



PAUL AND MONICA'S PIZZA CONJURES UP SWEET STONER MEMORIES

## Slow Ride

By Michael Nagrant

IN MY FOURTEENTH YEAR I had the good fortune of befriending a teenage entrepreneur and a crew of stoner pizza makers. The entrepreneur, my buddy Mike, was the proud owner of a lucrative paper route as well as a premier lawn-care business in Shelby Township, Michigan. Even before Mike could drive, he had a fleet of commercial walk-behinds and tractors, and a shiny trailer to haul them. He was generating mid-five figures while I was still begging my mom for quarters to secure Slurpees at 7-11.

I'd tried to get a paper route, but my father who'd been a Detroit News carrier and a Boy Scout declared that both endeavors had ruined his young life and insisted no son of his would ever join either organization. And for awhile I was sullen as my fellow second-grade homies rocked cool blue-and-gold Cub Scout caps. But, as fathers generally are, years later anyway, he was right. Without his steadfast boycott, I would surely be writing this article from a basement lair drooling over a growing collection of William Shatner memorabilia and animal porn.

But, thanks to my pops, I'd instead been privy to junior-high movie nights and occasional second-base-rounding make-out sessions with the young ladies (ironically the first of those girls is now Mike's wife—sorry, dude). But, no thanks to my dad, I was broke. A night at the Lakeside Mall AMC was not a cheap affair, nor was the price tag on that pair of Rossignol 4SK skis I coveted. I needed a job.

Thankfully, Mike, always restless, added pizza-making to his newspaper and lawn-cutting duties, and had vouched for me too, and I secured a spot on the line at Jimmy's Pizza. Though it was the early nineties, Jimmy's was straight out of Richard Linklater's "Dazed and Confused." Foghat's "Slow Ride" or Led Zep's "Stairway to Heaven" was on constant rotation on the boombox. My fellow pizza dudes all had long greasy tresses, and drove land-yacht sized Chevy Impalas and modded-up Mustangs. They drank more Milwaukee's Best than a frat house and smoked more weed than Snoop Dogg, sometimes with off-duty local cops, who often fixed the occasional speeding ticket in return for free 'za. These pie-slinging pirates traded stories of their conquests, referring to ladies' parts as "trim," as in "I scored some trim last night," and daydreamed of owning their own parlors someday.

One guy, Jamie, had a little more ambition than the others. He'd actually made it through a few years of film school before dropping out. He took me under his wing and schooled me on Sayles and Scorsese. Each weekend I was given homework, which I dutifully viewed in my bedroom on a thirteen-inch rabbit-eared television hooked up to a VCR the size of a microwave.

Jamie wrote scripts on the side, pitched their premises, and urged me to start writing. My first effort, about HIV-infected buddies who go on a cross-country trek to visit famous people's grave sites, was worse than an episode of "Baywatch". I am a writer in some small part because of Jamie's stoner cinema mentorship. Not a food writer mind you, as the idea of getting people to pay you to write about eating seemed as audacious as a skinny black kid with a funny name getting elected president of the United States. But wanting to capture the absurdity of those years as things unfolded compelled me to sit down and do the deed, eventually leading to my current occupation.

And because I am a food writer, I found myself standing in Paula and Monica's pizzeria on Chicago Avenue in West Town a couple of weeks ago, searching out another lead. Like Jimmy's, Paula and Monica's is a takeout and delivery affair. There are no cushy booths, white-and-red-checked tablecloths or wooden walls filled with weak immortality grabs in thousands of carved initials. It's pretty much stainless steel shelving and dudes flying around in their aprons tossing dough. Other than the monstrous apothecary-worthy Bell jar filled with crispy cannoli shells, it is almost a copy of where I toiled as a teenager.

But, frankly, the pizza at Paula and Monica's is better than the stuff I used to make. While it's not authentic New York-style, nor does it claim to be, the thin crust here is probably one of the tastier intermezzos native New Yorker's will find between trips back to Grimaldi's and Lombardi's.

As a now-stalwart Chicagoan, though, I've devoted myself to their "Combo" pie topped with fresh garlic, shiny roast beef scirms, sausage hunks and fiery giardiniera for the last three weeks. It's an Italian beef for people who hate Italian beef. In fact I'm not sure I really prefer Italian beef over this pizza version, and I love Italian beef. Oh, and those cannoli shells on the counter? They fill them to order, ensuring the creamy sweet-ricotta-stuffed pastry stays crispy.

Just as good as the food: as I stood in the lobby at Paula and Monica's, I caught a familiar waft of mingling tomato, sweet onion and garlic, and toasty yeast. And just as when I hear "Slow Ride" on the radio, that whiff conjured up memories of my five summers slinging sauce at Jimmy's like it was yesterday.

Paula and Monica's 1518 West Chicago, (312)929-3615

TIP OF THE WEEK  
ALEKSANDAR HEMON



We knew he was good, but did we know he was *this* good? The Bosnian-born, Chicago-based author of "The Question of Bruno," "Nowhere Man" and last year's National Book Award-finalist "The Lazarus Project"—a staggering work, indeed—returns, rather quickly, with "Love and Obstacles," a book of short stories that sees its release this week. A collection of eight tales with a linking narrator—yes, a man who immigrated from Yugoslavia to the United States—the book moves chronologically as Hemon's unique use of prose paints a picture of man who's path to adulthood cuts through stirring and unsettling world politics. Some of these stories have already appeared in The New Yorker; some see publication for the first time in this assembly. The speedy arrival of "Love and Obstacles" after the praise heaped upon "Lazarus" indicates Hemon's willingness to become the face of the current Chicago literary scene, and right now, I don't think we could ask for a better representative. (Tom Lynch)

Aleksandar Hemon discusses "Love and Obstacles" May 17 at Book Cellar, 4736-38 North Lincoln, (773)293-2665, at 3pm. Free.

### READINGS

SUN/17

#### → Aleksandar Hemon

The award-winning author discusses "Love & Obstacles."  
*The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665, 3pm. Free.*

### TALKS

#### Octavio Paz, Accessible or Enigmatic?

A lecture by Olivia Maciel. Instituto Cervantes Auditorium, 31 W. Ohio, (312)335-1996. THU 6pm. Free.



**Photography:** Elizabeth Jochum (elizabethjochum.com)  
**Styling:** Sheila Styling (ssphotostyle@hotmail.com)  
**Hair and Makeup:** Morgan Blaul, Represented by Artists by Timothy Priano (morganblaul.com)  
**Location:** CTA Orange Line  
**Model:** Hilary for Elite Model Management Chicago  
**Clothing:** Pillow Top Dress Stripe Indigo Ticking and Long Jane Leggings Stretch Silk Chiffon by Frei Designs (freidesigns.com, 773-322-7002, annie@freidesigns.com)  
**Shoes:** Blind Faiths Hi Nicolette Mango by John Fluevog (1539-41 N. Milwaukee, 773-772-1983, fluevog.com)

## VOL 24, NO. 1091

### PUBLISHERS

Brian & Jan Hieggelke  
Associate Publisher Mike Hartnett

### EDITORIAL

Editor Brian Hieggelke  
Senior Editor Tom Lynch  
Art Editor Jason Foubberg  
Film Editor Ray Pride  
Editorial Interns Katie Fanuko, Debra Lipson  
**Contributing Writers** Fabrizio O. Almeida, Ben Broeren, Lisa Busciani, Jaime Calder, John Alex Colon, Patrice Connelly, Jenn Danko, John Freeman, Rachel Furnari, Dan Gunn, Sharon Hoyer, Claudine Isé, Damien James, Valerie Jean Johnson, Noah Levine, Andrew Lochhead, Nina Metz, Michael Nagrant, Chris Miller, Danny Orendorff, Garin Pirnia, Dennis Polkow, Zeb Resman, Elly Rifkin, William Scott, Marla Seidell, Andy Seifert, Jarrett Spiegel, Bill Stamets, Michael Weinstein, Monica Westin, David Mark Wise

### ART & DESIGN

Designers Hwa-Ryong Kim, Jerad Koskey

### OPERATIONS

General Manager Jan Hieggelke  
Accounts Receivable Manager Carrie Marceau Lawlor  
Distribution Nick Bachmann, Derrick Weems, Henry Horton, William Jackson, Preston Klik, Kevin Pickney, Michael Saenz

ONE COPY OF CURRENT ISSUE FREE. ADDITIONAL COPIES, INCLUDING BACK ISSUES UP TO ONE YEAR, MAY BE PICKED UP AT OUR OFFICE FOR \$1 EACH. COPYRIGHT 2009, NEW CITY COMMUNICATIONS, INC. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

NEWCITY ASSUMES NO RESPONSIBILITY TO RETURN UNSOLICITED EDITORIAL OR GRAPHIC MATERIAL. ALL RIGHTS IN LETTERS AND UNSOLICITED EDITORIAL OR GRAPHIC MATERIAL WILL BE TREATED AS UNCONDITIONALLY ASSIGNED FOR PUBLICATION AND COPYRIGHT PURPOSES AND SUBJECT TO COMMENT EDITORIALY. NOTHING MAY BE REPRINTED IN WHOLE OR IN PART WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION FROM THE PUBLISHER.

NEWCITY IS PUBLISHED EVERY THURSDAY BY NEWCITY COMMUNICATIONS, INC.  
770 NORTH HALSTED, SUITE 303,  
CHICAGO, IL 60642  
(312)243-8786 (T)  
WWW.NEWCITY.COM

VISIT NEWCITYNETWORK.COM FOR ADVERTISING AND EDITORIAL INFORMATION.