



Enjoying a spot of tea at Ruthie B's.

## Decadence and Delights

Ruthie B's cream rises to the top.

**R**uthie B's is a lovely and wonderfully unique place. When I first walked through the door, in fact, I was sure I had come to the wrong place. Ruthie B's is an antique shop set up in one of downtown Springfield's old historic homes; it's packed wall to wall, floor to ceiling, beyond the point of saturation, with all kinds of fascinating remnants of cultural history. There are two floors of treasures (or junk depending on your perspective) placed on shelves or creeping into hallways, labeled with descriptions and prices: "Old Teapot, \$25," "Deco ashtray w/penguins, \$30," "Too Cute Rubber boots, \$19.95," and on and on and on. Not just a restaurant, this seems more like a theme ride through the past.

The history of the house itself runs back to the less staid times of Springfield's wild west era: The place has always been on the societal fringes and was once even a brothel. If ghosts haunt anywhere this year, this just might be their perfect home. The past lives cheek to cheek with the present, close but not always comfortable. The Chambers family company, which owns the property, has decided to redevelop the prime waterfront real estate into apartment complexes, and by winter 2005 the building will be a ghost. Plans for Ruthie B's are still undecided, but somehow someone will have to carefully pack up all those millions of wonderful things that fill the house and move them on. It's a tragic and overwhelming thought. The business moved to this location six years ago, says owner Ruth Ballenger, and will probably move on.

On my first visit, I must admit, I doubted that the place could possibly hold food in addition to everything else. Once I confirmed with the woman at the counter that the place was indeed a restaurant, she directed me to my seating choices. I found it interesting, considering the place's history, that women still run this show. There are a handful of tables inside tucked away in little corners or looking out over the river in the back. On pleasant days, the garden is also a wonderful place to enjoy a cuppa. Main Street goes right next to it and over the bridge to Glenwood, but don't let that bother you. With the lush flowers, fall colors and the nearby water, the place is intimate, pleasant and full of surprises.

I sat inside in a little nest, a table tucked into an alcove filled with art deco, plastic Egyptian and blown glass geehaws. It was cozy, visually fascinating and made me feel a little nervous — not somewhere you'd bring a really young child unless yours is content to

simply look around in wonder. There is a room upstairs filled with toys, however, available for little hands to play with.

The waitress skipped in with mint and orange flavored water, a dish of dried lavender and a small bottle of bubble mix. She welcomed us, passed out menus, and sprinkled the sweetly fragrant lavender over the table. Bubbles were blown to start the party off right, and the water was poured through an ancient silver tea strainer. The whole experience was charming and ritualistic, and very playful. After glancing through the menu of sandwiches, crustless quiche (good for a low carb diet) and other delicacies, I simply followed the recommendation of a friend and ordered the Strawberry Salad. It was wonderful to behold: a mountain of greens piled with soft Monterey jack cheese and a sassy sweet vinaigrette, and crowned finally with slices of fresh strawberries and pecans. The flavors and textures were delicious, satisfying and decadent.

Decadence is really what the place is all about. I tried a wonderful cream of tomato soup as well: rich and chunky, delicately textured yet strongly flavored. And the peak of the experience is, of course, the scones. I ordered one as an afterthought, almost too full from everything else, but determined to have the full Ruthie's experience. One look at the mountain of clotted cream and jam and I knew I was in deep. The scone with a cup of tea is a meal unto itself. Clotted cream, if you're new to the concept, is an almost buttery, yet not cloying, thick topping, very lightly sweetened. The real sweetness came from the strawberry jam on top, the best I've had since I last opened a jar of homemade. The strawberry flavor was strong and pure. The scones themselves come in several flavors daily, and are lovely: delicate and crumbly, the perfect foil for the decadence on top.

All in all, this has got to be the place for meeting a friend for a heart to heart, or stealing a quiet moment to pamper yourself. It's also a great place for dressing up for a Halloween tea and reminding yourself of the ghosts of civilized times past.

100 Main St., Springfield. 988-4791.10 am-5:30 pm M-Sa, noon-4 pm Su. \$-\$\$ **EW**

**CORRECTION:** I got my S's mixed up in the Oct. 17 issue of morsels. The Skipper's on 11th Ave. in Eugene is the one with the new look and the addition of Taco Del Mar, while the Sizzler's in Springfield is the place that hosted the FOOD for Lane County benefit.

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