



THE OUR BURGER



JENN'S CHICKEN SANDWICH

Wahlburgers

By Danny Fairchild

I'd like to use this platform that I've been given to state, for the record, that Donnie Wahlberg (Everybody's either favorite or least favorite New Kid. There's no in-between here.) is a better actor than his brother Mark Wahlberg. I've thought so since *Ransom*, and his work in *The Sixth Sense* and *Band of Brothers* only confirms it. And don't get me wrong, I like Mark Wahlberg as an actor. He didn't wilt in the face of Leo's scenery-chewing in *The Basketball Diaries*, and some moments in *Boogie Nights* are just masterful. I just think Donnie deserves more of the Wahl-love than he gets. That's all I'll say on the matter. Now let's talk about Wahlburgers, owned by Mark, Donnie, and their brother-chef, Paul.

Does it seem weird to you that there's a friggin' Wahlburgers in friggin' Hy-Vee? How did this come to be? It seems to have started a few years ago when Mark Wahlberg started appearing on magazine covers and dietary supplements and standees exclusive to Hy-Vee. That alone seemed weird enough at the time. It's not like Mark Wahlberg is a has-been. He's A-List, y'all. So what the hell is he doing peddling his wares in grocery stores based in the most fly-over of fly-over states? The guy is more Boston than a baked bean. The guy is more Hollywood than Meshach Taylor.

I don't know. I don't have an answer, and I'm not curious enough to investigate. Maybe he doesn't think he's bettah'n me, after all. In any case, I'm glad Wahlburgers is here, and you should be, too.

If you're looking for a burger analog, Wahlburgers is more akin to a Red Robin than a Five Guys. The price point is similar as well. So if you're sick of waiting for a table at Red Robin, Wahlburgers is worth considering. Dubuquers love their gourmet burgers though, so it won't be long until you'll be waiting for a table at Wahlburgers as well.

There's a few interesting things to note when looking at a Wahlburgers menu. To highlight the humble beginnings of the Wahlburger recipes, they proudly list "government cheese" when describing the ingredients of each burger. You may be thinking, "you're taking cheese away from welfare recipients and selling it at a premium?" No. Y'all, there's SOOOO MUCH CHEESE the government buys up to keep dairy prices stable. Like... more than any welfare program could ever need. Anyway, if you think you're bettah'n "government cheese," just shut up and call it American cheese and keep shoveling it in like we always have. It's your patriotic duty. The

second curiosity is the Wahl sauce. Every burger place has their secret sauce, usually ketchup and mayo or Thousand Island. Wahl sauce is much in the same vein, except with a little Sriracha kick to it. Just a little kick. Even we Dubuquers can handle it. I think that little kick in their Wahl sauce is why the burgers don't come with mustard. Sriracha and mustard tend to fight, and Sriracha tends to win that fight. In fact, you won't find mustard on the tables alongside the ketchup at Wahlburgers. Oh, you can request it, of course. They're not monsters. It's just not the standard operating procedure for Wahlburgers. Kind of like how a lot of hot dog joints are reluctant to provide ketchup or some BBQ joints make you ask for sauce. Misplaced or not, it's about pride.

I kept it kind of basic on my burger with an Our Burger, which is Chef Paul Wahlberg's choice. The order was my own little, "come at me, Chef." Quarter-pound patty, lettuce, tomato, onion, government cheese, Paul's signature Wahl sauce, and pickles. A burger with no bells and whistles. Keep your bacon and your onion rings and barbecue sauce (for now... I'm sure I'll want them later). Just show me what a burger looks like at Wahlburgers. I am not disappointed. The patty was juicy but done. I usually tell lettuce to go screw when it comes to burgers, but the crisp freshness was welcome here. This... is a damn burger.

Jenn's Chicken Sandwich. There is a hot debate I've commented on before as to whose chicky sammy reigns supreme. One of the entrants I refuse to eat at, and that's just fine because I'm not missing anything. Jenn's Chicken Sandwich at Wahlburgers is a little small, but don't go thinking that just because they specialize in burgers that their chicky sammy is just a dried-up piece of chicken breast. I know some of you have trouble with the following words, but "moist" and "juicy" are apt here. Our own Kristina ordered this, and she reports, "I wouldn't be sad to get this again."

Mom's Sloppy Joe. Holy crap, this thing is a challenge. If you think you're getting some Manwich lunch-lady-scooped onto a pathetic little bun, you're in for a rude awakening. I mean... this thing really is almost rude. You're getting a helluva lot of saucy meat, open-faced on some kind of a grilled hoagie roll. And when I say saucy, I'm not just talking about the sloppy joe seasoning. It's drenched in Wahl sauce and their signature cheese sauce. It answers the question nobody asked but should have: What if sloppy joes were more like cheesesteaks? The answer is impressive and intimidating. Get a fork and knife ready, you're NOT picking this one up.



MOM'S SLOPPY JOE



CHEESE & BACON TOTS



ONION RINGS

For those of you interested, Wahlburgers does offer an Impossible Burger option. In fact, that's Mark's choice. It tasted so animal-based that we were a little afraid we got the wrong thing. We didn't, though. Their Impossible Burger shrugs off the "government cheese" for smoked cheddar, and I think that smokiness helps it come across as real meat. Smart. It's also topped with lettuce, caramelized onions, chili-spiced tomato, and (of course) Wahl sauce. Gluten-free buns and bread are also available but were not sampled.

They got a good array of apps, too. Tater tots have kind of become a thing lately, so we gave the cheese and bacon tots a whirl. There was some good crisp to the tots that kind of got lost under the cheese, but that happens with cheese sauce. You expect it with nachos, so it only makes sense that it happens with tater tots, too. They were good, but the real crowd pleaser was the onion rings. Thin and crisp and ready to eat on their own or on a burger. I love onion rings like these.

As for the bathrooms, well... it's located in the Locust St. Hy-Vee. I'm

one of those people who inevitably has to go to the bathroom if I go to the store or library or bookstore by myself, and the Locust St. Hy-Vee bathroom is almost always in good condition.

All in all, Wahlburgers does a good job of representing one of our greatest actors and Dorchester's 2nd favorite son, Donnie Wahlberg. Welcome to Iowa, boys. ■

Wahlburgers at Locust Hy-Vee

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