



IN SEARCH OF A CRISPY CURE FOR INSOMNIA

## A Good Egg (Roll)

By Michael Nagrant

**FOR SIX YEARS SUNDAY NIGHTS WERE SUFFOCATING.** The fear of an impending work week at a job I hated roiled in my gut, twisting it every which way, though miraculously stopping somewhere short of an ulcer. Toward the end of my first major stint in corporate America I'd entered panic-attack territory, couldn't sleep many

nights and had an unhealthy regard for my mortality.

Unable to sleep, I'd get into my black Ford Escape, load my CD player with most of the Jay-Z discography, and crank the tunes till they threatened the integrity of my SUV's subwoofer. Indulging in some weird suburban-white-kid anger fantasy (sadly, I was a 27-year-old white man), I'd drive for hours, feeling the music while fording the circumference of the city, slicing down Lake Shore Drive, up the Kennedy, and across the Eisenhower, searching for something, but mostly indulging in the fractal majesty of a Chicago night.

I'd often make a circuit of Chicago's Asian enclaves swooshing past the glinting neon of Chinatown, through the steamy dead-duck-laden corridors of Argyle Street, and past the karaoke and Korean bbq shacks littering California looking for an end to my madness. The throbbing in my head and the tension in my fists only subsided when I stopped to fraternize with the sweet-bbq pork-laden bao at Chi Quon Bakery or to slurp a bowl of simmering pho from Tank Noodle. The foods of Vietnam, Korea and China sated and distracted well.

Unfortunately, I worked in the western suburbs in the pre-Katy's Dumpling days, and there were about as many great Asian options out there as there were in the wasteland of my cubicle (where I was not allowed to drink coffee, or anything other than water, for our owner's fear that insidious liquids might short-circuit a \$20 keyboard on a four-year-old Pentium III desktop).

There was, however, one spot in Elmhurst I frequented, a place I'd still drive to today should I want that satiating Americanized breed of cloying noodles and tame curries: Nathan's Noodles. Expecting authenticity from a noodle joint named Nathan's is like asking to see the captain of the Red Lobster fishing fleet. They didn't even get American Thai right, eschewing rice-paper wrappers in favor of the Cantonese-style wheat-flour pocket. Thank God, as those crispy fried mahogany-colored egg rolls dappled with pockmarks from hot oil and stuffed with piquant peppery cabbage and little shrimps were often the highlight of my work week.

Fast forward four years later, and my 2-year-old son hasn't slept through the night in almost a week. Tired and stressed, one night, as I attempt to flop in bed, I pass out between my bed and the wall. There is but one solution. Crisis demands an egg roll. I'd drive to Nathan's but only an Andre Agassi-like crystal-meth dalliance could stoke my weary body. I'm afraid the thirty-six-mile round-trip drive will end in disaster.

I must find something in Chicago. Soon, food-writer fanaticism takes over and I create a list of twelve potential spots cross-referenced against Google, Yelp, Metromix and LTHforum.com. I think this is somehow a more reasonable undertaking. And so, from Chinatown to Lincolnwood, on a Saturday evening I attempt once again to crisscross the city. Jay-Z lost me at "Blueprint 3," so I have become a harmless hipster, and "Wolfgang Amadeus Phoenix" is now my soundtrack. The Ford Escape remains the same. After four hours and twelve egg rolls this is what I learned:

1) The quality of an egg roll is directly proportionate to how much the restaurant that serves it looks like a postwar diner-style Chinese stereotype, i.e. the more red-vinyl-covered banquettes, paper lanterns and Chinese Zodiac placemats a spot has, the better the roll. 2) A restaurant that has "egg roll" in its name is generally not a purveyor of great egg rolls. The version at Hunan Egg Roll King was merely princely, and I spent more time thinking about whether the restaurant Ms. Egg Roll was hanging out with Ms. Pac-Man (local bacon blogger Jenni Spinner pointed out she might be dating Mr. Beef) than I did about her roll. 3) There are a lot of bad egg rolls out there. Some of them use more JIF than a choosey mom for binder and sealer. Even if your name is Elvis, peanut butter and cabbage do not mix. 4) There are only two egg rolls (including the twelve I tried on Saturday and the hundreds more I've eaten in Chicago over the years) so great they are worthy of Confucian-ideal loyalty.

Without further ado, my top Chicago-area egg rolls:

5. **Orange Garden**, 1942 W. Irving Park: This steroidally large roll has a savory finish that makes me suspect it was boiled in a vat of MSG.

4. **Silver Spoon Thai** (vegetable), 710 N. Rush: Though I am not a rabbit, I dig the abundance of sweet carrots in the filling, a smart counterpoint the tangy cabbage.

3. **Nathan's Noodles**, 683 N. York, Elmhurst: Virtues described above.

**And tied for first: Kow Kow**, 6755 N. Cicero, Lincolnwood: The common wisdom is that Jews love Chinese food, so it makes sense that this Jewish enclave has one of the Chicago area's best rolls. The light tempura-like crust and salty spinach make this the favored roll for those who don't like to mix Chinese appetizers and sweet pastry.

**Golden Wok**, 5731 N. Central: The McDonald's-apple-pie-like crispy crust featuring a deep-fried donut-like perfume may not be for everyone, but that texture along with sweet chunks of bbq pork ensures that after a few bites I do not care whether my son sleeps through the night again.

## READINGS

THU/19

### → Audrey Niffenegger

The local author discusses "Her Fearful Symmetry" as part of the "Writers on the Record with Victoria Lautman" series. *Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 6pm. Free.*

### Barbara Laken

The author discusses "The Cooperating Witness." *Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.*

### → Haki Madhubuti

The poet reads from "Liberation Narratives: New and Collected Poems, 1966-2009." *ETA Square, 7558 S. South Chicago, (773)752-3955. 6pm. Free.*

### → Rockpile

An evening of readings and jazz, featuring David Meltzer, Michael Rothenberg, Spider Trio, Art Lange, Dan Godston, Francesco Levato and more. *Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, (773)227-4433. 8pm. \$8.*

### Susana Vallejo, Care Santos

The Spanish authors discuss their work. *Instituto Cervantes Auditorium, 31 W. Ohio, (312)335-1996. 6pm.*

### Toby Lester

The author reads from "The Fourth Part of the World." *Newberry Library, 60 W. Walton, (312)943-9090. 6pm. Free.*

FRI/20

### Nancy Werking Poling

The author reads from "Out of the Pumpkin Shell." *Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7:30pm. Free.*

SAT/21

### → Bookamania

Chicago Public Library's annual celebration of children's books, featuring authors, illustrators, performances, puppetry and more. *Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 11am-3pm. Free.*

### → Green Lantern Press Reading

Featuring Stephanie Brooks and more. *Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 5:30pm. Free.*

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CHICAGO'S OPEN BOOKS  
ARRIVES WITH A MISSION

## The Good Word

By Micah McCrary

**“MORE THAN FIFTY PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE** in our city have low or limited literacy skills,” says Erin Walter, Literacy Director of Open Books in Chicago. “And sixty-one percent of low-income families nationwide have no children’s books at home.” Walter sits alongside Becca Keaty, Director of Marketing and Public Relations, and Stacy Ratner, Executive Director, in the soon-to-be-opened bookstore, which will house between 40,000 and 50,000 books by its grand opening November 21-22.

The store’s multicolored walls with inspirational and clever quotes like “He that loves reading has everything within his reach” resemble a painting of easter eggs, and ubiquitous shelves of purple, orange, green, pink and blue stand in ordered chaos, all of which can hold up to 60,000 books in total. In the children’s section, which is divided off by a standalone wall built to look like the front of a house, book clouds—donated books that have been painted to look like clouds in the sky—hang from a cerulean ceiling. A faux fireplace lounge hosts a wall covered by tiles purchased, customized and donated by both volunteers and by others who support the literary venture of Open Books.

What, exactly, is Open Books? “It’s a social venture,” Ratner says. “We’re nonprofit, so we’re dependent on charitable ways of giving. The second thing is that it’s a public space to make illiteracy an issue. It’s a big, colorful, creative, collaborative space for all levels.” Open Books houses four literacy programs: Open Books Buddies, a one-on-one reading program in elementary schools in Chicago and Evanston; Adventures in Creative Writing, creative-writing workshops for grades four through twelve held at Open Books, an “all-non-fiction-based idea to get these kids to share their personal stories,” says Walter; VWrite, mentoring programs for teens who are matched one-on-one with professionals in the city for college and career writing (résumés, personal essays, etc.); and WeWrite, a program for adults and the occasional teenager who’s extra motivated. “We have forty-five adults and teens from all over coming here to write,” Ratner says. “The grand opening lets us take all of our programs to the next level.”

The Open Books mission began three-and-a-half years ago in Ratner’s basement, when just she and Keaty were collecting donated books with the goal of becoming a nonprofit organization. “It took a year to get 501c3 status,” Ratner says. “We opened in May of 2006 and got the status in June of 2007.” In all this time, those at the forefront of the mission have collected tens of thousands of books ready to be sold to voracious readers from all over. “Lots of bookstores are closing,” Walter says, “and we hope to support those people who feel they’ve lost their bookstore.”

“We also decided we’re gonna be selling books online,” Keaty adds. “Some will sell in the store and some will sell better online, so we’re doing our best to maximize on that.” With any luck, book sales will garner the attention of readers and writers alike looking for a place to call home or even just pleasantly pass through. “Hopefully we’ll put Open Books on the map for authors who are coming through Chicago to promote their books,” Keaty says. Authors that will appear at the grand opening include Joe Meno, Marcus Sakey, James Kennedy and Kristy Bowen, all representing their own panels of Young Adult, Mystery/Thriller and Poetry writing.

The bookstore is a means to help fund the cost of Open Books’ literacy programs, the heart of their concerns. They’re partnering with and getting volunteers from more than literacy organizations in the Chicago area, including Story Bus, Young Chicago Authors, Steppenwolf Theatre, Christopher House and Sit Stay Read. “Really we have no barriers, I would say, when it comes to finding ways to support the cost,” says Walter.

*Open Books will open its doors November 21-22 at 213 West Institute Place. More information on the weekend’s events can be found at [open-books.org](http://open-books.org).*

## → RECOMMENDED

*Selected fashion shows, trunk shows, sales and events appear below. To submit listings email [stylecal@newcity.com](mailto:stylecal@newcity.com). For expanded coverage, visit [boutiqueville.com](http://boutiqueville.com).*

THU/19

### Chicago-Based Designer Accessory Trunk Show

Macy’s on State Street hosts the largest Chicago-based designer trunk show of the season featuring more than twenty established Chicago-based designers. Meet the designers behind the collections of men’s and women’s accessories, handbags and jewelry. Macy’s on State Street, 10-6pm. Also, FRI/20.

### Light-Up Night Cocktail Party

Trousseau Lingerie and Swim kicks off the holiday season with its First Annual Light-Up Night Party. Enjoy festive cocktails and treats as you peruse Trousseau’s holiday collections. Get ten percent off all purchases and if it’s your birthday, present a valid id and enjoy 25 percent off. Continue to stroll down the Southport Corridor from Belmont to Irving Park enjoying complimentary cocktails and in-store events from other local area retailers. This event is free and open to the public. For more information, call (773)472-2727 or email [trousseaulingerie@gmail.com](mailto:trousseaulingerie@gmail.com). Trousseau, 3543 N. Southport.

### Objets at Province

An evening for foodies and fashionistas: chef Randy Zweiban and jewelry designer, Kirsten Goede are pairing up to host a night of jewelry shopping, noshing and cocktailing. Objets d’Envy introduces brand new jewelry designed with the themes of silver+gold, seriously dramatic earrings, and a rash of red, coral, rouge. Chef Randy presents complimentary appetizers inspired by Objets jewelry. Festive cocktails are in the offering. And with any jewelry purchase, receive one free signature cocktail.

Details and RSVP [objetsdenvy.com/events.cfm](http://objetsdenvy.com/events.cfm). Province, 161 N. Jefferson at Randolph, 5:30-7pm.

FRI/20

### Taboo Tabou Red Light Charity Event

“Red light” window performances by local burlesque dance troop, the Chicago Starlets, as well as makeovers by the Johnathan Breitung Salon will highlight the event. Prizes will be raffled off throughout the night, including striptease classes at Studio L’Amour, spa services at the Johnathan Breitung Salon, beauty products from Booty Parlor and more. Lakeview’s female-friendly fetish shop, Taboo Tabou, will host the charity event benefiting Women in Film Chicago. They’ll also be donating 10 percent of gross sales for the day to Women in Film Chicago. (773)883-1400. Taboo Tabou, 854 W. Belmont, 9-11pm.

SAT/21

### Best of All Worlds Trunk Show

Pre-holiday fashion trunk show with Ssaucy Boutique’s handbag designer Sue An; Yana Collections’ women’s high-end apparel designer, Yana German; and luxury handbag designer, Christopher Augmon. Wine and hors d’oeuvres provided. (847)722-8001. Ssaucy Boutique, 1000 W. Lake, 1-5pm.

### Modern Vintage Holiday Market

The third annual Market returns. Shoppers can kick their holiday shopping off with this mix of vintage and modern goods. Free parking will be available in the Plumbers Hall parking lot and free gift wrapping and packaging will also be offered throughout the weekend. Admission, \$10 (\$8 in advance online); student admission with valid ID, \$5; children under 12 are free. [randolphstreetmarket.com](http://randolphstreetmarket.com) (312)666-1200. Beaux Arts Plumbers Hall, 1340 W. Washington, 10-7pm. Also, SUN/22, 10-5pm.

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