



## Journey to the Journeyman

By Michael Nagrant

LIVING IN A CITY WITH MORE THAN 6,000 RESTAURANTS, why would you ever drive 150 miles to eat in a city with a population of 1,500? For me, it's a kind of a Hillary Clinton-type thing. She was right, it does take a village to raise a child. Unfortunately for my wife and I, parents of a 16-month-old boy who believes soil is a basic food group, we left the village back in our

home state of Michigan when we moved to Chicago. So when we need a break from the exhaustive process of keeping our son's mouth free of dirt and other things you find on the average floor, we gotta go to the village.

It turns out Fennville, a one-Subway-franchise town surrounded by farmland and located two hours from Chicago and about six miles from the nearest freeway, is the perfect halfway point between Lansing, home of my in-laws, and our West Loop loft. Luckily for us, it's also home to one of Michigan's best restaurants, the Journeyman, our drop-off point for junior's sleepovers, aka parental-sanity breaks, with the grandparents.

The Journeyman is a culinary dream, a destination so incongruous with its location you're not sure it really exists. It's the real-life embodiment of fictional isolation fantasies like the Brick bar and restaurant from the TV show "Northern Exposure" or the "Mystic Pizza" parlor. The Journeyman sits smack dab in the middle of a charming ramshackle downtown, where the tattered awning from the local video/electronics flutters in the breeze. Downtown Fennville is so small, your average little leaguer could easily toss a baseball its entire length, and locating a "gourmet" restaurant here feels like an exercise in entrepreneurial suicide.

Fennville is the kind of place where you find a mom-and-pop pie shack (Crane's Pie Pantry in this case), not a topnotch culinary destination that features handmade charcuterie, wood-fired hearth-baked breads and some of the best farm-to-table fare this side of Chez Panisse. But owners Matthew Millar and Amy Cook didn't worry much about that. They just put their heads down and set about their goal of creating a "fresh dialogue about food and a new ethic in cooking."

The Journeyman is a place where the community spirit is as warm as a cup of great steamy coffee. There are places in Chicago that attempt to be like the Journeyman and come pretty close, but there's nothing here that's quite as pure. In Chicago, when restaurateurs talk about establishing a small family-run seasonal spot, it's more often an exercise in PR fantasy. In Chicago, when restaurants talk about their farm-to-table philosophy, it usually means getting fresh produce and meat that's been driven at least a few hundred miles from surrounding farms in Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin.

When the Journeyman puts a chicken leg on the menu and girds it with oozy dill flower and squash risotto and a zingy red-beet-and-cassis vinegar reduction, that chicken was raised ten miles away at Providence Farms in nearby Saugatuck. Salad greens, tossed with blue cheese, scallions and truffle-oil vinaigrette, come from Eater's Guild, a veg and fruit farm located in Bangor, Michigan twenty miles away.

The sausage is house-made and studded with fennel. The creamy foie and chicken liver pate slathered on the wood-fired, homemade crostini melts in your mouth and is served alongside Armandino Batali's salumi, Paul Bertolli's sausages and a selection of pickles and cheese.

Rustic presentations here aren't garnished with frilly bullshit or molded in ridiculous shapes. There are no chemical stabilizers in the bourbon maple gastric paired with juicy Creswick Farms pork tenderloin and belly.

Though Chicago is a town of pizza, we are more a town of stomach-distending deep-dish slices and wispy, bubbly Neapolitan-style crumb. Though Burt and Pequod's come close, we don't quite have the perfect Sicilian airiness of the square wood-fired crust topped with the rich, funky blend of aged parmesan, provolone and "Fumicata" mozzarella cheeses served here.

Simply put, even if you don't have a demanding dirt-eating toddler that you plan on dropping off with the grandparents, you should make the drive to Fennville and eat at the Journeyman. You could also make a side trip to peruse the nearby art galleries in Saugatuck or play on the shore of Lake Michigan in South Haven—but once you stop in at the Journeyman, you probably won't want to leave.

*Journeyman is located at 114 East Main, Fennville, Michigan, (219)561-2269, journeymancafe.com*



## Run, Boy, Run

THIRTY YEARS AGO, Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami owned a jazz club in Tokyo. It was a tiny place. During the day, he served coffee; at night, the club became a bar. Murakami closed up himself, arriving home as the sun was rising in the sky. It had never occurred to him to do anything else, let alone write fiction. And then, it did.

This charming, sober little book tells the story of how, shortly after he embarked on a career as a novelist, Murakami was blindsided by an even likelier idea: to go for a run. One can understand his surprise. At the time, he was smoking sixty cigarettes a day. He had never been an athlete. But he was a solitary person, and before long, he was hooked.

Runners will find a kindred soul on these pages. Here is Everyman, hitting the pavement, falling into that peculiar mental void that opens up on a long jog. He endures the indignities of the sport, too. Completing his first marathon in Greece in midsummer, his sweat dries so fast, it leaves behind smears of salt. "When I lick my lips," he writes, "they taste like anchovy paste."

Since that race, Murakami has run a marathon every year without fail. "What I Talk About When I Talk About Running" skips around these races, circuitously filling out Murakami's thoughts on running as it links to writing—the two habits becoming a feedback loop. In this sense, the book provides a fascinating portrait of Murakami's working mind and how he works his magic on the page.

Since the early 1990s, with novels ("Dance Dance Dance") and stories ("The Elephant Vanishes"), he has been one of the world's most vibrant, spontaneous storytellers—a modern-day Kafka. Apparently, though, there is no magic to what he does. "Writing novels, to me, is basically a kind of manual labor," Murakami writes. "I have to pound the rock with a chisel and dig out a deep hole before I can locate the source of creativity." This droll little book reminds how he has pounded at that bedrock, one mile at a time. (John Freeman)

*"What I Talk About When I Talk About Running: A Memoir"*

By Haruki Murakami

Knopf, 192 pages, \$20

### READINGS

THU/7

#### Elaine Szewczyk

The author discusses "I'm with Stupid." *The Book Cellar*, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

#### John Talbott

The author discusses "Obamanomics." *Barbara's Bookstore, UIC*, (312)222-0890. 7:30pm. Free.

#### Josef Steiff & Contributors

Writers read their work from "Battlestar Gallactica and Philosophy." *Women and Children First Bookstore*, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.

FRI/8

#### Colleen Payne-Nabors

The author reads from "I Did It My Way And...It Worked!" *The Book Cellar*, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

#### Joanne Passet

The author discusses "Sex Variant Woman: The Life of Jeanette Howard Foster." *Women and Children First Bookstore*, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 5pm. Free.

#### Ryan Claytor

The comic book artist discusses his self-published thesis on autobiographical comics. *Quimby's*, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.

SUN/10

#### E. Lynn Harris

The author reads from "Just Too Good to Be True." *Barbara's Bookstore, Oak Park*, (312)222-0890. 2pm. Free.

MON/11

#### Erick Lyle

The author reads from his new book, "On the Lower Frequencies: A Secret History of the City." *Quimby's*, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.

