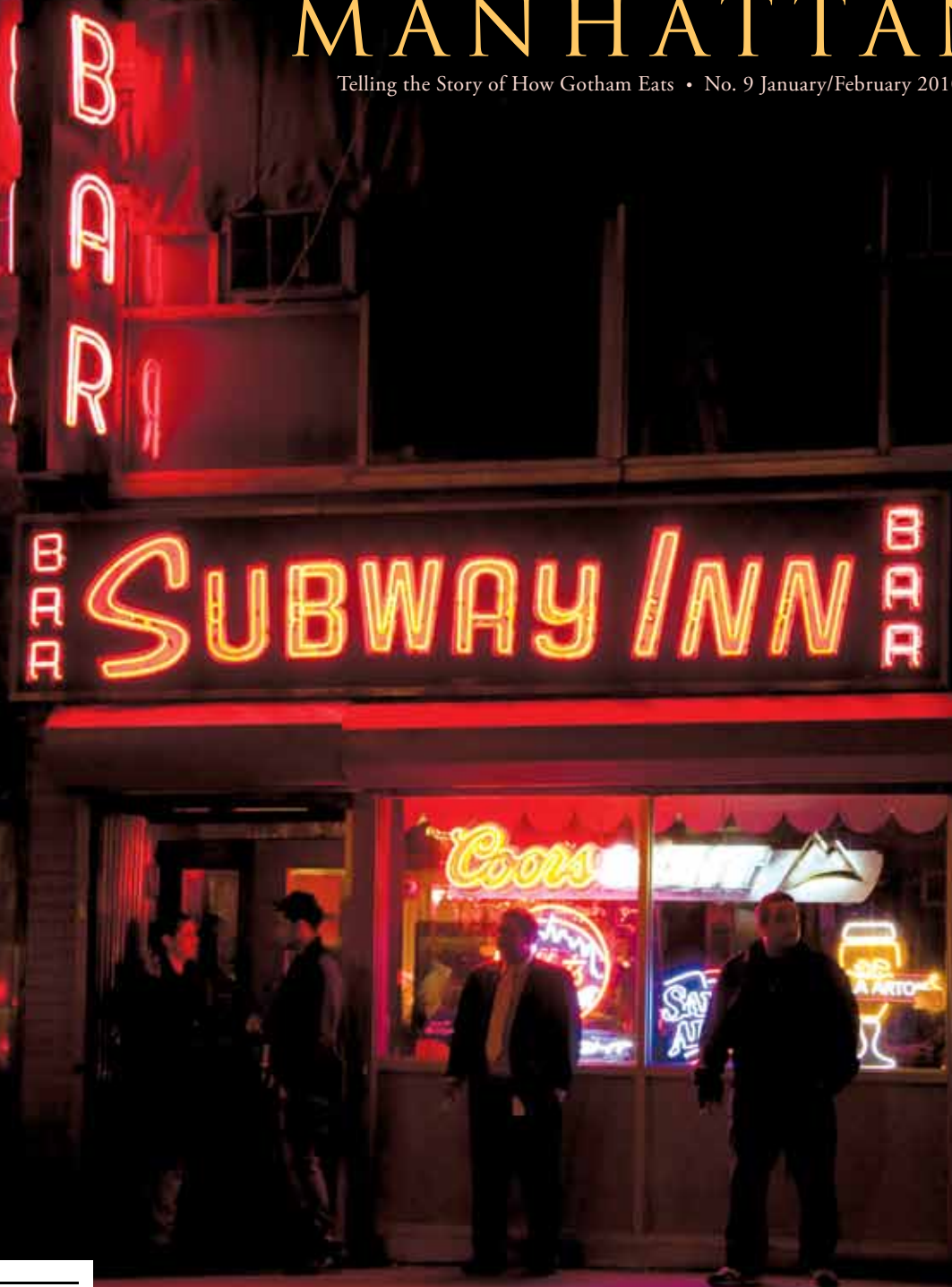


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SUPER MARKETS

A TASTE OF MOTHER ENGLAND

On Hudson Street, bangers and salad cream.

BY NANCY MATSUMOTO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN DORSETT

Some people can't do without their regular fix of Gentleman's Relish, a palate-searing blend of anchovies, butter, herbs and spices that will make your eyes cross and your hair curl. Others will traverse the city to replenish their stores of Opies pickled walnuts or Heinz "squeezey" bottled salad cream. These British condiments can be found in the 25-year-old grocery shop Myers of Keswick, on Hudson Street in the West Village. All are universally detested by shop founder Peter Myers.

"I think they're awful," says Myers. "I've tried the Gentleman's Relish at least four or five times as recommended, just a smidgen, on toast, because I think of myself as a gentleman. But, no, I can't get away with it. It's like the pickled walnuts—people travel bloody miles for it. They get addicted to it like a drug."

It is somehow reassuring to know that not all Englishmen (even gentlemanly British grocers) like every eccentrically named food item from the country that produces Baxters Cullen Skink (a smoked

haddock soup that Myers happens to love). Instead he eats his store's own Cumberland sausages for breakfast, three times a week.

Some tastes, however, are more universal; Myers is the place for expats yearning for familiar and revered comfort foods such as Heinz baked beans, HP brown sauce, Crosse and Blackwell Branston pickles or Ribena black currant juice, a beverage Myers recommends mixed with water or milk and served hot in winter.

Myers, 65, turned over control of the shop to his daughter, Jennifer Myers Pulidore, in 2007, but still appears during busy periods, such as the Christmas holiday season, when the shop produces up to 500 pounds of its sausages daily, along with sausage rolls, meat pies and Cornish pasties, and wickedly good miniature mincemeat pies. Myers's sausages appear on tables at Balthazar, Pastis and the Pierre, Mark and Stanhope hotels; its mince pies are equally sought after. "We could make those 24 hours a day and still not keep up with demand," says Myers.





Customer Jean King travels to Myers of Keswick regularly from 181st Street to stock up on bangers (sausages) and sausage rolls for her husband, Graham, a native of Kent. She's also just purchased 20 of the mincemeat pies ("they go fast"), Ribena, McVitie's chocolate digestive biscuits, Smarties candy ("because my children have to have Smarties, and they're in their 30s,"), some canned rhubarb and a package of Bisto gravy granules. "It's really nice, and you can't find it in any of the American markets," King says of Bisto. "It's imported but it's worth it."

In 1972, Myers took a vacation from his family's butcher shop in the Lake District town of Keswick, England, to visit New York City. A friend introduced him to a bar on West 13th Street called the Bells of Hell (owned by actor and writer Malachy McCourt), where he worked to earn a little money while on vacation. The planned two-week holiday turned into a 38-year sojourn. Myers met his future wife, Irene, from behind the Schaefer beer pumps at the bar, and eventually bought the place with another Englishman.

Myers's father, Tommy, came to visit from Keswick, and began making his signature sausage rolls and Cornish pasties for Peter to hand out at cocktail hour. "I looked down the bar," recalls Myers. "It was full, and everyone was eating." That sight—and the conversations he had with other Britons about all the foods they missed from back home—were enough to convince him to open his shop.

He chose the Hudson Street location, formerly occupied by an Italian deli, says Myers, "purely for its proximity to the meatpacking district," since he wanted to buy fresh meat daily for his sausages. Though the area is now sagging under the weight of its own trendiness, Myers's butcher, Louis Zucker & Co., is among the dwindling number of meat purveyors left in the neighborhood.

In 2006, Peter's cat, Molly, became trapped between the walls of the store, and for two weeks the shop was at the center of a media circus, as news organizations from around the globe breathlessly followed the drama. Even today, says an exasperated Myers, "not a day goes by that someone doesn't come in and ask if this is

Fancy That: At Myers of Keswick you'll find many mini mincemeat pies made by Peter Myers himself.

the store where Molly got trapped." Molly emerged unscathed and resumed her lush life of gourmet dining. "Last night she had finely chopped rump steak fried in butter," reports her indulgent owner.

Although he no longer makes the shop's sausages himself, judging from an impromptu demonstration Myers has not lost his touch. Using motions he learned at age 14—and his father's recipe—he makes a batch of the store's celebrated Cumberland sausages, running a mix of pork shoulder, loin and belly, bread crumbs, salt, white pepper and dried parsley and sage through a meat grinder, and then into a cylindrical sausage presser. His casings are either hog or lamb intestine, "the bit that goes nice and crispy" when the sausages are fried. "You've got to get the right amount of meat," he warns. "Too full and it will explode in the pan." Working quickly, he deftly twists the long tube into sausage shapes and braids them into elaborate intertwined strands three links thick. "They're like a good steak," he explains. "You have to keep them two or three days to let the meat dry out a bit and the flavors permeate before you cook them."

Pulidore has plans to expand the store's wholesale and mail-order business, and would like to see Myers's sausages served in pubs throughout the city. That would mean expanding the store's staff of four kitchen hands and five salespeople, and perhaps relocating. Differences inevitably arise when a family business passes from one generation to another, Pulidore acknowledges, and "issues of boundaries come up." She and her dad still travel frequently to England to visit family and scout new foods for the shop's shelves. Recent additions include Thorntons chocolate, which Pulidore describes as "the Godiva of England"; McVitie's Flapjacks; a sort of granola bar and a Jamaican ginger cake. Often, however, father and daughter disagree violently about what new product should make the cut.

Asked how they resolve such differences, Pulidore responds instantly, "We don't speak!" Affectionately, her father glares back at her. 🐾