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REGISTER COLUMNIST

Anna and I give Piecemakers a chance

All this folderol about the Piecemakers, O.C.'s own crypto-Amish sect, running amok and cussing out health inspectors has missed the Big Picture question: How's the food?

Young Anna and I lunched at the church folks' little cafe in Costa Mesa on Friday, just a day after they were ordered by the county to close their kitchen because they refused to let in health inspectors — an order they proudly defied.

We were greeted at the patio seating area by a nice woman and told we could dine indoors or out. (In the manner of all serious restaurant critics, we did not announce our media connection.) We elected to have our appetizers and entrees inside and dessert on the patio.

As Piecemakers is primarily a shop that sells quilts and all that craft-making stuff, it was not clear exactly where the dining room is, but we found it by following our noses while dodging yarn displays.

The inside dining area suffers from a lack of windows, but the quilts and other wall hangings provide a pleasant atmosphere. Roger Whittacker's deep baritone on songs such as "The Green, Green Grass of Home" provided soothing background music and helped drown out the traffic noise from busy Adams Avenue, although I believe my companion preferred the traffic noise.

Anna ordered the pumpkin curry soup (\$3.50) to start, and before our very eyes, our server ladled the thick, steaming broth from a tureen into a sturdy paper bowl, then squirted on a dab of sour cream and finished the presentation with a sprinkling of pine nuts.

Delightful!

I had a cup of the split pea and ham soup (\$2), and was surprised to find actual chunks of ham, thick and tasty, floating around. Another pleasant surprise: Anna's tea came in a silver teapot and was poured into a real china teacup with matching saucer. I had the homemade berry iced tea.

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My entree, half of the vegetarian Greek sandwich (\$3.50), came with bell peppers, avocado, cucumber, cream cheese, feta cheese and olive oil paste generously stuffed between two slices of fresh sourdough. It was so good, I wished I'd ordered a whole one. I bought a jar of the olive oil paste (\$8.50) so I could make them at home.

We repaired to the aforementioned patio, where we picked desserts from a modest selection of cookies, cakes and pies. Keeping with the theme, Anna had a slice of pumpkin pie — she thought it yummy, while I found the bite she gave me rather ordinary — while I had a pumpkin cookie with nuts and raisins. The cookie was of a softer consistency than I care for, but those whose palates run that way will certainly not be disappointed.

If you can tune out the traffic noise, the Piecemakers' shady patio can be a pleasant way to spend a fall afternoon.

As for the legal issue at hand, all I can say is that the food that was supposed to be hot was piping hot and that which was supposed to be cold was cold, and we saw no vermin of any kind, although we did bump into editorial writer Alan Bock as we were leaving. My feeling is, your chance of picking up food poisoning here is far less than it would be at your crazy Aunt Lucy's with the 19 cats.

About the only evidence anything was amiss was a can't-miss-it sign on the front door proclaiming that in the name of the Fourth Amendment, all gov'mit inspectors are barred. Not having been mistaken for revenueurs or their ilk, we were never cursed at or even given the hairy eyeball. Quite the opposite — every waitperson we encountered treated us with absolute courtesy. Moreover, the food is good! As my young companion remarked as we pulled away: "That was real good. I'm not going to lie." Three stars.

Piecemakers. 1720 Adams Ave., Costa Mesa. (714) 641-3112. Open 11 a.m.- 3 p.m. daily for lunch. Major credit cards. No reservations required.

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