

## Family Wing Ding

*Feeling cooped up? Take the Kids to Duff's*

by Jonathan Zweig

**Duff's Famous Wings**  
1604 Bayview Ave., (416) 544-0100

God bless Teressa Bellissimo. Never heard of her, you say? Well, I can just about guarantee that you have eaten the fruits of her labour. As legend has it, Teressa was the one who, in 1964, originally cooked up the idea of frying and serving the bits of a chicken usually destined for the garbage or soup pot – that is, the wings. As the story goes, Ms. Bellissimo and her son Domenic were working at the now-famous Anchor Bar in Buffalo late one Friday night, when a group of Domenic's friends came in sporting a severe case of the munchies. So, as if in a scene right out of *Good Fellas*, Teressa promptly prepared a late-night meal for her son and his buddies, and the rest is pub-and-grill history.

Sheri and I are not above thrusting our own tastes upon our children, so a family outing to a wing joint hardly seemed out of the question. Duff's Famous Wings, on Bayview north of Davisville, was our destination.

As we approached the restaurant, I wondered aloud, *where do you park?* Being in midtown Toronto, the answer naturally was wherever you can. Then a spot opened up on the street directly in front! We couldn't have gotten any closer if we tried, short of driving right into Duff's quaint little (and I mean little) outdoor patio.

Inside, Duff's is cozy and welcoming. It is family-owned and -operated, and for some reason, you can just tell. It is small – four TVs are spread throughout and I don't think there is a single seat that wouldn't give you a good view of one of them – but you don't feel cramped. Friendly staff abound, and all of them seem eager to please. A stone archway appears about a third of the way in, thus signalling the end of the stone-floored area, and the rest is scuffed and worn hardwood. Chalkboards, beer banners, placards and poster prints adorn the walls, one chalkboard listing the vast array of beers available, both bottled and on tap.

Sounds more like a bar than a family restaurant, right? Well as I looked around, every single table save for one had a ten-or-under at it, and many of the highchairs (unfortunately the popular but potentially dangerous wooden type) were in use. I couldn't really tell if this was Duff's target market, but like it or not, families definitely come here.

We had the good fortune of both kids being in a fine mood, and the crayons and colouring sheets provided as soon as we sat down only helped. We were told that the wings take 15 to 20 minutes to prepare, so order fast! Zara wanted wings, so we didn't bother with the kids' menu for her. Just to be safe, we ordered a grilled cheese sandwich for Jorey. The kids' menu also has chicken fingers, hamburger, cheeseburger and hot dog, all with fries and pop, milk or juice, and all for \$4.25 – a nice price, but no dessert included. (You can, however, order a kids' single scoop of ice cream for just \$1.) The grownup menu has a number of salads and sandwiches, burgers, veggie burger, fish and chips, etc. ranging from \$5.45 for the B.L.T. to \$9.45 for the grilled chicken Greek salad, but no one seems to come here for those items. In my scan around the room, I saw no one – NO ONE – eating anything but wings.

The wings come by 10s, 20s and 50s (\$7.95, \$14.95 and \$34.95) with coleslaw, celery and blue cheese or creamy dill dip. There are also various 20-wing specials that include fries and a pitcher of anything from pop to beer, and range from \$20.25 to \$30.95. You can enjoy your wings plain, barbecue, spicy barbecue, honey garlic or choose from seven different degrees of Buffalo-style. A caveat in the centre of the menu reads, "Warning!! MEDIUM is hot – MEDIUM HOT is very hot – HOT is very, very hot." But they also go up to "super hot" and what they blithely refer to as "death." There is an extra charge for "death," and whenever anyone dares, they ring a loud bell in the restaurant so that everyone there can get a good look at the nutcase who ordered it.

Duff's will let you break your wing orders up by tens for no extra charge, so we had a sampling of plain, honey garlic and mild medium. The wings came faster than we expected, just a minute or two after the grilled cheese had arrived. The sandwich was large and made with real cheddar on quality bread, but as soon as Jorey saw the wings, that was the end of his sandwich eating. And no cutting up his food! He has teeth now, and by golly, he'll use 'em! Imagine if you will, a one-year-old fervently gnawing away on a drumlet nearly half the size of his face, twisting and turning it to get every morsel. Very reminiscent of the Flintstones, and with Jorey's bright blond hair I just couldn't resist calling him Bamm-Bamm.

The wings were excellent. Plump, meaty,

large – but not too large – and not a dud in the batch. And the staff knows its stuff. As soon as the wings arrive, along comes a healthy supply of napkins and wet-naps, as well as a tall plastic container for chucking bones. This part was great fun for Zara. While I figure she has about as much chance of playing in the WNBA as I do, she nonetheless delighted in displaying her hoops skills with every finished wing. Most of her shots were good for two points.

We used plenty of napkins – these wings are undeniably messy. At the bottom of the mild-medium was a generous amount of sauce. But don't mistake it for grease. Duff's can fry their wings up nice and crispy, keeping the meat inside moist and tender, all the while making them free of excess grease.

The honey garlic wings were a little too saucy for Zara, so I was charged with the task of "wiping them down" for her. I went through a lot of napkins in the process, but she loved the flavour, as did Sheri and me. Jorey stuck to the plain ones because we didn't need to see how wing sauce works as hair gel, and Sheri and I worked on the mild-medium batch, which was perfectly spiced and absolutely delectable.

Zara actually enjoyed her meal so much she didn't even bother with her customary mid-meal trip to the bathroom. But after we had all scored our last two points in the bone bucket, Mom and Dad decided that no amount of wet-naps could match good ol' soap and hot water. So off Zara and I went down the stairs to the bathroom, where I discovered the only negative thing I can say about Duff's. The bathroom is minuscule, and while most of us have had to change a diaper in imperfect conditions, even Harry Houdini would be challenged here. Who knows, maybe they'll renovate the downstairs to accommodate their non beer-guzzling, sports-mad, dart-throwing, "death"-eating patrons. In the meantime, if you love chicken wings and are prepared for a potentially difficult diaper change, then head to Duff's Famous Wings. Lo and behold, we, like so many others we saw that night, have become a whole family of wing eaters. Even the little guy, eight teeth and all.

Duff's is, in a word, Bellissimo!

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