

Cozy cafe is a great place to hang out with friends**Calgary Herald****Thursday, December 14, 2000****Page: 12****Section: Neighbors****Byline: Barbara Balfour, Calgary Herald****Column: Chow Down**

Friends Cappuccino Bar and Bake Shop is a long-time favourite haunt of mine.

Its warm and homey atmosphere makes it a great refuge from blustery cold weather -- precisely what we were looking forward to when we pulled into the parking lot.

Hidden away in the heart of the Edgemont community, it's been a while since I last set foot in Friends, so I was quite relieved to see the invitingly soft couches were still there, as was, of course, the roaring fireplace. Friends's atmosphere is like stepping into someone's living room, where many a letter has been penned and a good conversation has been held.

Now all I had to do was test to see if the menu was still as good as I remembered it to be.

I found that I had a sudden craving for soup, so I decided to satisfy myself with a large bowl of home-made cheddar vegetable (\$3.99). I also thought to try the breakfast bob sandwich (\$5.95), a combination of grilled cheese, ham, onion, tomato and seasoned egg, which piqued my interest. After all, breakfast is my favourite meal of the day, next to lunch and dinner.

"So is that kind of like an Egg McMuffin?" I asked the friendly girl behind the counter.

"Well, I'd like to think that what we have here is better than what you could get at McDonald's," she laughed.

And boy, was she ever right. The sandwich itself was pretty straightforward, but I would definitely go back just to taste that zingy complement of flavours that were somehow just right together.

My soup was incredibly cheesy, its diced carrots, peas and corn slid comfortably down my throat. I quickly came to the conclusion that Friends has not lost its knack for making basic food items taste great. And the fact that they make everything from scratch doesn't hurt either.

My guest's choices were just as good. He opted for the smoked turkey sandwich on grilled rosemary focaccia, complete with tomato, onions and edam cheese (\$5.95), and a half order of the chicken quesadilla (\$5.95).

"I really like the way they grill the bread here," he said between bites. "It gives the bread a nice crispy texture."

As for the quesadilla -- well, I've always thought that Friends makes the best quesadillas in the city. A grilled flour tortilla chock full of cheese, onions, peppers and thick chunks of chicken, served with gobs of sour cream and tangy salsa, it wins me over every time.

Next it was time for dessert. We pondered over the selection of cheesecakes in the display case and decided to share a fresh-baked chocolate chip cookie (\$1.26) and a slice of apple caramel cheesecake (\$3.98).

But when I saw the Confetti-butterscotch-peanut-butter-marshmallow-squares (\$1.64), I told my guest he could keep the cookie. Those home-made, melt-in-your-mouth chunks of heaven really are just like grandma used to make -- and now rank in my list of top 10 guilty pleasures.

As we sipped hot apple cider (\$2.80) in front of the fire, letting the food digest in our satisfied bellies, I searched the bookshelves for the books and games I've grown accustomed to seeing at the cafe.

But many of them were missing and I was disappointed to see that the chess set needed replacing -- a game of chess would have been a great way to end a relaxing evening.

So we fiddled around with the magnetic poetry set and perused some of the wares the cafe had to offer on its gift shop side. I even ended up buying something for my mother for Christmas. (Wish I could tell you what it is, but I can't, because she might read this).

When we left, I felt just like I was leaving a friend's home.

Although this visit was our first one this winter, it definitely won't be the last.

Friends has a welcoming atmosphere and a sense of ambiance that I have been unable to find anywhere else in the city for such a reasonable price.