



## **THE I LOVE BAGELS HISTORY BEGINS IN THE YEAR 1965**

The year was 1965 and my father, Martin Amster was working for the Watson Bagel Bakery in Newark, N.J. where he was a member of the Bakery & Confectionary Workers Union, Local 338. Each long day consisted of working in front of the hot Brick-Ovens.

My father had befriended many of his co-workers who stood side by side rolling piles of dough into slabs and then again into strips which were rolled into bagels. Each piece was then carefully placed into large wooden Proof Boxes, allowing the dough time to rise. Earning just a few pennies per dozen was considered good of money, and piece-work is how they were paid.

The workers often spoke of wanting a future as independent business owners who would not be restricted to any of the Union constraints, but no one dared to try (except my dad and his brother Murray).

Looking towards the future, my dad took the initiative and in 1966 he opened his first of many locations in Highland Park N.J., just a stones throw from the Rutgers University campus. Dad always had a phenomenal business sense and a powerful drive to succeed... but the Unions wouldn't leave without a fight and fight they did...protesting right in front of his store every day to drive the customers away by making them fear crossing the picket lines. To make matters worse, the union forced his former co-workers to do their dirty work as some of those picketing...something they did very reluctantly!

I was so young then that I really didn't understand what the fuss was all about. Even one of his friends let me put on a sign to march around with them, not in an adversarial way, but more as a friend would spend time to play with another friends child, after all they had to be there anyway to do the unions dirty bidding. Eventually the protesters left, and my father's persistence opened the door for countless others to follow in his example.

These were good times, filled with lots of loyal customers, taking home bag after bag of delicious, beautiful bagels on the weekends. I worked there every weekend as my dad would wake me up and drag me out of bed in the wee hours of around three-thirty or so for the thirty minute drive. At ten years old I started as each rookie starts, at the kettle and stayed there for a couple of years.

I occasionally tried the oven-man position and by the time I turned 13, I was baking all the time. There were no air-conditioners, just a couple of fans which were mostly used to cool down the giant baskets of bagels waiting to be bagged for wholesale delivery. There were only about eight varieties back then, Plain, Salt, Onion, Poppy Seed, Sesame Seed, Garlic & Egg. Today I still use these original recipes plus others which we developed for a total off over thirty-plus varieties.

# THE VALUE OF COMMITMENT

My father instilled in me the value of commitment to quality (at all times) and that there was no second best for our customers! One day my dad ordered a hot dog from Cohen's Knishes and the cook wasn't paying attention and burnt the roll and was about to throw it out, when my dad stopped him. Dad insisted that he just scrape away the burnt crust and serve his hot dog on that bun. When asked why did you not take a new bun he said, "There are starving people in other parts of the world and even in this country" so do not to waste food!

This lesson carried through me, and I now pass it down to my son, after-all we are in the food business!

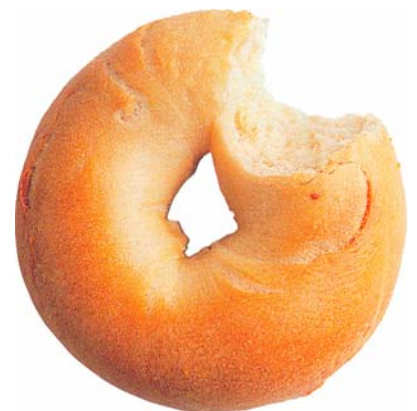
Most of the new hires were high school kids three to four years older than I was and they certainly weren't about to listen to advice about how to do their job better from any thirteen year-old, so I just showed them that I could do it better, consistently better, day in and out! Eventually they paid me heed on how to get it right! Occasionally I would burn my arm on the oven door and it hurt, but I wore this as a battle scar of sorts, a badge of honor.... as complainers weren't worthy of the attention.

When I eventually took over the oven mans position full time, I would perform my duties in a sort of rhythm as we baked out one shelf, and put in the next set of wooden boards in, then the oven shelves rotated to the next shelf where another set of wooden boards was ready to be turned and removed. With a loud bang, we would tap the boards on the back edge of the shelf, dislodging most of the seeds so they would stick to the top of the bagel. Whenever one of my fathers' bagel friends would visit, they would get excited to here the banging sound that these boards would make. One of them once told me, "Now that's the sound a good bagel baker makes"!

Our business was always about...giving more quality to our customers...and although our mother was adamantly apposed to any of her three sons going into the bagel business, somehow we were all drawn into it (with both feet)... although we never really benefited from all of the business experience that my father had compiled during his long career because he was always so busy running all of the operations himself. Business isn't easy and anyone who says different is lying.

You have to use what God gave you physically and mentally to deal with each days challenges, while remembering yesterdays lessons too. My pay scale may have seemed meager to those who read this, but it was... what it was for the times, \$1/day at first then, six months later I got a raise to 25 cents per hour (big money I thought). Then I got \$5 per day...then 50 cents per hour (I'd work 13 plus hours) so it was still a big raise. Now came the big money...\$1/hour and boy did I save every penny of it! I also sold greeting cards and lemonade (age 8) and anything else I could think of to earn money.

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# LEARNING FROM THE PAST

I had the honor and privilege to work around the best bakers and people that you could imagine. The work ethic and dedication to the consistent quality of their products were second to none! I remember many a lesson, sometimes in the form of a line of wisdom or a quote (I remember one of the old bakers telling me to, “work hard, but don’t work harder than you have too”) this might sound strange but what he meant was to work very efficiently instead of backwards ...so, each product and every attempt was just like making the perfect hero sandwich ... one slice or ingredient at a time until it was complete!

As my dad expanded his locations, I too moved around as needed. My High School afternoons were spent working, Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 4 PM to 10 PM and all day Saturday and Sunday at Linden Plaza Bagels, Linden N.J.. Having a drivers license made me eligible as needed in other locations, so I worked in Hightstown, Watchung, Union, South Amboy and let me not forget old Englishtown (yes, the famous flea market) there were so many strange characters down there and lots of even more bizarre events, but boy oh boy was it a blast...sometimes each vendor had to “out-act” each other in order to draw attention to our products and if I learned anything there, it was not to be as shy as I used to. Later in the morning after the crowds slowed a bit, I would take my break as I enjoyed “walking the tables” looking at all of the unique products like everyone there, and hoping for a deal!

My dad never thought of operating all of his stores under one “branded” name, I think that this could have helped his business get more recognition. But he did the best he could for us, always!

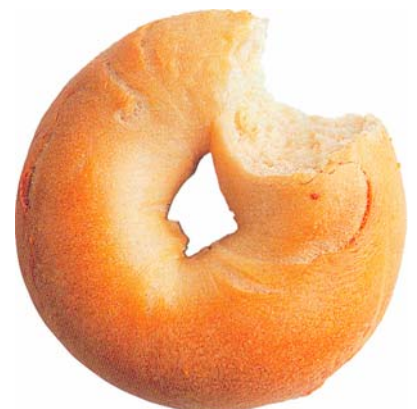
I had the benefit to learn by a few of my dad’s mistakes this way, although I made plenty of my own in my career.

In 1977 I made my last move into Menlo Park Bagels, in Edison, N.J. and I was now twenty years old. I stayed there manning my post as I called it, for ten solid years.

In 1987 I looked back and thought I just spent one eighth of my life here. I decided to sell the Menlo Park Location because we were on a month to month lease and had been so for over ten years and the property owners had future plans to level the mall and rebuild almost all of it.

One of my employees, whose older brother had worked for my dad many years before asked how much I would want for the business, but without a lease it was worth only the value of the equipment....which was about \$35,000 so we agreed on this amount and made the deal!

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# TOUGH TIMES AND TOUGH PEOPLE

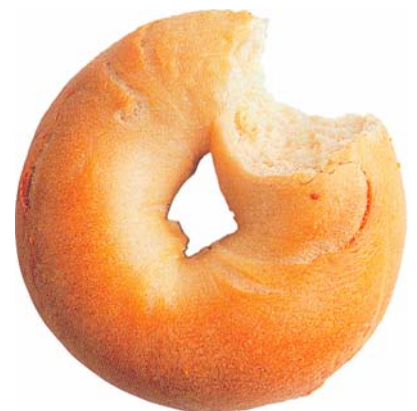
The store made a profit, but when compared with today we probably made as much income in a week as we do in just one day now, but putting this into perspective... bagels were sold for less than \$2 per dozen and 95% of the total sales were just bagels in the bag going home, so there were no sandwiches, very little drinks and just a bit of cream cheese (Philadelphia) being sold! Yet, I provided my mom with money for the bills and had enough to get by for me. New Jersey was a nice place to grow up in. Like most Jersey natives I loved "The Shore". I would usually have a day off mid-week and at least once a month I went fishing on the party boats. Once aboard (usually Wednesdays) I would often be surrounded by doctors, strange I thought at first until I realized that many doctors took off Wednesday and worked a weekend day. I was asked many a time, "What specialty do you practice)? To which I always replied, "I'm a Bagelologist"! It was very funny to see the expressions on their faces and they were always fascinated by my profession and would ask an array of worthy questions about baking & bagels, to which they always got an honest answer!

These were tougher times, times of struggles to survive and times of illness for my dad. It came to pass, that while he worked in Hightstown, one of his assistant managers came into work knowing that she had viral pneumonia and my dad caught it. For most people this would not have seemed so critical, except that my dad had been a juvenile diabetic. Within days he was stricken and wound up in intensive care for two months.

The man who went in, later emerged as frail fragment of his former self, still of sound mind though, my dad never quit thinking of how to help his ailing business. Eventually he and his business partner my Uncle Murray decided to close all non-performing store locations. We wound up with three locations after the onslaught, Union, (where my brother Alan worked) Menlo Park and my Uncle Murray got the Willowbrook Mall location which amounted to an equal split based on sales volumes.

My younger brother Steve had moved to California in 1987, Steve really liked it there, and why not, what could be bad about San Diego? By being there, I had to visit him, which started as a once a year trip and then twice a year...eventually I considered the thought that this would be a nice place for me too! Now mind you that I wasn't a natural born tourist and travel seemed like too much effort for me, but one day Steve called and told me that one of his main guys was quitting and if I wanted a job I would need to pack what I need and get out there in two weeks. So I made the commitment, but I had to return once more time to pack up the remainder of my belongings and arrange to have them moved out. I spent the better part of the next six months in North County San Diego and started to look for a possible business location in Orange County.

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# FINDING MISSION VIEJO

One of my former Menlo Park customers had moved to Mission Viejo years earlier. She had mentioned that if I was ever in the area to please look her up and that is exactly what I did. I had located her phone number, booked a flight and went for a quick visit. I had a pleasant afternoon with Sid & Elaine and after our gathering I asked how would I get back to the ocean? Elaine suggested that I go back via Margarite Parkway and turn west on Crown Valley and follow that strait to the Beach.

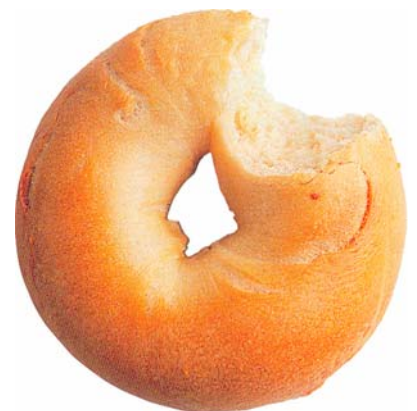
On Crown Valley Pkwy I noticed a sign for Laguna Niguel Information and a shopping center site was located just back of this mobile trailer, so I thought I should get some info on this project. I asked the man inside, "what was coming into this new commercial project"? Somewhat arrogantly he replied "Who wants to know"? So I introduced myself and he asked, "Where are you from"? I responded. "I'm from Clark N.J.". He asked me if I knew Melody Records in Clark, N.J. and I said, "Yes, of course"! He told me that Jimmy, the owner and he were very good friends. I found out that Steve was actually a realtor in Laguna Niguel. I continued to explain my background.

Later we realized that his in-laws were old customers from Menlo Park. He knew that I "just landed so to speak" and he invited me over to his house for a pre- Thanksgiving get together and to meet some of the mishpucha and friends, this is also where I experienced my first earthquake (it felt like someone had dropped a fully loaded semi-truck) right outside the wall of the dining room where I was seated.

We obviously became acquaintances from there-on forward. Steve along with the then Mayor Pro-Tem Jim Krembas were actually helping to stock-up the front self-service refrigerator with drinks at my first store and (I remember the two of them having a lot of fun doing it) too. It was just a few years later that Jim passed away (he was a great guy with a big heart)!

I think that I've always been attentive to my customer's requests and likings, henceforth the vast varieties of bagel types which we either carry daily or rotate weekly. We keep expanding our sandwich and condiment offerings as well! I regularly hear customers speak out as they investigate our menu, that the prices are so cheap. This is great news, as value in our products is always our goal, but more so is the quality of the ingredients and the hand-methods of our bagel baking (still done the traditional way), boiling first then baked on revolving ovens! We recently developed a POWER-BAGEL which was specifically formulated to add high fiber, higher protein, reduced sodium, and lower gluten to a healthy product, which has been so well received by our clientele!

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# THE BRIGHT FUTURE

We've tried a lot of new menu items that didn't work and we even opened stores that failed due to difficult access or other problems...but we learned from these mistakes and evolved and we are currently on the path to expansion once again and we are developing new licensee opportunities to address getting I Love Bagels closer to more communities in SoCal.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the wonderful dedicated employees of our company, a tight-knit family and a real special breed. It is not easy work, and I feel that I could never pay these folks what I feel that they are truly worth, but I will always endeavor to do good by them, as best I can. These long-time dedicated people have been instrumental in watching over our business and taking great care of our customers .... I hold them in the highest regard!

Sincerely,

Howard Amster, President

I Love Bagels, Inc.

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