Save the Deli

"Deeply satisfying."
—LOS ANGELES TIMES



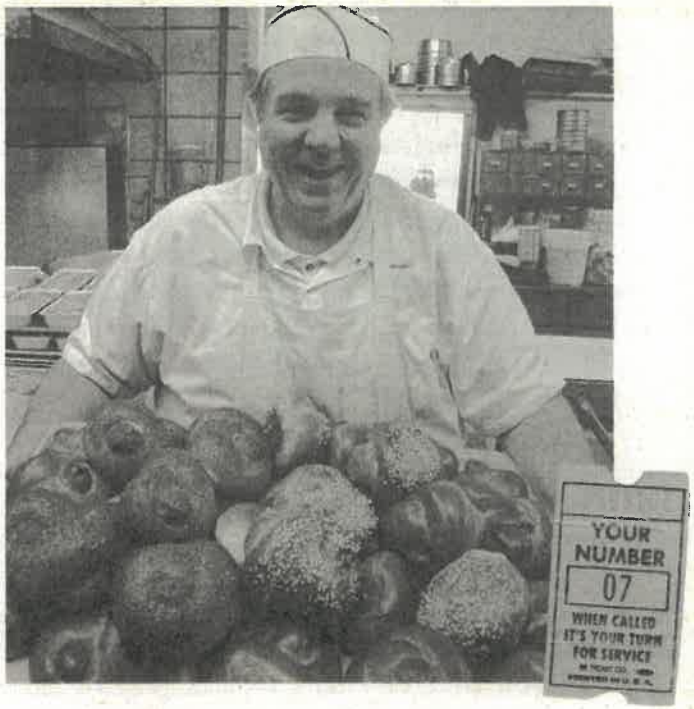
In Search of PERFECT PASTRAMI, CRUSTY RYE, and the Heart of JEWISH DELICATESSEN

David Sax

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competition at bay. In the world beyond the town's borders, the deli business was more cutthroat, and many who had tried to emulate Zingerman's elsewhere succeeded only on a surface level.

"The Zingerman clones just don't match up," Sy Ginsberg said, wiping bits of *blintz* from his mustache. "It's like putting some extra chrome on a Chevy and calling it a Cadillac."



Chicago: Can Deli Return to the Windy City?

A man walks into Manny's Coffee Shop & Deli, grabs a tray, and slowly starts down the cafeteria line. On the other side of the counter, a quartet of men in white button-up T-shirts and paper hats reaches underneath the protective glass to retrieve a rainbow of soul-warming dishes. It snowed two feet this week and the Bears got pummeled in the Super Bowl last night. He's earned this meal.

At the first counterman, he eyes browned strips of baked fish, golden salmon patties, crisp little fried smelts, and *knishes* big as

grapefruits, but he's drawn to a softball-sized piece of homemade *gefilte* fish. The counterman hands it over, along with a bowl of *mishmosh*—chicken soup with the works, including a duo of dense *kreplach*, a handful of thin noodles, and two *matzo* balls.

Next, our man arrives at Gino. Manny's legendary counterman is furiously assembling overstuffed corned beef sandwiches. "Hey pal," Gino says in a flash, his wry smile emerging behind Einstein whiskers, eyes peering expectantly over spectacles that rest on the tip of his nose. Somewhere in the metronome tempo of two slicing machines peeling off strips of pink corned beef like soft cheese, our man in line falls into a trance, snapping awake only when Gino issues a quick "Hey pal? What can I getcha?"

The man orders a corned beef and Gino explodes into action. He slaps a big slice of rye onto the wood board, flips his fork in the air like a ninja, catches it, and stabs the growing pile of meat falling off the machine's blade. Gino drops the corned beef onto the bread, tosses another slice on top, and slices the sandwich in half. Then he grabs a plate and pickles, and in one swift move flips the plate into the air, catches it, slams the pickles down, drops on the sandwich, impales a crispy blond *latke*, and hands it over.

"Fast hands," our man in line says.

"Yeah," Gino quips, "and they're still attached too."

The man ignores the salad counter and waits while the cashier punches in his friend's order. Starving now, he takes a fork from the bin and tears off a fat hunk of *gefilte* fish. It's so good, almost creamy, that he barely chews, and is still savoring it, when he starts gasping audibly for air. His face turns red. The man is choking.

This is the point when my interview with Ken Raskin, Manny's owner, is interrupted, as he rushes over to save his customer's life. Raskin, a great bear of a man, wraps his arms around the choking man and lifts him off his feet, performing the Heimlich maneuver until the offending *gefilte* fish is dislodged. "Are you okay?" Raskin asks. The man wordlessly pats Raskin on the shoulder in brief thanks, then chews and successfully swallows the very piece of

gefilte fish that nearly killed him. Without breaking stride, he joyfully saunters over to his table, where he rips into the rest of his meal with undaunted ferocity. No panic. No tears. No life flashing before his eyes. His only concern is to keep on eating.

"My arms are killing me," Ken Raskin said, returning to the table rubbing his forearms. I asked Raskin if the man's unruffled reaction was common. "Four years ago the roof caught on fire at lunchtime and people were fighting to get *in!*"

The Windy City has all the elements that should make for one of the world's best delicatessen towns. Its Jewish population clocks in at approximately 285,000, the fourth largest in the country (after Philadelphia), and is one of the few communities that is growing in size. Most of Chicago's Jews have Ashkenazi roots: Poles, Romanians, Russians, Hungarians . . . delicatessen stock.

Since the rise of the great stockyards in the 1880s, Chicago has long been America's meatiest city. Up until the 1950s and the advent of refrigerated trucks, if you ate beef in America, Chicago was its likely source. As a result, it was a hub of deli production. Vienna Beef, Best's Kosher and Sinai 48, Wilno Salami, Eisenberg, Oscherwitz Kosher, King Kold, Sara Lee, and Eli's Cheesecake are all Chicago Jewish food brands. Chicago's sausage makers still supply many delis west of the Mississippi.

The factors are all there for a Midwestern deli Mecca: lots of Jews, big carnivores, and a fair chunk of the deli industry. But why weren't Chicago's delis that well known? No one really discussed them. Were they still around? I had seen archival photos of delicatessens in the city from previous decades. Had they simply closed? Were the delis scattered among far-flung suburbs, like those I visited in Detroit? If so, why hadn't they come back to the city itself, which remained a thriving and wealthy metropolis?

"I don't think the mentality [in Chicago] was ever that delicatessens were the place to go, like in Cleveland or Detroit or New

York," Bob Schwartz said, recalling his own surprise when he moved to Chicago from Cleveland in the mid-1970s. "It's a hot dog town primarily." Schwartz, a short joyous man with a Danny DeVito rasp, was a senior vice president of Vienna Beef. He has published a book on Chicago's hot dog stands, and drives a red Audi with a license plate that says PSTRAMI. We had just finished a tour of Vienna's processing plant, a giant industrial facility that annually produces hundreds of millions of pounds of hot dogs and deli meats. Founded in 1894, Vienna Beef is one of the oldest Jewish deli purveyors in the country, predating Hebrew National by a decade, and is largely responsible for popularizing the hot dog in America.

Compared to United Meat and Deli, Vienna was playing in the national leagues. As I toured around with Schwartz, we passed racks of tens of thousands of hot dogs and walked along raised metal catwalks suspended above a dozen vats of bubbling corned beefs. Thousands of briskets and navels awaited entry into giant smokers, stacked onto the racks of metal trolleys suspended from a track in the ceiling. Schwartz said that Vienna sold half a million pounds of corned beef the month before St. Patrick's Day. With regard to hot dogs, they were making an average of 80,000 pounds a day, upping that to 120,000 pounds during baseball season. The plant runs twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

The majority of Vienna's products went to supermarkets, big box chains, and restaurant supply companies like Sysco. Schwartz estimated that sales to Jewish delis were less than half of what they had been in the 1970s, maybe 10 per cent of Vienna's total business, and a much greater decline from the first half of the twentieth century. The days of independent meat salesmen (whom Schwartz called "Wagon-jobbers"), *schmoozing* at their customer's neighborhood deli, were done. "That's why a company like ours has done very well, because we haven't relied on that one segment," Schwartz said. "A guy like Sy, for instance, that's his whole business. He'll get on an airplane and go to Bozeman, Montana. No one here will go to Montana just to visit one deli."

Consolidation had also cemented giants like Vienna, and the recent history of Chicago's deli purveyors reads like a meaty M&A report. David Berg and Company went bankrupt in the 1980s, and their Kosher Zion brand was absorbed into Vienna Beef. King Kold, Berg's glatt kosher dairy operation, was spun off independently and acquired the Ratner's brand name from the legendary Lower East Side dairy restaurant, which closed in 2002. Best's Kosher Sausage Company had merged with Sinai Kosher Sausage to form the Bessin Corporation, which then sold out to the Sara Lee Corporation. Sara Lee, which was established in 1935 by Chicago Jewish baker Charles Lubin, was acquired by the Consolidated Foods Corporation in 1956. Today Sara Lee is a publicly traded food empire with tens of billions in assets, including Shofar, Wilno, and Oscherwitz deli brands, LaVazza espresso in Italy, and Godrej insecticides in India.

All this consolidation had placed increased pressure on producers to leverage more profitability out of their products. Foods were being replaced with "foodstuffs"—engineered products with artificial flavorings, like Vienna's "Smoked Brisket," which was injected with liquid smoke. So long as the product could sell in Costco or Sam's Club, did it matter if it tasted *haymish*? These corporations had no loyalty to Jewish deli products. In January 2008, Sara Lee ceased all production of kosher meat products, ending the legacy of Best's Kosher, Sinai, Shofar, and Wilno in a penstroke. Best's Kosher alone had been around since 1886. Anyway, there were even fewer delis to sell to in Chicago, and they had been dying for some time.

"Benny Goodman first played clarinet in that old synagogue over there," Irving Cutler said, slowly driving his car around the West Side of Chicago's Lawndale and Douglas Park neighborhoods. "In this building, my sister sat and listened to Golda Meir, then a public librarian, give fiery speeches about the Zionist cause."

Retired as the chair of the geography department at Chicago State University, Irving Cutler has been spending much of his golden years as a historical tour guide of Jewish Chicago, and I asked him to show me the ghosts of Chicago's deli heyday. Up until the middle of the twentieth century, 125,000 Jews lived in Lawndale, but only traces of their community remain. Along Douglas Boulevard, a tree-lined street with a grassy median, Cutler pointed out the shells of once grand synagogues. Imposing stone structures rose from the sidewalks atop wide staircases, their turn-of-the-century grandeur unmolested by time. These were gorgeous buildings, some of the finest specimens of Diaspora architecture in America, now absorbed into the neighborhood's background. Most had boarded windows and barricaded doors. Many became Baptist churches, their Stars of David covered by bright signs enticing all to come and be saved.

As we turned onto Roosevelt Road, the area's main commercial street, Cutler began rattling off the delicatessens that had occupied various corners. The Blintzes Inn had become a day-care center. Silverstein's, once a banquet hall filled with seltzer bottles and *bar mitzvah* parties, was an empty lot. By the time of the 1968 inner-city riots, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, there were few Jews left in central Chicago, and even fewer delicatessens. Those that hadn't decamped to the suburbs sold, went out of business, or burned up in the riots. Carl's, known for its corned beef and clubby atmosphere, was no more. Zweig's lasted until the mid-1960s. Gerwitz's, Sam & Hy's, and dozens of tiny corner delis . . . all were gone now.

In other areas of downtown Chicago, the story was the same. Cutler next took me to the historic Maxwell Street Market, once a dense collection of tenements and pushcarts just south of the city center that had been Chicago's equivalent of the Lower East Side. But Mama Batt's was gone, as was Leavitt's, and Gold's. The last holdout was Nate's Deli, formerly Lyons, which was owned by Nate Duncan, an African-American counterman who'd worked at

Lyons for many years. In *The Blues Brothers* film, Nate's exterior provided a stand-in for Aretha Franklin's soul food restaurant, but in 1994, the city tore down the Maxwell Street Market, including Nate's, to make room for condos and the growing University of Illinois at Chicago campus.

We drove on to northern enclaves like Humboldt Park, Roger's Park, and Albany Park, where Cutler explained how change came more gradually as Jewish families slowly moved out to the suburbs. Again, the delis were left to die: Moishe Pippic's, Itzkovitz, Joe Pierce, and Koppel's. Though Hasidic and elderly Jews remain embedded in West Rogers Park, there is nary a deli to be found for miles. Down in Chicago's South Side, Cutler remarked how Unique Deli and the legendary Braverman's are fading memories.

"The delicatessens that had relocated to the suburbs often didn't adjust well," Cutler said. "In the suburbs, they tried to open and failed. As you move away from the heart of the city, [the community] becomes more and more diluted." Where each Jewish neighborhood once boasted a dozen delis in its roster, now the whole of Chicago and its suburbs barely listed that many. It was fitting that the last stop Cutler made was in the suburb of Skokie. He pulled into the parking lot of the Barnum and Bagel Restaurant, a Skokie institution that had been teeming with business weeks before. Now it sat empty. White pieces of paper stating "CLOSED" were taped to the windows. Just a few blocks away, the only sign that Chaim's Kosher Bakery and Deli had closed the week before was its locked door. Chaim's stunned customers were now trickling across the street to Kaufman's Bagel & Deli where a sign beckoned "WINTER IS COLD. OUR HOT TREATS WILL WARM YOUR HEART." Inside, mother Judy Dworkin, daughter Bette, husband Arnold, a bevy of veteran countermen, and a big jolly baker named Herb Fingerhut were keeping Skokie's deli scene alive.

Physically divided in two, between a bakery and a takeout delicatessen, Kaufman's was not a restaurant, but a bustling Jewish food emporium. At Kaufman's I experienced my first great hope for

Chicago deli. Silver-haired matriarch Judy took me around the store, procuring various nibbles and tastes of anything she felt was worthy: cornmeal-rolled rye, dark Russian pumpernickel, sugar-speckled raspberry *rugelach*, sweet *gefilte* fish, coarsely chopped liver, dense noodle *kugel*, and a baked rice pudding. Bette, the gregarious daughter of already gregarious parents, was everything I expected in a Chicago woman: she greeted you with a huge smile, shot straight to the heart of the matter, and was one tough cookie maker when she needed to be. Only a handful of successful female delicatessen owners existed in the business, and as Bette (who was in her early forties) took over from her parents, the importance of the staff's respect was apparent. None showed that adulation more than her newly hired baker, Herb Fingerhut.

A seventh-generation baker, one look at Herb revealed that the occupation had crept into his genetic fiber. He had the solidly built frame of a man whose life had been surrounded by butterfat, which he said was a good thing, because you should never trust a skinny baker. Herb's face revealed the dimpled, cherubic smile of a grown-up kid who was having the time of his life. Bette hoped Herb's touch would inject something unique into Kaufman's, which continued to be successful, but nonetheless felt the constraints of the neighborhood and the slowing economy. Jewish Skokie had given way over the years to a more mixed community, and Kaufman's aging client base was dwindling, as the closing of the Barnum and Bagel and Chaim's illustrated. Traditional foods would remain the bedrock, but Herb could add touches of creativity that would bring new customers in the door. One of these was the daily special: his Reuben Strudel.

Herb stretched out four rectangles of pastry dough and spread roughly a pound of corned beef scraps on each of the pastry sheets. Next, he sprinkled sauerkraut, laid down thick slices of Swiss cheese, folded the pastry shut, scored the top, brushed it with butter, and placed it in the creaking oven. Twenty minutes later, Herb retrieved the tray. Though the golden dough was piping hot,

he sliced one up, popping a scalding corner into his mouth. Slowly, a mischievous grin emerged. "It's very good," Herb beamed. Herb was being modest. The Reuben Strudel was freaking sensational, nothing short of a revelation in deli baking. Each bite was a mélange of decadent flavors; the buttery flaking of the dough meeting the gooey aroma of the melted Swiss, all brought together by the corned beef, steamed to a new life inside the pastry shell. I would never taste anything comparable to Herb's experiment that day at Kaufman's. If deli in Chicago was going to make its comeback, the Reuben Strudel was helping it off to a great start.

Unlike in most major American cities, people worked, lived, ate, and played in Chicago's downtown, though this wasn't always the case. For decades Chicago was known as a dangerous town, where gangs killed for nothing more than a pair of Air Jordans. Things began to turn around in the mid-1990s, with the revitalization work of Mayor Richard M. Daley, and Jewish delicatessens have slowly been returning downtown, looking to capture a slice of business from those moving into new condominiums, as well as those living in traditionally moneyed enclaves like the Gold Coast. In the winter of 2006, two very ambitious delis opened in downtown Chicago, stoking the hopes for a revival.

Eleven City Diner and Max and Benny's were both the product of suburban dreamers who'd set their sights on the big city. In the case of Eleven City Diner, its charismatic owner, Brad Rubin, had grown up in a big house with parents who constantly entertained. Rubin had worked in high-end restaurants around town, but after a decade in fine dining, Rubin (who was thirty-six at the time) wanted something else. Realizing the delis of his youth had disappeared, he developed the idea of an urban delicatessen/diner.

The Eleven City Diner opened on March 30, 2006, in the condo-crazy South Loop area, on Wabash at the corner of 11th Street. The space was lofty and bright, with white tiling along the walls,

Formica-topped tables, and an old wooden bar he salvaged from a strip club. By the register there was a mini candy store, and Rubin hung his bar mitzvah photographs on the way to the washroom. On weekends, his father worked the soda fountain, while his mother played hostess and *schmoozed* with customers.

The other deli, Max and Benny's, had been a going concern since 1985, when Lester Schlan opened it in ritzy suburban Northbrook, twenty-five miles north of the city. Max and Benny's excelled at everything a suburban delicatessen should. It was expansive (12,000 square feet) and comfortable. The menu at Max and Benny's offered everything from stacked corned beef sandwiches to breakfasts, salads, and an outstanding blueberry noodle *kugel*. They baked everything on site: bagels, breads, hot dogs wrapped in bagel dough, black and white cookies, and adorable bear-shaped Rice Krispy treats with mini Chicago Cubs hats. There was a huge takeout section packed with smoked fish, cold cuts, and breads. They catered *bar mitzvahs*, *shivas*, and *bris'*, and sold five hundred gallons of chicken soup each weekend and thirty metric tons of corned beef annually.

Schlan's son Max, then twenty-five, had recently graduated from Boston University's prestigious hotel/restaurant school, and Lester Schlan saw a double opportunity to give Max a chance at the head of his own shop, while establishing a foothold downtown. They would open a sophisticated delicatessen that could attract downtown Jewish residents, tourists, and office workers. Schlan secured a location at the base of the River East Center, a fifty-eight-story condominium and multiplex in the up and coming Streeterville neighborhood. The new Max and Benny's opened in February 2006 to much fanfare. Guests were greeted by lush draperies, expansive banquettes, high ceilings, etched glass walls, and flat-screen televisions galore, as well as a fully stocked bar.

Schlan was a proven entity in Chicago's deli landscape and served a product customers already loved. At Eleven City Diner, Rubin knew Chicago's downtown clientele but wasn't a Deli Man.

Both were risky ventures in newly gentrified, high-rent neighborhoods. So which of the two closed after only six months downtown?

"There's a reason there's not a deli in downtown," Schlan said, exactly a year and a day after his Streeterville location had opened. There was no single cause for his deli's failure, which lost an average of fifty thousand dollars a month. Large numbers of Jewish clients never materialized like they did in Northbrook. Locals rarely ate there at night or during the week. Though the decor was lavish, many felt it was ill-suited for a delicatessen. Staffing remained a constant problem. Tourists loved the place, and weekends were busy, especially at brunch, but Max and Benny's simply never sold enough food to make a profit. Smoked fish wilted in the display case like wallflowers at a school dance.

"Part of my success here is we know what people like," Schlan said, sitting amid the hustle of his original location. "My son didn't want to stay in the deli business. We thought we'd start with what we knew and we upscaled it a bit, but it just didn't take off. . . . It's possible that if we did an old-fashioned deli it might have worked." Schlan had no regrets, and business was doing better than ever in Northbrook. The only regret was Chicago's unrealized potential. "It's a shame in Chicago that I can count on my hand the number of delis," he said, "and less the number of good delis."

Over at Eleven City Diner, Brad Rubin was bouncing around like a pinball from table to table, back to the bar, over to the kitchen, into his office, around the deli counter, to the door, the cash, and over again, furiously pumping flesh, making jokes, teasing the staff in Spanish, fielding incessant calls, shooting the shit with suppliers, and handing kids candy. Eleven City Diner had survived its first year, a feat that was intrinsically tied to the kinetic energy of its *meshugah* owner.

Though he was nearly forty, Rubin looked far younger and gave off the image of an eccentric Internet wizard from 1992. He spoke quickly, punctuating words with his hands, and when I made a point he liked, he would grab my arm and say, "Yesssss! Exactly!"

I would be asking him about his meat supplier, and before he got halfway through the answer he was running to the counter to return with slices of maroon pastrami, heavily blackened, nicely marbled, and thickly cut. The man had no off-switch.

"It's not sexy to work seven days a week," Rubin said, the exhaustion showing in his eyes. "If I want to live in a restaurant, I want the place to be like a family to me. . . . I saw all the fancy restaurants trying to be the next big thing, but none of them had a forty- or fifty- or sixty-year longevity. I want to be around for a long time, to be part of this neighborhood." Upscale diners everywhere promised nostalgic food and atmosphere without grease-stained counters and dingy washrooms. What set Eleven City Diner apart was the Jewish delicatessen. The food certainly lived up to its billing. Eleven City's brisket, a hefty slab of sweetly braised meat atop stewed potatoes and carrots, peeled away at the touch of a fork. The chopped liver was superb.

I really enjoyed Eleven City Diner, so much so that I went back at night. There was Rubin, still kibitzing with everyone, from old Hebrew school friends to tables full of cops and booths packed with the city's top investment bankers. "With my education and experience I could work here four days a week," he said, completely drained. "I could sleep late. I could meet a nice Jewish girl, and make my mother happy. But instead I'm here all the time." I felt for him, but wasn't this what Rubin had signed up for? He wanted the life of the Deli Man, to be around for decades. Yet the more we spoke, the more I saw that Brad Rubin's ambitions went beyond that.

He talked about opening other locations within a year or two, possibly in a boutique hotel, maybe even Las Vegas. Then, in the spring of 2007, Rubin excitedly called to tell me that he was going to open up another Eleven City Diner on ritzy Michigan Avenue, the so-called Magnificent Mile, sometime in 2008 (though by the end of that year it had yet to open). It would have four hundred seats and a larger menu, more elaborate decor, and even pickled tongue. "But don't think we'll get modern on your ass!" he joked into the phone, assuring me that he still wanted to keep things authentic. In just over a year, Rubin had turned one restaurant into two and had plans to do more. So why was I worried?

Because, like most deli owners I met in Chicago, Rubin's hero was Richard Melman, the founder and chairman of Lettuce Entertain You, a corporation that owns over seventy restaurants across the United States with annual revenues estimated at over three hundred million dollars. Melman's career began behind the soda counter of his father's Chicago deli, Ricky's, where he cut strawberries with a spoon. When his father and uncle refused to sell him a piece of the business, Melman struck out on his own, opening R.J. Grunts in 1971, the restaurant that launched his empire. Though Lettuce Entertain You Enterprises has since opened everything from fine French dining establishments (Everest) to seafood restaurants (Joe's Stone Crab), Melman has yet to touch a deli.

"I have had an idea for what I think would be one of the great delis in the country," Melman said, talking to me from his Chicago home. "Every two or three years I get a group of Jewish guys who call me and say, 'When are you going to open that great deli?' and this is what I tell them: 'I don't know that I could make money in today's world running the type of delicatessen I'd like to run.' I always end it by telling them it would almost have to be like giving to Israel. It's just charity." Though Melman had the formula, experience, and money to save the deli, the risk wasn't yet worth taking.

Yet in Melman, both Rubin, Schlan, and other ambitious Chicago deli owners saw their dreams lived to their fullest, and they couldn't help but try to emulate his success. Many had tried over the years. Max and Benny's foray downtown demonstrated just how difficult that was. Eleven City Diner was a success, but one that seemed inseparable from its charismatic owner. What would happen when Rubin opened his second location, splitting his presence between two relatively new restaurants?

Chicago's deli revival was building up steam. Long-standing local delis such as Max's and Eppy's were adding more locations,

and the popular Michigan deli Steve's had just opened in downtown Chicago. I openly confessed to Rubin that I feared he was spreading himself too thin. He worked ridiculous hours and in 2008 had to undergo three back surgeries from the damage he'd done to his spine at the restaurant. Eleven City Diner was a major part of that revival, but it needed to be nurtured and settle roots before branching out further. Aggressive expansion was tempting in the short run, but it increased the risk that Chicago's deli revival could fizzle. Rubin admitted he had those concerns too, but he was intent on sticking around as long as Manny's had. "I have one shot at making this succeed," he said, "and I don't want to fail."

Manny's was the biggest, best-known, and oldest deli in the city, and it was directly tied into Chicago's nascent Jewish deli revival. As owner Ken Raskin told the story, his grandfather Jack Raskin bought a cafeteria called Sonny's in 1945, and because it was cheaper to change two letters on the sign, he named it after his son Emanuel, ergo Manny's. From age thirteen on, Ken Raskin worked at Manny's every Saturday and summer with his dad. After the 1968 riots, Manny's closed at nights and on weekends, though the riot police took their lunch breaks at Manny's between cracking skulls at the Democratic National Convention. When Ken was just twenty-seven years old, his father suddenly died of a heart attack. It was a terrible shock. Ken's wife, Patti, had recently given birth to a second son, Danny, and the young family now lived in the suburb of Deerfield, thirty-five miles from the deli. Still, Ken Raskin never considered closing.

"I had been working here for half my life," Ken recalled. "I had a mortgage and two kids, but I also had a point to prove, because all the old-timers on the street were taking bets on how long I could last." Raskin worked tirelessly to maintain the original look, feel, and taste of Manny's. The potatoes were still peeled by hand and the *latkes* fried in cast-iron skillets. The antique water fountain,

with a framed photo of Manny Raskin hanging above it, still anchored the deli.

In 2006, Ken's son Danny, then twenty-four, began working full time at Manny's, the fourth Raskin in an unbroken line of succession. Since coming on board he had pushed Ken for small modernizations. It was at Danny's insistence that Manny's took credit cards. He'd lobbied his dad hard to reopen Sundays and at nights for dinner and brought in free valet parking for customers, a move that drove up business during winter. The most important change had been to the food. Though Danny introduced chopped salads and a few "healthier" items, he'd also brought back traditional Jewish foods.

"I've noticed people my age started eating that food again, like noodle *kugel*," Danny said. "We were always afraid that when our older clientele died off, that food would too. The thing that makes you smile is that on Saturdays we're busier now than on any other day of the week. People my age come in with strollers and load up their trays with *matzo* ball soup and other Jewish foods. We are trying to modernize without changing the core of what we are. I don't want to stop those small things that make us Manny's, I just want to make it more efficient."

A new generation was on the cusp of rediscovering their past through the deli, and Manny's, the oldest and grandest of Chicago's delis, led the way. It wasn't the interior design that lured them; Manny's had no plasma televisions or plush banquettes. They came for what delis do best: *kugel*, *kishke*, *gefilte* fish, and fat sandwiches of tender, hot, pink corned beef. Danny Raskin's generation would save the Windy City's deli.

When Danny got up to help a young mother with a baby carry a tray to her table, Ken leaned in close: "He could have been an executive. It's a major regret of mine. But this has been a major part of the fun of working here. When I'm not here, Danny shines."

Danny returned and asked what we were talking about. Ken just smiled, put his arm around the boy's shoulder, and pulled him close.