FINDING A HOME IN PARK SLOPE’S DINERS

October 20, 2026

RESERVED

October 20, 2026

By Emmett Lindner

Photographs by Caroline Mardok

There aren’t a lot of social options when you grow up in the woods. You wait for the summer sun to go down and the cicadas to quiet before throwing a few logs together for a bonfire, idly staring at the flames among friends until parents are mad you’re not yet home.

Winters are even duller. Basements, aimless drives, sitting in cars in parking lots, rolling down the windows to let out puffs of smoke. Mostly it was deciding where to go and where to camp out and who was already at the Wendy’s two towns over.

But even in a town of 8,000 people with no sidewalks or traffic lights, only 15 minutes away was a 24-hour haven: the local diner.

The booths were often patched together with duct tape. The food was not particularly good or thoughtful. But it always tasted the same—and that was never the point, anyway.

Waitresses knew you since you were too shy to order eggs. The owner had kids in your grade and chatted with your parents. Years later, back from college, you and your friend studied a bullet hole in the diner’s window that seemed to aim at the husk of a former Blockbuster across the street. Seated across from each other in a diner booth, you both plotted how to reach a friend who hadn’t answered a text in a year. And when the waiter noticed you staring at the cracked window, he just looked away and forced a laugh.

That place degraded as you also aged. But it always smelled the same, and the doors were never locked. The diner never looked beyond its walls to judge.

One day, after deciding to skip school, the Athenian Diner was the only logical place to go.

Already late. Always late. Too many detentions to count as you and your friends pulled into the last spot in the lot, a half mile from the school. You didn't walk long before the hesitation bubbled into pointless debate.

"It's far," Greg said.

"Too far," Jerry said.

"Wait," Greg said. "Why are we even going to school today?"

The five of us, almost in unison: "Yeah, why *are* we going to school today?"

Back to the car we went. And straight to the diner we drove.

The waitress heard us laughing about the endeavor. We were honest when she asked.

"Give me a phone," she said. She proceeded to call the school five separate times pretending to be five entirely different mothers, and gave us a month's worth of conversation amongst ourselves.

Being spontaneous required stasis. There wasn't a schedule to meet; there was a door to open. At the diner, the room stayed the same while the people passed through in winter coats or sandals.

Maybe it's a product of where you grow up. The Athenian has closed, and the Wendy's, a lesser place of worship, lost its solarium and the chili there tastes worse.

But I’m still searching for places where everyone walks through those same doors.

HOSPITAL
PHARMACY
Purity Diner
Established
1929
289 7th Ave.
718-840-0881
7 St
ONE WAY

Purity Diner at the corner of the hospital on 7th Avenue

PURITY

The diner is across the street from Brooklyn Presbyterian. It’s a favorite of mine. There are no frills or catering to a certain kind of crowd. How could Purity deign to, when it serves many at their most exhausted hour?

It places plates of breakfast, lunch and dinner in front of patrons sitting in chairs and booths at what one must imagine is their most tired, most vulnerable, or between the worst moments they can remember.

I can sympathize. A girlfriend was sitting in a hospital bed when the doctors cleared her after a medical scare. I left to buy her spicy Cheez-Its and magazines from the Rite Aid down the block. But she was asleep, and I had been slouching in a chair for 12 hours since 4 a.m. I hadn’t eaten in almost a day.

Purity beckoned as I passed, offering a semblance of stability. And there was a booth I knew the texture of before I even sat down. (I ate quickly and she got her Cheez-Its posthaste.)

Diners had been stuck in my idea of childhood and high school, when the vinyl sank in the same way every time. Then, while the entire world spun outside at its own pace, the sound of the laminated menu smacking the table became an anchor.

The Grand Canyon Diner on 7th avenue, across from PS 321.

GRAND CANYON

A diner I respect and frequent, but it doesn’t quite fit my suburban particularities. (That’s a negative? Against myself.) The menu is big. That’s good. It offers more Mexican cuisine than any other diner I’ve come across in the area. (Yes, please.) Having lived in Los Angeles for a number of years, the tacos and breakfast burritos at Grand Canyon keep pulling me back on hazy Sunday mornings.

The welcome team at the Grand Canyon diner.

Grand Canyon is probably the diner I should like best. But, aesthetically, it’s too different to imagine my grandmother’s blonde beehive bobbing up the front steps, or my family’s silence as the food came—not because they prayed but because a mouthful was more sacred than idle conversation.

It is a place that can offer fun, with tables for big parties, and which serves cuisine that is sorely lacking in the neighborhood.

2nd Floor
Dalsey's
DINER
NO STANDING
Destination
Bay Ridge
Minutes
Route
B63
5 Av &
9 St
454 5th AV
FLOUR
DINER

Daisy’s Diner on 5th avenue.

DAISY’S

I’ll be the first to say it: It doesn’t have the best food. There are cracks in the walls, and I’ve waited quite a few minutes for a coffee refill. And yet, I wouldn’t change a thing.

There are few places, first and foremost, where I can sit at a booth any time of day or night. The 24-hour schedule gives the diner nostalgia and points for practicality.

The counter at Daisy’s.

Daisy's
DINER
A BROOKLYN LANDMARK
Where friends and family gather!
Welcome
Daisy's
DINER
Daisy's Diner
Park Slope, Brooklyn NYC
UNIVERSAL

Jude Howl serving at Daisy’s Diner

But, perhaps because of the photos of famous people on the walls—like Muhammad Ali, who has absolutely never eaten the Daisy tuna melt and probably never walked inside—or the I-don’t-need-to-ask-for-them condiments that have been on the table all day, my heart sings.

I sit in a booth and I’m suddenly six. An apparition of my father sits across from me, pulling a half-and-half creamer from the bowl. He lays it on the counter and flicks it toward me, trying to land it half on, half off on my edge of the table. We rotate until someone wins or our food arrives. It’s what we did before phones.

I can imagine the days, like at the Athenian, when waiters would ask: “Smoking or non-smoking?” Like it mattered. The specter of flicked ash and smoke that didn’t abide by sections still lingers in Daisy’s.

I don’t go to diners much with my father anymore. I rarely ever go with friends. We built lives there, which is why I hold them dear. And perhaps they haven’t changed—or maybe they have, a bit—but it’s not leaving me empty. The booths and varnished counters are still there, however faded and patched.

Emmett Lindner works on the breaking and trending news desk at The New York Times.