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**No place like Home Place; Outstanding service, sensational food distinguish P.E.I.
restaurant**

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No place like Home Place; Outstanding service, sensational food distinguish P.E.I. restaurant

Bill Spurr Bourgeois Gourmet

I LEARNED two things on our annual weeklong vacation to P.E.I.: don't forget to put sunscreen on the tops of your feet, and if rain spoils plans to have barbecued steaks for supper, your idea to go out to eat will be duplicated by throngs of other tourists.

Luckily, we had a little insider's knowledge. One of Kath's oldest friends lives in Kensington and she invited us to join her and her two kids for dinner at the Home Place. I was a little skeptical because Anna and her family are exceedingly lean, due to a combination of activity and a diet that includes mostly cereal, yogurt they make themselves, fruit and other things from the food group that BJ refers to as "twigs and stems." They couldn't tell you where to get a great hamburger if their lives depended on it.

But I was wrong, very wrong. The Home Place, a restaurant and inn, was sensational.

Owned and run by the daughter of a local baking legend, the Home Place has three separate eating areas - a covered patio, a dining room and a smaller room known as the pub, where we sat. Across the road, a guy runs an antique furniture business out of his house, and the handsome tables at which we sat looked like they might have come from there.

Our waitress, Gina Beth, is just a couple of years out of high school but displayed a level of professionalism that made her seem much older, and another of the restaurant's young waitresses won a national award last month for her serving skills. Some restaurant owners in Halifax might want to skip over to the island to check out what they're doing in the training of wait staff.

When Gina Beth told us the night's special was chicken and shrimp with hollandaise sauce, BJ's hand shot up like an eager student who knows the answer to a teacher's question. Anna ordered sesame crusted salmon on greens, both her kids got pasta primavera (see what I mean?), Kath the chicken caesar and I went with almond crusted chicken, the best ordering decision I've made in a long time.

We had barely placed our entr-ee orders when the appetizers and a basket of rolls fresh out of the oven arrived. Mushrooms stuffed with lobster and cream cheese, then broiled, and seafood chowder made with cream and full of local mussels, scallops and haddock were devoured and praised highly. A bowl of ginger carrot soup wasn't at the same level, with the texture not quite smooth enough and the carrot overwhelming any hint of ginger. However, my caesar salad more than made up for it. Just my luck, to find a caesar made

exactly the way I like it, in a restaurant too far away to visit every week. With fresh strips of romaine, home-made croutons, real bacon and a dressing that finds the perfect balance between lemon and garlic, and creamy but not cloying, it was the best caesar I've had in a long time.

If possible, I was even happier with my entr-ee. The chicken, stuffed with almonds, red peppers and feta, is saut-ed in ground almonds and bread crumbs, then finished in the oven. On the side are julienned vegetables steamed just long enough to heat them through, without the crispness being lost, and duchess potatoes. This meal raises the humble chicken breast to lofty heights. It's tender, moist, just a bit crisp on the outside, beyond delicious.

The salmon, crusted with sesame seeds, is a large fillet, cooked perfectly, just past translucence, and served with a house-made orange ginger dressing. BJ, who had selected scallop potatoes instead of duchess, a tough decision, described his chicken and shrimp dish as being "like someone designed it with me in mind." Kath was very happy with her chicken caesar. I didn't try the pasta primavera, but Tessa and Sven, who live a short walk away, order it almost every time they eat here.

There are five desserts on the menu, all made here. We settled on two orders of crepes, with different

toppings and a slice of cheesecake. Our dinner for six, including beer, a carafe of wine, tax and a tip of \$30 to reflect the excellent service, was \$201.23 and worth every penny. Our whole experience was so good that I went to the kitchen to pay my compliments, something I almost never do. Then I went back to the cottage to put aloe vera on my feet.

The chocolate cheesecake, rich and topped with a raspberry sauce, was excellent, but the star of the desserts was crepes topped with hazelnut toffee sauce and real hazelnuts. Real hazelnuts! No shortcuts at this place.

Bill Spurr, a features writer for The Chronicle Herald, freelanced this column. ()

Figure:

Dessert crepes topped with hazelnut toffee sauce and real hazelnuts- the perfect sweet treat after a sumptuous meal at The Home Place in Kensington, P.E.I.(TESSA STAMMBERGER)

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