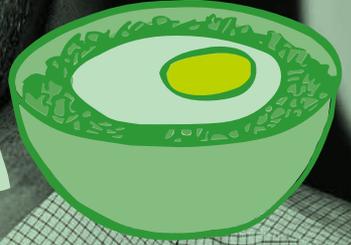


# PUT A EGG ON IT



Tasty zine! #5 \$7

\$7.00US 05>

A standard 1D barcode with a price tag of \$7.00US and a small '05' indicator to the right. The barcode is located on a white rectangular background.

0 74470 26491 0

Svetlana Kitto



My English father likes to remind me that when I was a small kid, I used to horrify him by begging for a “proper sit-down” at McDonald’s: “Please, daddy, please!” As the child of two European immigrants, not only did I love what I thought of as “American food,” I loved the ritual of going somewhere to eat it. Though he drew the line at McDonald’s, my father, a gourmet chef, also loved going out for food completely unlike what we ate at home, and regularly took my sister and me to diners and coffee shops all through our growing up in Los Angeles. Though the restaurants changed from year to year, they remained extremely cheap, no more than a ten-minute drive away and not particularly populated — often with a squat sign that read: Please Seat Yourself.

Until I was about 11, we lived smack-dab in the middle of Hollywood on a grubby street near the intersection of Sunset and La Brea, an area that has since become prime real estate. Back then, my house was walking distance to the Seventh Veil strip club; the Federated superstore (pronounced Federated by my younger sister) and its miles of dusty outdated electronics; a Wendy’s, whose square burgers I loved; the 7-11 where I spent \$2.50 of my allowance every weekend to decorate nachos with cheese that came out of a pump; and Mel’s Diner, a chrome-paneled cube in the middle of a crumbling strip mall, and one of the many Los Angeles

restaurants popular in the 1980s with a 1950s theme, complete with mini jukeboxes at every table, malts and milkshakes and waiters in white paper hats.

One of our regular haunts was Ships on La Cienega, which was actually built in the ‘50s, an antique by L.A. standards. The restaurant’s space-age sign atop a long pole in the parking lot could be seen from a block away, the letters styled like lightning bolts. Every table had its own personal toaster, the silver bubbly kind straight out of a show on Nick at Nite, and the long counter that encircled the entire place was filled with men chatting and reading newspapers.

At Ships, anything else I might order was secondary to the restaurant’s main attraction — the Cream of Chicken soup — a giant white bowl of thick, gravy-like broth and lots of noodles. (My love for chicken soup originated in my Jewish grandmother’s home: her “Noodles and Bouillon,” transliterated from the Russian, was a bowl of soup so adored by my sister and me that its ingredients, a can of Swanson’s chicken broth and a handful of Manischewitz noodles, held a permanent place in both my father’s cupboard and his vernacular, as in, “If you’re hungry go make yourself a bowl of noodles and bouillon, impudent child!”) Somehow, in the hands of diner chefs, a bowl of chicken soup became illicitly creamy in a



*The Big Bang Coffee Shop was once a Nibbler’s. Photo by Elijah Geiger*

sort-of-artificial way, and I heartily enjoyed the twist.

Angel’s Coffee Shop was another family favorite (and in yet another strip mall) on La Brea and Santa Monica. I liked to order the iceberg salad with creamy blue cheese dressing and extra croutons, then watch for the exact right moment to ask my dad if we could follow the meal with a scoop of rainbow sherbet from the Thrifty’s next door.

Sometimes we would venture west and more upscale to Nibbler’s, a Jewish restaurant just off Wilshire in Beverly Hills that took up half the block. Inside was room after room of old people eating and talking: American Jews who struck me as happier, more American versions of my grandparents. I would get a bowl of matzoh ball soup and a perfectly crisped, golden grilled-cheese sandwich with gooey hot American cheese that I liked to stick my finger in.

While I was busy trying to be an American kid at these restaurants, my father was using them to revisit his English childhood. He always ordered as if he were in an English roadside café: fish and chips at places that had no business making fish and chips, like Angel’s; diner-style Spaghetti Bolognese that reminded him of the Italian cafés of postwar London. The food he cooked at home was often English or Italian, and always delicious — penne with homemade pesto that he kept in baggies in the freezer, cauliflower baked in cheese and béchamel sauce, which I called cauliflower o’ cheese, shep-

herd’s pie, real spaghetti Bolognese that took hours to cook. This was nothing like the food I looked forward to eating at friends’ houses, like tortilla chips with Velveeta, Kraft macaroni and cheese and the mysterious Hamburger Helper, which had that chemical creaminess to it that delighted me then but alarms me now.

Even when my father did order himself American food it was always with some distance. At the McDonald’s drive-thru he would order the Filet-o-Fish but insist on the English pronunciation, “a fill-it of fish, please,” which, of course, meant having to repeat it several times to the cashier. And back at Mel’s Diner, an order of “wet fries” for the table (fries covered in hot gravy that we all loved) prompted him to put on his warm yet mocking American accent, imitating the Beverly Hillbillies, for the waiter: “Hi, Willburrrr, can we get some wet fries?”

This surely was a golden age of eating and living in Los Angeles; most of these places closed in the ‘90s with a more sanitized Hollywood emerging in the 2000s. Ships closed in 1995, there’s a fancy mall where the Angel’s used to be on La Brea and Mel’s Diner shuttered its doors while I was still living around the corner — just months after the L.A. Riots in 1992. Looking at the neighborhood today, you would never know that on the day of the riots I remember looking out our front window and seeing a young kid sprinting down the street with a large TV in his arms, smiling. ☺

Rub it down

Rub the inside of your cooking pot with a little oil to prevent pasta from boiling over.

