

resto



LAKEVIEW’S FALAFILL HAS GOOD BALLS

Just Pickled

By Michael Nagrant

I USED TO THINK the greatest thing the Coptics (Christian Egyptians) bestowed upon the world was the sixth secretary general of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali—well, at least his name, which may be the most amusing political moniker of all time. Turns out, though, I'm wrong. Their superior gift to humanity is falafel.

Forbidden to eat meat during certain Christian holy days, foremost the Lenten holiday, and seeking alternative sustenance, the Coptics ground fava beans, mixed them with spices, formed them into patties or balls and deep fried them. As the dish migrated toward the northeast, Chickpeas were substituted for favas.

As the Jewish diaspora resettled in the Middle East, they adopted the dish as their own. Falafel has become such a touchstone in Israel that it's likely any scientific analysis of the particulate content of air in Jerusalem these days shows at least a few parts per million of chickpea and cumin.

My own history with the falafel, though short, is obsessive. I grew up in parts where a vegetarian, and the entrees he or she might consume, was pretty much greeted with the goodwill reserved for a Packers fan at Soldier Field. At best, a vegetarian would be a source of amusement at Thanksgiving dinner, regarded like a carnival oddity, and placated with a jiggly disc of canned cranberry dressing.

As such, I didn't get my first bite of falafel until college. Luckily I picked the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, embracer of all things green (hash bash, carbon neutrality) long before Ed Begley Jr. bought his first Toyota Prius. Falafel balls were everywhere. My spot for the stuff was Jerusalem Garden, a tiny lunch counter done up in red-and-white-painted Soviet gulag-style cinder block. I didn't go there because I was a particularly discriminate eater, but because the Garden was a block away from my favorite used-music store, Encore Recordings, and the fear of displeasing a haughty record clerk with one's music choices generates quite the appetite.

I don't remember flavor particulars, but I know the falafel was good enough such that the Garden became a respite after exams and I became a sucker for that coriander-and-cumin perfume and the crunchy/fluffy dichotomy of a perfect ball.

Since then, I've traveled all over to find the best, and while there are even better examples, one of my favorites is from L'As du Fallafel in the Marais neighborhood of Paris. I'd heard it was Lenny Kravitz's favorite. Note: one should probably not take culinary advice from a man who rocks skinny jeans better than Kate Moss, but this time things worked out.

The energy of the L'As is frenetic, and watching the cooks feverishly form hundreds of balls an hour with just a few spoons and their bare hands is mesmerizing. Harissa sauce adds a touch of fire and the balls are super fresh. As a bonus you get to watch all the young Hasidim chillin' in the street outside, which is eminently more compelling since the success of Matisyahu convinced me they might all be potential reggae musicians.

Despite my fervor for falafel, in the last decade, it has suffered an ignominious fate. In 2002, the FBI was discovered data mining the buying habits at Bay area grocers, aka following the "falafel trail," in the hopes that a spike in purchases of certain foods, like say hummus, might indicate a terrorist sleeper cell. Based on this surveillance technique, one wonders if the FBI regarded Berkeley as the center of world terrorist activity.

In 2004, Bill O'Reilly, Fox's No Spin Zone overlord, transformed the deep-fried ball into a Clintonian cigar of sorts when reports surfaced that he allegedly said that he wanted to rub a falafel (he confused it with a loofah) on one of his female producer's private parts.

Back to redeem the legume fritter is a new Lakeview spot, Falafill, which comes from the guys who brought you Wicker Park's Souk. There are no belly dancers or hookahs this time around, just a tiny room with mod orange seats and gleaming white surfaces, what a diner imagined by the set designer for the movie "2001: A Space Odyssey" would probably look like.

The crispy falafel here features a haunting cumin undertone and is pretty equal if not better than most local falafel I've had. The pita wrap wasn't terrible; however, if all you do is falafel, it shouldn't be coming from a plastic bag on the back counter.

The good news is because of Falafill's super pickle bar, a garden of earthly delights (I haven't been this excited about condiments since the Quizno's pepper-bar commercials featuring those skeezy hampsters), that includes everything from pickled mango to creamy garlic sauce, you should be skipping the sandwich in favor of the falafel "salad bowl" anyway so you can pile on the excellent sides. The baba ghanoung, which uncoils in your mouth with a soulful smokiness, is superior. The best part about Falafill though might just be that every item on the menu is priced under ten bucks, something the old poor college kid, and now, the parsimonious adult, in me loves.

Falafill, 3202 North Broadway (773)525-0052

words

TIP OF THE WEEK
JOHN KOETHE



Great Wisconsin poet John Koethe, winner of the Frank O'Hara Award for Poetry, has for years taken inspiration from both his beloved home state and masters like Proust and William Wordsworth. A significant and largely revered contemporary poet, Koethe published his latest collection, "Ninety-fifth Street," last month, a thrilling assemblage of blurry-eyed glances to the past. Koethe's strongest attribute has always been his ability to reach a larger audience—through both his matter-of-fact use of language as well as his willingness to insightfully detail common themes. Everyone has a past that's viewed wistfully with equal amounts of pride and regret, and as Koethe grows older, it seems his appreciation for his walks down memory lane grows as well. Now in his mid-sixties, thoughts of mortality have taken residence in the poet's mind and heart, and he invites us along for the modest journey. Lovely work from Koethe, as always. (Tom Lynch)

John Koethe reads October 9 at Book Cellar, 4736-38 North Lincoln, (773)293-2665, at 7pm.

READINGS

THU/8

Raymond Britt

The author signs copies of "Chicago Marathon." Barnes & Noble, 1441 W. Webster, (773)871-3610. 7:30pm. Free.

FRI/9

➔ John Koethe

See Tip of the Week. The poet reads from "Ninety-fifth Street." The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

Rebecca Brown, Christine Simokaitis

The writers read from their work. Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.

SAT/10

Sarah Schulman

The author reads from "The Mere Future Sparkling." Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 5:30pm. Free.

Second City/Third Person

Hosted by Brian Costello. The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

SUN/11

Jacqueline Edelberg

The author discusses "How to Walk to School." Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 4:30pm. Free.

MON/12

➔ Blake Butler, Amelia Gray, Sam Pink, Kathryn Regina

The writers read from their work. No Coast, 1500 W. 17th, (312)636-0971. 7pm.

TUE/13

➔ Bookslut Reading Series

Featuring Laird Hunt and Sarah Schulman. Hopleaf Bar, 5148 N. Clark, (773)793-9488. 7:30pm.

➔ Quicksies! Reading Series

With Beth Wylder, Ben Tanzer, Richard Thomas, Caroline Picard, Zach Dodson and more. Innertown Pub, 1935 W. Thomas. 7:30pm. Free.

➔ Requited Reading Series

With Mike Zapata, Heather Momyer, Nicholas Hayes, Amanda Marbais, Laura Krughoff, Kevin Kilroy, Kathy Regina, Ira S. Murfin. Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, (773)227-4433. 6pm. \$5.

Sara Paretsky

The Chicago author discusses "Hardball." Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton, (312)943-9090. 6pm. Free.

WED/14

➔ Billy Lombardo

The author reads from "How to Hold a Woman." Barbara's Bookstore, UIC, (312)222-0890. 7:30pm. Free.

Mike Thomas

The author discusses "The Second City Unscripted." Tim Kazurinsky appears as well. The Book Cellar, 4736 N. Lincoln, (773)293-2665. 7pm. Free.

Plan of Chicago Discussion

An open discussion of the work of Daniel Burnham. Sulzer Regional Library, 4455 N. Lincoln, (312)744-7616. 7pm.

Powell's Bookstore

1501 East 57th Street
828 South Wabash
2850 North Lincoln Avenue



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have
meaning

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WOMEN AND CHILDREN
FIRST TURNS THIRTY



The Female Fight

By Katie Fanuko

THE THIRD FLOOR OF The Breakers at Edgewater Beach is bustling with energy during Women and Children First's 30th Anniversary Celebration & Benefit. Store owners Linda Bubon and Ann Christophersen chat with the many women (and men) who have supported the bookstore over the past three decades as they dine and await speeches from keynote speakers Alison Bechdel and Dorothy Allison. Yet even though the party goes off without a hitch, their work isn't even close to being finished. "I'm more sure than ever that we are in the middle of things, thirty years is nothing. It's just a start on all of the work that needs to be done... there are a lot of the same issues that we've been working on for thirty, forty, fifty years and they are still with us," says Bubon.

When walking into the feminist bookstore located in Andersonville, it's understandable how a place like this could last thirty years, because there isn't anything else quite like it in Chicago, with an inviting atmosphere that's both welcoming to first-timers and keeps regulars coming back. This is exactly the kind of place that Bubon and Christophersen were hoping to create back in November 1979.

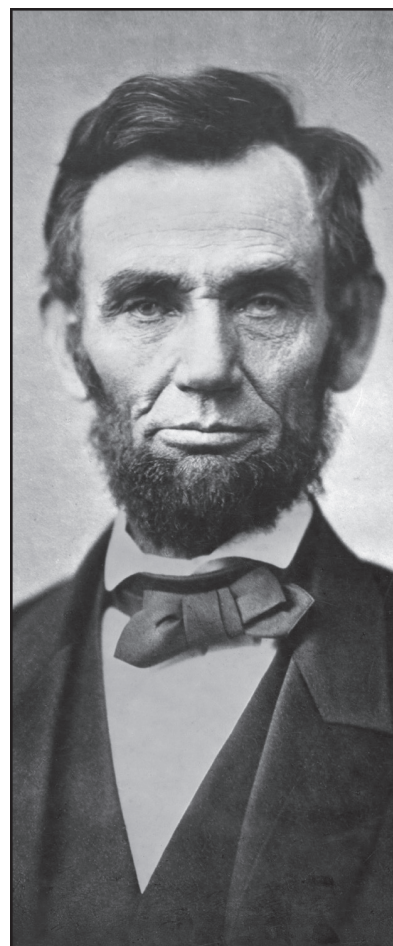
The pair met while studying literature in graduate school at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The initial idea of starting up a feminist bookstore came about as a way to find meaningful employment while staying true to their values and to create a space where the work of female writers could thrive. "This was a motivation for us and the story that we often tell is that we just couldn't find women writers or much of a selection of women writers at so-called general bookstores," says Christophersen. Though both Bubon and Christophersen felt fulfilled in running Women and Children First, they never expected it to become their life's work. "I didn't know that thirty years later that I would still be working towards equality for women," says Bubon. "We thought that we were stuck there for a little bit and then the women's movement came along and we were making all of these strides and by the mid-eighties all of these bookstores would be carrying these great women writers and that didn't happen."

Over the years, everyone from Gloria Steinem to Maya Angelou have read to packed houses at Women and Children First, but Bubon and Christophersen have always championed local authors—especially those first starting out—by providing them with an opportunity to find their niche. Sandra Cisneros, Achy Obejas, Sara Paretsky, Ana Castillo and Audrey Niffenegger are only a handful of the local writers who have been featured. "It's been our privilege to host hundreds of Chicago women authors, poets, fiction writers, non-fiction writers, the whole range," says Christophersen.

Though Women and Children First has successfully fostered its community over the past three decades, there have been challenges along the way. In 2007 the store faced a financial crisis, due to competition from behemoths like Amazon and a stalling economy. On the verge of closing, Bubon and Christophersen turned to the store's patrons and asked for help. "People just think 'The store looks great, they're doing fine, they'll be here forever,' and just get complacent or make assumptions that the appearance belies the reality," says Christophersen. The tremendous outpouring allowed the store to surpass the previous year's profits—for the first time in five years.

Even though the store is still facing financial challenges due to the current economic downturn, Bubon and Christophersen are keeping an eye on what's ahead. Over the past few years, Women and Children First has sold a selection of e-books and is currently planning to expand upon their collection within the next month. While they have embraced the digital trends in the publishing industry, Christophersen still hopes that independent bookstores will still remain valuable well into the future. "We think so much of what's important is not so much the act of acquiring a book, but of being surrounded by books," says Christophersen. "I learn as much about books from talking to customers and over-hearing customers talking to each other. Certainly my fervent hope is that bookstores have a long life ahead of them, but who can predict."

Women and Children First, 5233 North Clark, (773)769-9299



WITH MALICE TOWARD NONE THE ABRAHAM LINCOLN BICENTENNIAL EXHIBITION

A Library of Congress Exhibition at the Newberry Library

The Newberry is proud to present *With Malice Toward None: The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Exhibition*, created by the Library of Congress to commemorate President Lincoln's 200th birthday. A treasure trove of priceless Lincoln artifacts will bring our nation's 16th president to life like never before. Among them are rarely seen period letters, documents, photographs and political cartoons. Admission is free.

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CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY



Community Discussions: What's Next?

Join us to discuss how Daniel Burnham's *Plan of Chicago* shaped our city and what's in store for Chicago's future, at the following locations.

Wednesday, October 14, 7:00 p.m.
Sulzer Regional Library
4455 N. Lincoln Ave.
(312) 744-7616

Saturday, October 17, 11:00 a.m.
Bucktown-Wicker Park Branch
1701 N. Milwaukee Ave.
(312) 744-6022

Saturday, October 17, 1:30 p.m.
Mayfair Branch
4400 W. Lawrence Ave.
(312) 744-1254

For more information visit chipublib.org, or call the library location number listed.

Presented in partnership with Chicago Matters, The Great Books Foundation and the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning. Chicago Matters is an annual information series made possible by The Chicago Community Trust, our region's community foundation.

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