friday from ten to four, didn't sit well with my seven to seven workday. The weekend option, Saturday from eight to eleven, seemed like an evil attempt to sabotage a lazy do-nothing morning. Just so you know I didn't jump the fence. The recycling bins and barrels were not barricaded behind a heavy gate but opening hours and rules were clearly posted. Everyone felt honor bound to follow them. Well, everyone except this no-so-honorable expatriate.

And by the way, when and who prettied things up and renamed it the transfer station? I'm guessing the name change happened about the same time that garage and trash collectors became sanitation engineers. Call it what you like, it's still the dump. And in a small town, the people who work there are referred to by name or as so-and-so's son, the nice one or the tall, skinny guy with glasses but not by job titles.

But back to New Englanders and their affinity for the dump. Growing up in suburbia, I often accompanied my dad on his weekly trips to the dump. When I was ten, watching our trash get churned up and smashed in the hopper was among the more intriguing errands I undertook with him. But interesting is relative. A trip to the dump was certainly better than shopping for grass seed but nowhere near as fun as checking out the lobster tank at the fish market.

Somewhere along the way I outgrew my interest in the dump. Blame it on the neighbor who chastised me for recycling on a Sunday. Now, the dump is just a place that, when I have to go there, they have to take my trash ... as long as the sticker on the windshield of my car is up to date.

This indifference is hardly the norm. Most of my friends, family and neighbors look forward to dump runs. In particular, the transplants from cities and towns south of the New Hampshire border enjoy the dump as a bit of nostalgic fun. Perhaps it brings back memories of Saturday mornings with their fathers. For others, including my male relatives, the dump is a place to catch up with friends or find a treasure at the swap table. As for me, I'm more than happy to enjoy a lazy Saturday morning and let my dad go to the dump without me.

Bon appétit!



Pumpkin-Ginger Muffins

A delicious fall treat for a lazy weekend morning! Enjoy!

Makes about 18 muffins

2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons ground ginger
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup chopped crystallized ginger
1 cup light brown sugar
1/2 cup (1 stick) butter at room temperature
3 large eggs
1 15-ounce can (1 3/4 cup) pure pumpkin
1/2 cup maple syrup
1/2 cup sour cream
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Line standard (1/3-cup) muffin tins with paper liners.

Put the flour, ground ginger, cinnamon, baking soda and salt in a bowl and whisk to combine. Add the crystallized ginger and whisk again.

Using an electric mixer, beat the brown sugar and butter in large bowl until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, 1 at a time, and mix well after each addition. Beat in the pumpkin, maple syrup, sour cream and vanilla. With the mixer on low speed, add the dry ingredients in 2 batches and mix until just combined.

Fill the muffin cups about two-thirds full. Bake at 350 degrees until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Cool the muffins in the pan for a few minutes before transferring to a cooling rack. Serve the muffins warm or at room temperature.