

MEATLOAF BAKERY CHALLENGES MOMS EVERYWHERE



Loafin' Around

By Michael Nagrant

AS ANYONE WHO'S EVER SEEN THE FILMS "SERIAL MOM" OR "MOMMY DEAREST" knows, you don't mess with mother. But, Cynthia Kallile, chef/owner of The Meatloaf Bakery, isn't quaking in her kitchen clogs. She's ready to go baking mitt to baking mitt with the assurance that she's got the best meatloaf you've ever tasted.

But that's no easy task with such an iconic plate. In 2007, Good Housekeeping dubbed the "loaf" the seventh favorite dish in the United States. Though the modern American version became popular in part during the early twentieth century as a result of recipes created by the Quaker Oats company to sell more oatmeal, minced meat loaves also make an appearance

in the fifth-century Roman cookery collection "Apicius" (the ancient tome suggests that fried, ground peacock meat was best for this type of preparation). First lady Pat Nixon seasoned her meatloaf with marjoram and had her recipe printed on White House stationery to be mailed on request. And most importantly, almost every mother in America worth her Jell-O mold makes a version.

As a ubiquitous part of the parent/offspring culinary covenant, meatloaf is therefore subject to the rule of nostalgia. No matter how bad it was, the fact that it was a staple of your childhood counts for far too much—how else to explain the inferior blue-box reign of Kraft Mac and Cheese. If your mom had a way with deep-fried grasshoppers when you were a rugrat, then the adult you probably has a deep yen for the crunchy buggers.

My own mother combined pork and beef with egg, breadcrumbs soaked in milk, onion, salt, pepper and topped it all off with a Heinz ketchup lacquer. Frankly, as open-minded as I've been about food, and despite sampling meatloaf made with Waygu beef and artisan bacon and glazed in balsamic thyme tomato reduction, my mother's is the only version for which I hanker for seconds. That is until I stopped in at Kallile's Lakeview spot.

When I first heard about the Meatloaf Bakery, I'd suggested the whole idea sounded like the pipe dream of an overworked insurance salesman or a stockbroker character in a Ben Stiller or Judd Apatow movie. What? There's a place that serves \$9 meatloaf cupcakes with faux frosting made from mashed potatoes? I mean, what next, a cereal restaurant? Oh wait... Cereality, we hardly knew ye.

My job, though, is not to mock leads, but to follow them. Then again, the story I found on the Meatloaf Bakery was almost as illogical as the concept. Kallile is a twenty-five-year veteran corporate communications and PR executive. She has no formal culinary training, just a passion for cooking. She says, "After college I lived with a couple of sorority girls, and they'd eat Cheez-Its while I whipped up full-course dinners for myself." In the tradition of great home cooks cum experts like Madhur Jaffrey, or even great chefs like Thomas Keller, who never went to culinary school, she trusted her palate.

Her palate was honed growing up in a Lebanese family where the flavors of lemon, spearmint and curly parsley dominated. In fact, her flagship loaf, aka the Mother Loaf, is her 86-year-old mother's beef-, pork- and veal-based recipe, save for the use of red pepper in place of green (she doesn't like green).

But still, the road to restaurant bankruptcy is paved with the good intentions of great home cooks. Kallile, though, doesn't suffer from the usual faux pas of under-seasoning. Her Loaf-a-Roma meatloaf, featuring oozy mozzarella, sun-dried tomatoes, basil and red-wine-infused beef and Italian sausage, stands up as a supreme nona- (aka Italian Grandmother) beater. You could toss it in the linguine at Spiaggia and Barack Obama would be none the wiser.

I'd always thought turkey and salmon alternatives at restaurants were throw-away courses reserved for health nuts and those whose undergarments were cinched just a little too tight. But Kallile's turkey meatloaf studded with garlic and red pepper, dusted with parmesan and crowned with cranberry sauce might be her best, if not the Omega-3, an Alaskan salmon croquette perfumed with lemon, dill and parsley.

Truly not afraid of busting through the nostalgia barrier, even her MACnificent pasta, aka mac and cheese featuring a funky cheese blend and a crispy panko crust, might be better than my previous favorite side mac found at Smoque BBQ.

While there are a couple of tables, the Meatloaf Bakery is generally a take-out spot, and the loaves come in three sizes, a "loafie," a cupcake and a full loaf or tart portion. The loafie, despite sounding a little too scatological, is actually an appetizer portion served in a pastry crust. My only quibble is that the pastry masks the meat flavor a bit, and I prefer the cupcake as the best ratio of meat to mashed-potato topping.

While the prices aren't necessarily friendly during these trying economic times, approximately \$9 for a large cupcake portion, or \$30-plus for a full loaf, they're not unfair considering the quality and luxury of the ingredients. And, while our governor sells senate seats, our newspapers file for bankruptcy and your wallet tightens, you can bet at the Meatloaf Bakery you're getting a certain priceless dose of tasty comfort, maybe almost as good as your mom's.

Meatloaf Bakery is located at 2464 North Clark, (773)698-6667

MUSEUMS

Chicago History Museum

1601 N. Clark, (312)642-4600. → CHICAGO: COUTURE TREASURES FROM THE CHICAGO HISTORY MUSEUM. "Chic Chicago," the newest exhibit at the Chicago History Museum, highlights more than fifty high-end couture gowns chosen from the museum's collection of more than 50,000 historical pieces. The exhibit is a unique juxtaposition of high-brow and low-brow, of silk, pearls and satin set against a backdrop of soot, metal and blood. In a city famous for its slaughterhouses and gangsters, Chicago's elite sought to rise above their hometown's stigma by flaunting fashion from the most expensive and cutting-edge couture boutiques in Europe. On display are dresses donned by notable Chicago women between 1861 and 2008: Mrs. Potter Palmer II was presented to the Queen of England in a chiffon Madeleine Vionnet gown in 1938; nearly sixty years later, Oprah Winfrey wore a Chanel evening gown she purchased on Michigan Avenue. While admiring the exquisite beauty of these fashion masterpieces, visitors are constantly reminded of the gritty, industrial city in which these gowns were worn. At a mirrored vanity against one wall, guests are welcome to apply the perfume of their choice: Chanel's infamous No. 5...or the timeless stink of the stockyard. (Laura Hawbaker) Through Jul 26. Hours: Mon-Wed 9:30am-4:30pm, Thu 9:30-8pm, Fri-Sat 9:30-4:30pm, Sun noon-5pm. Fees: \$12; \$10 seniors 65+ and students 13-22 w/ID. Members and children under 12 free. Mon free.

Field Museum

1400 S. Lake Shore (at Roosevelt), (312)922-9410. → THE AZTEC WORLD. A mask carved from a human skull, the nose and tongue skewered by ceremonial daggers. This artifact, on display at the Field's exclusive and expansive new exhibit, "The Aztec World," exemplifies the most shocking aspects of the Mesoamerican tribe that, in just 200 years, shaped the foundations of modern-day Mexico. Caricatured in the popular media as brutal and blood-thirsty, the Aztecs were in actuality a deeply complex, sophisticated society fascinated with dyads: male and female, light and darkness, life and death. This assemblage of nearly 300 artifacts has been collected in collaboration with ten Mexican museums. The exhibit explores the stark and shocking duality of the Aztecs: an empire that embraced life through technical and artistic achievements, and death through ritual human sacrifice. Museum guests can view wares from the Great Aztec Market, which dwarfed its European counterparts, as well as large stone statues excavated from the "House of Eagles" and the Templo Mayor in Mexico City. Another artifact—a large, rabbit-shaped drinking vessel for the alcoholic *pulque*—exemplifies a little-known aspect of Aztec culture: a charming and whimsical sense of humor. The Aztecs saw a rabbit's silhouette in the face of the moon, thereby associating rabbits with a popular nighttime activity: drunkenness. (Laura Hawbaker) Through Apr 19. Hours: Daily 9am-5pm. Fees: \$12 adults, \$7 children 4-11, \$7 students & seniors. With Chicago ID: \$10, \$6 children, \$7 students & seniors.

Museum of Science and Industry

57th and Lake Shore, (773)684-1414. → SMART HOME: GREEN + WIRED. The Museum of Science and Industry's latest exhibit is a fully functioning three-story house, the "Smart Home," an ecologically sound building built on the foundation of material, energy and water efficiency. This

is green living gone haywire. Museum guests are ushered through a twenty-minute eye-opening (if somewhat rushed) tour of the house. Every aspect of the building is environmentally friendly, from the recycled construction material, to the organic food, to the LED lights. An ethanol-burning fireplace. A "raw" wood kitchen table. And of course, in the garage, a hybrid car. The house is called "smart" for a reason. Even the houseplants are clever. When a plant needs watering, a call is placed to your phone. That's right—your plant is calling to say it's thirsty. A black obelisk with blinking blue lights (that calls to mind HAL from "2001: A Space Odyssey") is the "brains and guts" of the "Smart Home"; it's an automated system that controls the heating, cooling and lighting of the entire house. A module of the house's network charts not only the amount of energy being used, but also the amount being produced. Guests are given a "Resource Guide" which, like a shopping catalogue, details each gadget and piece of furniture, and where everything can be purchased. We all might not be able to live in technologically advanced, self-sustainable houses, but we can live green by bringing aspects of the "Smart Home" into our own. (Laura Hawbaker) Through Jan 4. Hours: Mon-Sat 9:30am-5:30pm, Sun 11am-5:30pm. Fees: \$11, \$10 Chicago residents with ID; \$9.50 seniors 65+, \$8.75 city residents; \$7 children 3-11, \$6.25 city residents; children 3 and under & members free. Thu free. Omnimax, U-505 sub tour & CSI exhibit prices not included. Parking \$12 non-members.

Newberry Library

60 W. Walton, (312)943-9090. → ARTIFACTS OF CHILDHOOD: 700 YEARS OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS. Yes, it really is 700 years, going back to a thirteenth-century Latin bible, but most of these books are more recent—nineteenth and early twentieth century—including all the various genres made for children, mostly to set them on the straight and narrow path, but occasionally to entertain them as well. There's plenty of unusual stuff here, like a 1975 picture book from Cuba, with colorful drawings done by the children themselves to illustrate the Communist triumph at the Bay of Pigs. And then there's a 1912 "Girl's Ethical Reader" from Shanghai, with delicate, color illustrations in a late-Qing-Dynasty style. My favorites are a few of the original wood engravings for "Alice in Wonderland," designed by Sir John Tenniel, with many subtleties that have disappeared from subsequent editions. Also memorable were the playful, early Modernist illustrations that accompanied the publication of the music for Debussy's "La Boite a Joujoux." Many of the books—or pamphlets—are very small, quite appropriate for small hands and young eyes, but somewhat challenging for adults, especially in the dimly lit display cases. But often the exhibition does present super-size reproductions that capture every detail. (Chris Miller) Through Jan 17. Hours: Tue-Thu 10am-6pm, Fri-Sat 9am-5pm. Fees: Free.