

Dish Omaha – May 21st, 2025

Jeff: Time now for Dish Omaha, featuring KVNO's resident foodie, Diane Watson. Good morning, Diane.

Diane: Good morning, Jeff. I'm so excited about this Dish episode. We are going to do a Remember When discussion on Bishop's Buffet.

Jeff: Oh, that was at the Westroads for many, many years.

Diane: Exactly. Did you go as a youngster?

Jeff: I did as a kid. My Aunt Jean took our family there often.

Diane: Oh, thanks Aunt Jean.

Jeff: Oh yes.

Diane: There were two locations, one in downtown Omaha and one at the Westroads, as you mentioned. And also there was one in Council Bluffs in Lincoln. It was a chain started in Waterloo, Iowa by Frank Bishop in 1920. There were 35 locations across the Midwest at one time.

Jeff: Really? I had no idea.

Diane: The downtown one was near the old Rialto Theater, opened in 1948. On their first day, they served 1,000 customers.

Jeff: Wow.

Diane: This was in kind of the golden age of cafeterias. The location at the Westroads, which a lot of us remember, opened in August 1968, which was the week of the shopping center's grand opening. In one day, that location served 3,200 customers.

Jeff: Wow.

Diane: Right? So some of the things Bishop's was known for, if you remember, the a la carte items on plates, the carving stations for the entrees, the prime rib they would carve for you. The chefs wore those tall toques.

Jeff: Yep.

Diane: The line attendants, if you remember, were all women. They wore brown dresses with white trim. And tray carriers would lead you to your table.

Jeff: Hmm.

Diane: I had forgotten about that.

Jeff: I had forgotten about that, too. Yeah.

Diane: Nice. And it was wood paneled, plush carpet, a fireplace roaring. And if you wanted a beverage refill, do you remember what you would do?

Jeff: I don't.

Diane: You would push the lighted candle on your table.

Jeff: Oh, my goodness.

Diane: And someone would come over and see what you wanted.

Jeff: I forgot about that.

Diane: I know. Me, too. Other buffets came into challenge. But in 1986, the Mobile Travel Guide, which was kind of a big deal then, awarded Bishop's, Nebraska's only three-star cafeteria award. In 1988, they stopped carrying trays for you. They were kind of trying to cut back on staff a little bit. In 1989, in order to compete with some of the other buffets, they added an all-you-can-eat option. So, lunch was \$4.49 and dinner was \$5.29.

Jeff: Oh, wow.

Diane: So, they left the Westroads when their lease was up in 1989, I think making room for Von Maur.

Jeff: Oh, sure, sure.

Diane: And they moved to 114th and Dodge, and the Metro Area Transit Bus expanded their line to be able to accommodate people to their location.

Jeff: Really? I don't remember that... wow.

Diane: Now, I didn't know this, but in 1983, Kmart bought Bishop's and also Fur's Cafeteria, if you remember that place, and sold it then in 1988. And then the owners started closing them, and in 1994, the last table light went out when Bishop's on Dodge closed. The final Bishop's location closed in 2012. It was in Moline, Iowa. Now, I asked our listeners to send in any memories they had, and oh, my goodness, I got dozens of stories. They were just fabulous. Listener Teresa talked about how her mom worked there, and she would go to work with her mom, and the managers would do salt—I'm sorry, sauce-tasting quality control every morning, checking all the sauces. Oh, my goodness. And one day, little Teresa got invited to join in and taste them. She got a job there when she was 16, and then it closed shortly after. My friend Dana told me she was introduced to her first French dip sandwich, her mom and grandma...

Jeff: I think that's where I had my first one.

Diane: Is that right?

Jeff: Yeah, I think so.

Diane: Oh, that great roast beef and prime rib. Listener Penny talked about triangle pieces of cheese on a frilly toothpick cut with serrated knives. She thought it was so fancy. Cameron said he could eat his weight in the orange rolls.

Jeff: (laughter)

Diane: Sarah talked about the fried chicken, the cornbread, and the cubed red Jell-O, and also that she thought it was pronounced Bishop's Buffet, like Warren Buffet, and that was the first time she realized it was buffet. Christy said she went Westroads shopping for back-to-school clothes every year, and the ritual was after that her family...

Jeff: My Aunt Jean did that same thing!

Diane: Oh, Aunt Jean, I love it. Kevin, who's in the food biz, said that the folks who came and worked there as youngsters were IWCC food students, so it was a real training ground to make your way into professional food life, and the wages and the training at Bishop's were really special. One thing everybody hit on was the pie.

Jeff: Yep.

Diane: Listener Mitch pointed out it was not a French silk pie. It was called the Royal Chocolate Ambrosia Pie. How it was made was standard brands, the Royal Pudding Division made a special instant pudding just for bishops. They mixed it with 14% fat ice cream, and then the curls came from a 10-pound chocolate bar from the Ambrosia Chocolate Company.

Jeff: Really?

Diane: So, the name came from their suppliers, but you can find a kind of a replica of a recipe on the internet if you want to make it.

Jeff: Can you? But I recall it as being called French silk pie.

Diane: Probably by Aunt Jean.

Jeff: Yeah, interesting. That's so funny how you tend to remember things.

Diane: Exactly.

Jeff: The minute you brought up Bishop's, I started craving the pie.

Diane: Now I want pie. Let's go get pie.

Jeff: All right, and thanks so very much.

Diane: See you next week.