

Behind the Entenmann's Cellophane, a Slice of Long Island Life

The passing of a founding baker reminds our writer of what the brand meant, and still does, in its birthplace — banana crunch, polysorbate 60 and all.

Dan Barry March 15, 2022



In the working-class home of the author's youth, the blue-and-white Entenmann's box was often on proud display in the kitchen, within easy reach for weddings and wakes and late-night snacks. David Nelson/Alamy

The tasty crumb of a detail appeared in [news accounts](#) last week about the death of Charles E. Entenmann, whose very surname conjures a white-and-blue box with a cellophane glimpse of some baked treat that is both good and bad for you.

It was said that Mr. Entenmann, who [died last month](#) at age 92 in Florida — far from the South Shore of Long Island, where he helped

his family's business rise like a baking Bundt cake to become a national brand — did not eat [Entenmann's products](#).

“He just wasn't a dessert guy,” one of his children explained, no doubt causing Entenmann's aficionados everywhere to choke on their second secret slice of a Cheese Danish Twist.

As someone who grew up near the old Entenmann's factory in Bay Shore, my first reaction to this revelation is: No wonder he lived to 92.

My second reaction, though, is to say: Forget it, your royal Entenmann's eminence. The Barrys of Deer Park, and those like them, ate more than enough to cover what you didn't. You are now excused from the Formica-topped kitchen table of life, with our deep thanks.



Charles E. Entenmann, the last of the baking Entenmanns, oversaw the automation of the cake line that was integral to the family business's growth. Meyer Liebowitz for The New York Times

Oh, and we promise not to linger too long on the ingredients listed on

your boxes as we eat their processed contents. The ingredients, for example, of the Entenmann's standard, the All Butter Loaf Cake, include sodium propionate, sorbitan monostearate, polysorbate 60 and other components that sound like pharmaceuticals for the odd conditions apparently afflicting viewers of daytime television.

For some self-conscious fans, buying an Entenmann's pastry may call for a little wink-and-nod: *The organic bakery was out of its locally sourced herb scones, so we thought it'd be fun to have an Entenmann's, like the ones our grandmother used to eat out of the box in Massapequa ...*

But Long Island working-class families like mine believed that a box of Entenmann's conveyed class. It would be on proud display in the kitchen, prominent on the refrigerator or displacing plastic flowers as the table centerpiece.

Sometimes, several boxes would be on exhibit, but not for reasons of ostentation. They merely meant that someone had made the six-mile trip to the discount outlet adjacent to the Entenmann's plant, an industrial behemoth churning through a million eggs a week. The Entenmann cognoscenti would plan their visits like wartime generals, calculating dates of expiration to determine the best time to attack — that is, to shop.



True aficionados on Long Island knew the best times to hit the Entenmann's discount outlet beside its factory in Bay Shore. Phil Marino for The New York Times

The Entenmann's on the fridge was more than a signal of solvent family finances (*Yes, Dolores, we can afford the Banana Crunch Cake*). It was a blue-and-white invitation to communion, its contents suitable for weddings and wakes and Communion parties and late-morning gossip sessions with cups of percolated coffee and a Marlboro Light.

As I look back, Entenmann's seems more present in my memory than in reality. In my mind's eye, there would be a Raspberry Danish Twist on Sunday mornings; a slice of Chocolate Chip Crumb Loaf, wrapped in paper towel, for school lunch; a hunk of [Blackout Cake](#) for dessert; and a rush to Good Samaritan Hospital before bed. (Not really.)

I do know that as a boy, we celebrated my birthday during one difficult year for the family with a Fudge Iced Golden Cake adorned with a flickering votive candle. And that as a young man, I often returned late

at night from some bar to find my father watching a horror movie, and together we would drink milk and eat Vanilla-Filled Crumb Cake while watching the vampirish [Christopher Lee](#) drink a young maiden's blood.

Nothing stays the same, of course, as Entenmann's itself reminds us. The family sold the business in 1978 to a pharmaceutical company — *Ask your doctor about Polysorbate 60* — after which it was sold and sold and sold again, no expiration date in sight. It is owned at the moment by [Bimbo Bakeries USA](#).



The baked goods made at the Entenmann's factory along Fifth Avenue in Bay Shore were integral to family life in a home six miles away, in Deer Park. Meyer Liebowitz for The New York Times

In 2014, Entenmann's [ended its baking operations](#) at the Bay Shore plant, and the South Shore sighed. Older Long Islanders with finely developed palates will tell you that the taste has declined — become more “chemical” — since the company left. Perhaps this is because Entenmann's no longer has access to the clear mountain waters

running down from Jayne's Hill, the highest point on Long Island (elevation: [about 400 feet](#)).

Then there is the discontinuance of various Entenmann's products over the years, more than a few of which had been staples in the Barry house. The Almond Danish Ring that could make a wake almost bearable. The Vanilla-Filled Crumb Cake that went so well with late-night horror movies. The Filled Chocolate Chip Crumb Cake, a personal favorite of my brother, Brian.

Oh Banana Crunch Cake, we hardly knew ye.

Still there are Entenmann's treats that I enjoy, in moderation; an Entenmann's box sits on my refrigerator as I write. I've learned that a glass of milk washes away any chemical aftertaste, real or imagined, and that a processed baked good can taste like the sweetest madeleine.