

LULY Halal Cart

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As I prepare Sunday night, going into my sock drawer, choosing a hat, and black sweater, all I can think of is how tired I already feel thinking the next day is Monday. Eager to wake up but too eager to sleep, I set four different alarms for the following day. Yeah, Monday is the best day of the week...said no one ever. At 5 am, the air hits my ankles, so I imagine it might be a chilly Monday morning. As I walk across Fort Greene Park to reach Myrtle Avenue, I feel a sense of peace for it's not rowdy or loud yet. After walking down Myrtle Avenue, I finally reach the corner of Jay Street and there she is: "The Luly Halal Food Truck," covered in blue wrapping with sphinx images alongside pyramids. A tiny metal door is flung open with an orange cone next to it. That's where the generator is kept. We keep the little door open to prevent the generator from overheating. If it does over heat, the first couple of hours of work are done in darkness, making it hard to see. As I get closer, I can hear the sounds of the overnight construction crew hard at work. And yet, it's still calm.

The cart is like a kitchen compressed to fit into a tiny metal box. As I slide the back door facing the sidewalk curb, I make a quick inspection. To my left, is the grill and fryer; in front is the stove and ice box and then the steam box to the right of the stove. To the right, are shelves with an assortment of pastries and donuts. Behind the shelves, my co-worker cuts bagels while he waits for the coffee machine to brew. After a quick glance I get a sense of what I need to prepare. The inventory van, as we like to call it, is parked right behind the food truck. There, I pick up a block of cheese, butter, cream cheese, eggs, bacon, sausage, lamb, lemon, ketchup and onions. I gather my supplies and then I finally step into the cart. As I stand over the grill, I carefully do my setup, placing the eggs over ice as well as the butter and cream cheese. The grill is ready and hot; I begin to prep the bacon and sausages for the breakfast sandwiches to be made later. I take my block of cheese and take it apart. I lay the slices over one another on a sheet of foil to create what would appear to be a six-point star shape. It can get pretty annoying when it gets busy to reach for a slice of cheese for an egg sandwich if one disregards this step. Cold cheese is the worst when you start to feel rushed and seconds turn to minutes in the blink of an eye.

Besides egg sandwiches, we also serve muffins, pastries, donuts, hot drinks, a variety of commercial cold drinks, gyros, falafel, lamb/chicken over rice and much more! By now, the smell of turkey bacon is so aromatic that a customer who ordered a large coffee begins to exclaim in delight that he could smell the turkey coming out of the A train on Jay Street. I myself get hungry now. My co-worker is already sipping on his tea and enjoying a nice slice of marble pound cake, for his morning duties are now complete with a bit of time to spare. Inside

Luly, we like to mentally divide the cart in half by station so we know what work we're responsible for. For him it's the coffee machine and pastries. For me it's the grill and making hot food. Eventually when it gets too busy, we disregard this imaginary border and jump to either side, making work easier and faster, for timing is everything in this business! But of course all of this is possible because we always work as a TEAM!

Mondays and Fridays are normally slow days at Luly on Jay Street. On Tuesdays business gets a little too busy. Business normally begins around 8am, or earlier. Our customers include bankers, teachers, students, retirees, people reporting for jury duty and others. Some are people who come with a blank stare and ask a million questions as if they're buying a home. Each person has their own personality and special needs. People may look at us and automatically assume that we have the brain of a starfish. Dealing with all of these types of vibrant people is a job in and of itself: whether it's someone complaining that the corner-store has the bread they like or a customer who wants an "egg white sandwich," then advises you to "hold the yolk in the air, count to ten, then add the yolk to their egg whites." They say there are two types of people in this world: the customer and the cashier.

Through it all, we see the angry retirees and even men who come out of family court upset and hollering because they wanted more sugar in their coffee, but in fact are just mad because they have to pay extra child support. We still keep our composure for we understand and treat everyone with fairness. In front there is an optical solutions business with a man yelling: "EYES GO BAD TOO! CHECK 'EM OUT!" When we see and hear him it's a relief as we now have someone else to laugh and joke with. For us, working at Luly isn't just about being a food vendor. It's about a community and the world around LULY FOOD TRUCK. We like to think our job consists of being a peacemaker, friend, therapist, interpreter, guide, security officer and even a health advisor.

By Wednesday, the energy levels of my co-worker and I are low. Thursdays, for me, are the best days. That's the day I drink more coffee than I should and my body can't keep up with how fast my mind processes the work. They just won't coincide. My co-worker on Thursday mornings usually laughs and says, "Look, you made it, welcome to the jungle, my man," followed by a fist bump. He, by now, already knows this pattern for he too gets tired. But we hang on because this is how we choose to make an honest living. But most importantly we are there for YOU! Through the layers of being tired, annoyed at times, hungry, happy, mad and sometimes sad, we give thanks. There's a man who works at the parking lot who one time said, "Thursdays are used to rejuvenate." It makes me smile and keeps me going through frozen feet in the winter, numb hands, super-hot summers beside the hot grill when the steel sucks in the heat. Thursdays are indeed the new Fridays! If I can make it past Thursday, every other day will be a breeze. For the joy I have on a Thursday is the smile you will see through my tired eyes on a Monday even if the evil guy approaching the window tries to pull a fast one with a juice. Working in this business you come across all types of beings and souls whether good or bad, the police officers, or the ones who hate to see you smile. With us there, I feel like no one will go hungry.

Laura Polla Scanlon Award, 2016 Literary Arts Festival, New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

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