



## Elmer's Hamburgers



**DISH**

Price: \$12 for 2 burgers and a free drink because they felt bad about the wait

**BY MICHAEL HIRSCH**

December 13th, 2025 was cold in an unholy way. A way only known to midwesterners and Canadians. A way that I had totally forgotten about over the past 6 years when I lived everywhere else but the midwest and Canada. I don't remember it getting to single digits that early into the season during my childhood because apparently it didn't but now I'm going to have to deal with "climate change" which is the offshoot of "global warming" that is reality where the climate is "changing" and by changing I mean that everywhere is more unpleasant, which totally blows. Forreal I think there's going to be another ice age or something. The roads were stained with salt and nobody was outside except for me.

I was plastering posters all over the city to promote a new year's eve rave I'm throwing in a skatepark, but the weather was too cold so the adhesive on the tape wouldn't work, my hands and face were growing numb and my 2001 Lexus was clearly not enjoying the cold because buttons were malfunctioning in ways I was unaccustomed to, which is totally fine and not scary to me. I found myself deep on the west side, a place I hardly go to. I don't avoid it actively, I just have no business in that part of the city and there really isn't anything there to justify my existence in that space. I was there solely to drop off a stack of flyers to Anne Marie, a DJ who goes by AMX on stage. She loves to play the hardest of techno and frequently gets flown out to Berlin because they love that there too.

As my car skated out of her neighborhood I noticed Elmer's, like a beacon in the middle of the desolate tundra. I'm sure the neighborhood feels more alive when you can walk outside without the cold being oppressively painful. I know Hunter House, Greene's, Little Bros., and Telway; these are all staples in and around Detroit. They all look the same, built in the middle of the 20th century. White tile boxes with white tile interiors, usually some stools with chrome accents attached to the ground and the smell of grease and grilled onions giving olfactoringus to my nose. Mmmmmmmmm. It's a seriously romantic style of place. Not in the sense that you would ever want to take a date there unless you were comfortable farting in front of them. More in the sense that it's comfortable, timeless and exemplifies a moment in the city's history where everything was perfect and lovely.



I was cold and in search of a place to be stoned and sit alone while surrounded by people, so I attempted to walk into the dining room. Locked. Damn it. The carryout window was in fact open and was in fact somewhat shielded from the cold. There was no heat in the little vestibule tacked onto the side of the building where I placed my order. A man in adidas pants and dreads was receiving an apology from the sixty-something year old behind the bulletproof glass.

“What kind of soda you like? It’s on the house because you had to wait,” stated so flatly that I could tell she’d spent a significant amount of her life behind the doors of this “family owned establishment”. Maybe all 50 years like the sign out front claimed. If she told me she was conceived and birthed inside of those walls, I would not have argued or thought twice about the statement’s truthfulness.

“Diet Pepsi” monotone, slightly annoyed but probably stoned.

What a lame choice of drink is all I could think. Pepsi is such a backup beverage and Diet Pepsi is like, totally a weird thing to want. Diet Coke, yes. Regular Coke, totally. Pepsi? What? Bro, no.

The other woman behind the glass, probably in her thirties, looked at him with a side eye when he said Diet Pepsi then went right back to managing the cooktop. She was probably pulled from some deep fugue state to register what bro just said.

I stepped up to the glass to order.

“Two cheeseburgers, no ketchup and a chili fries,” plainly.

“We ain’t got chili no more, what else you want?” she said, like I was inconveniencing her. This didn’t bother me and in a backwards sort of way kind of added to the ambiance.

“Cool cool cool, just the burgers then,” I said in a tone so relaxed that everyone probably knew I was high.

I paid by card and waited, leaning back against the window, I could feel drafts of the outside air touch my neck; it really wasn’t even warmer in the vestibule at all. The old woman called out “It’s gonna take 20 minutes, just wait in your car” and that irritated me because there must be some sort of ridiculously inefficient method they’re preparing these burgers with because they’re too small and too not busy to justify the wait.

I did wait in my car, but not before lingering a couple of extra moments to inspect the frycook’s methods.

Rings and dings coming from her spatula ping-ponging between burger and onion whose flavors were marrying, bumping, *and* grinding each other on the same flat top. Crashes of the metal burger cloche being shifted from one patty to the next as umami steam rises from underneath to warm a set of buns.



A one-woman assembly line on Detroit's west side. There was totally a ton of wasted movement but I wasn't going to stand there correcting some stranger's technique behind bullet proof glass, I'm not completely stupid.

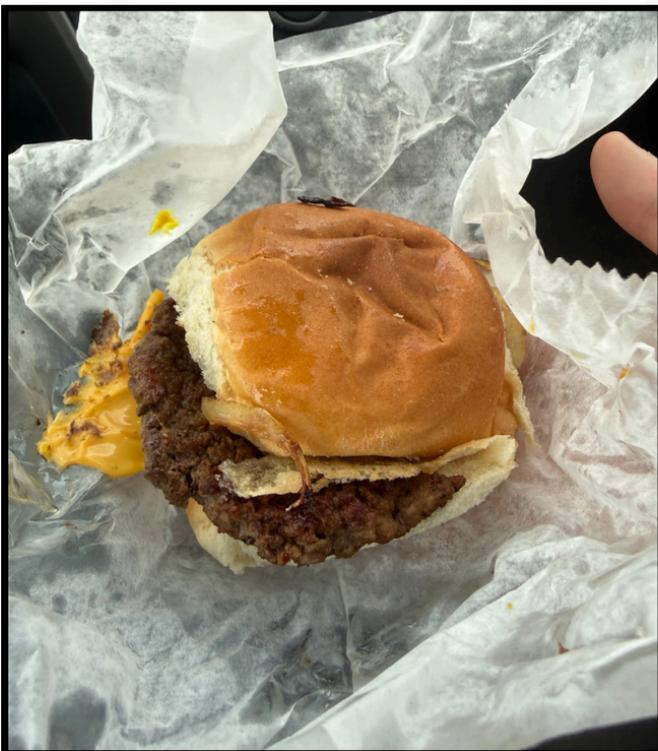
I waited 22 minutes in my car, heat on high, fan setting on maximum, barely thawing out while listening to Kid A for probably the 30th time that week. I rolled the dice and decided to walk back in. After minimal fuss a greasy paper sack was placed in a revolving plexiglass compartment and twirled over to me. "Hey so you waited, what do you want to drink? It's on the house," same way she said it to the other guy! I was not special and that made me feel awesome, just another customer.

“Y’all got Moon Mist?” I asked.

“Yeah we got Moon Mist,”

She tossed a can back into the revolving compartment and twirled it my way. I try to avoid soda because I care so so much about my teeth so this was kind of just for me to give to some random person later on (which I did).

I walked back to my car, excited and anxious. If there was ketchup on there, would I just deal with it? I definitely wouldn’t ask them to remake my food, that would be massively inconvenient for everyone involved. So I carefully unloaded the paper translucent with grease and unraveled the mess of a burger inside. The smell of frygrease filled my car as I slid into a left turn onto Chicago St in the 9 degree weather, it was like heaven but worse.



I fumbled with the burger, trying to fold the paper so I wouldn't have to touch the bun before apprehending the futility of such a thing and stuffed it into my mouth. It was totally exactly what I expected, no ketchup either. The wait was worth it. The cold was worth it. My tastebuds were activated and stimulated, I didn't know where the beef stopped and the onion began. Savory flavors and the slight crunch of the patty from frying on the grill offered the perfect textural contrast to the soft bun that steamed over the same flat top. Everything was punched with a tasteful amount of yellow mustard that pulled it all together. I swear to god I closed my eyes, floating while driving down the iced over street. I was truly a man on the go, but in this moment time stopped and it didn't really matter. Repeat the process for burger number two, a quick pat on the back to reward myself for another meal well earned.

I went home and took a shower and didn't go back outside for the rest of the day.



<https://runnerdetroit.run/MeltdownMeals.MichaelHirsch.html>