

eat & drink

LENNY GILMORE/REDEYE



By Michael NAGRANT | FOR REDEYE

"It's the eye of the tiger. It's the thrill of the fight ..."

I'm at Andorka's Sandwich Shop, a cozy neighborhood joint tucked into the bottom of an old red brick building in Pilsen, and I can't stop humming that legendary *Survivor* track from the "Rocky" movies.

As I bite into an Italian sausage sandwich dripping with gooey provolone, a cascade of olive-rich giardiniera flows out like a salty, earthy waterfall. The scent of tomato and garlic flares my nostrils. This is the ideal hero, the kind of red sauce-slathered gem you'd find in an Italian mom-and-pop shop on some lonely corner of Staten Island, N.Y., or at Fontano's Subs in Chicago's Little Italy. Or, as my brain is currently processing it, somewhere in Philadelphia's 9th Street Italian Market.

With just one mouthful of this sandwich, a montage of "Rocky" flickers in my head. Sylvester Stallone is running around the market in gray sweats, beating sides of beef, catching loose chickens and doing one-handed push-

ups. And just like Stallone reaching the top steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I'm pumping my fist as notes of fennel and red pepper burst from the plump, juicy sausage. I'm smitten.

The one thing that sets this sandwich apart from a typical Italian hoagie is that it's served on toasted white bread instead of a crusty roll. The bread, which is also available in multi-grain if you prefer, is baked in-house by owner and chef Matt Andorka. It's not some spongy Wonder slice best left for sopping up sloppy barbecue, but a fresh airy raft with a dark mahogany crust.

I added on a side of housemade chips (\$2), which are a total steal and taste 10 times better than the expensive bagged stuff you'll find

at the store. They're not fried to order, but the crispy sliced russet potatoes are made daily and glisten with a touch of fry oil. There are vinegar dispensers at each table, and it's nearly impossible not to shake a few drops of the stuff on the basket of chips to make an improvised version of salt and vinegar spuds. If vinegar's not your thing, go for the Kepler dip (\$1), a mixture of sour cream, mayo and caramelized onions poached from Andorka's wife's family recipe.

"Everyone in her family makes a version," Andorka said. "I tried and they told me mine wasn't good enough."

Though the giardiniera is a jarred product that isn't crafted in-house, it's fantastic, packed with olives and also available on the cured sandwich (\$8) with salami, coppa, ham,

provolone and red wine vinegar.

"I love giardiniera. I wanted it on all the sandwiches, but my wife said maybe that wasn't such a good idea," Andorka said.

Like the food, the space here is homey. It's filled with all kinds of interesting bric-a-brac including a cement gargoyle, a fake bomb with the word "sandwich" stenciled on it, a glass candy jar your grandma probably also has at her house and a functioning 8-track player.

"A customer of ours gave [the 8-track] to us. He said, 'I have this old thing and it kind of fits with the decor,'" Andorka explained. "We have a Beatles mix we play a lot as well as the soundtrack from 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind' from the Electric Moog Orchestra."

I might just scour some thrift stores this weekend to see if I can find a copy of the "Rocky" soundtrack to donate to the Andorka's 8-track collection.

MICHAEL NAGRANT IS A REDEYE CONTRIBUTOR. REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.

worth a trip

Sausage sandwich (\$8)

Andorka's Sandwich Shop, 2110 S. Halsted St. 312-763-6916