

COFFEE CRAZED CONFUSION

By Jim Gustafson

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CAST: A young woman under 30.

PROPS: Coffee cup or Starbuck-Style cardboard cup

I began drinking coffee when I got a job as a cub reporter at a small town newspaper. . . The pop machine charged a dollar for a can of Diet Coke. . . The coffee was free. With my starting salary around 125 bucks a week. . . FREE was good. . . The coffee. . . Not so much. . . But the price was right. In our office we had one of those 32 cup coffee makers you see at church bazaars. . . Theirs are a bright and shiny silver. . . Ours was, well, it was sort of "bronze". . . A combination of coffee stains. . . A touch of rust and. . . a lot burn. . . I don't think that old pot was ever turned off since it was first plugged in back in 1957. . . but it was still percolating in 2005 so give the pot credit for longevity.

Anyway, the editor was in charge of coffee. Every Monday morning he'd fill up the hopper with grounds and fill the pot with water. When we knocked off 32 cups he'd just add more water. Then on Tuesday morning he add just one more teaspoon of coffee grounds and brew up another 32 cups with the wet lump of coffee grounds that was left in the hopper. . . Plus his new teaspoon of fresh coffee. . . On Wednesday same thing. One more teaspoon of coffee and new water. . . Same on Thursday and Friday. By the end of the week the coffee was taking on the consistency of pudding and it was pretty pungent. But with enough sugar and CoffeeMate it wouldn't kill ya. One Thursday a sports reporter was working late and left his spoon in a half finished cup of coffee when he knocked off for the night. The next morning we couldn't get the spoon out of the petrified coffee so we tossed the cup and spoon out.

Well, that's how I came to be a coffee drinker. . . As you can figure when I order a cup of coffee now my expectations aren't all that high. For years drinking coffee was easy. All I had to do was respond to three simple questions. "Do you want coffee?" Yes! "Regular or Decaf?" Regular! "Cream or sugar?" Both! Life was good. . .

Oh my, how times have changed when I wasn't watching. . . Today we live in the Starbucks Age. . . The other morning I walked into one of the **four** Starbucks on the same block downtown. All I wanted was a quick cup of coffee with enough caffeine to wake me up.

I'd never gone to Starbucks before. . . It's a little too. . . too up-scale for me, if you know what I mean. . . But I was desperate for my morning jolt. I didn't need anything fancy just a mug of Java and I'd be on my way. Little did I realize the simple task of ordering a cup of coffee has become a cult ritual. . . And apparently the guy at the head of the line was a high priest "Baptized in the Brew of the Bean." Without hesitation he canted a Gregorian chant of "Half-caf, no frothed, single shot, double blended, extra hot, cafe latte con panna. The young lady behind the counter, obviously a coffee acolyte, smiled knowingly and went about preparing his drink.

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