



Sheila McManus

NOSHNEWS

*"Nosh your way from Odessa to Bombay...
And never leave New York"*

Premiere Issue (Free!)
Winter 1999

Welcome to NoshNews!

Welcome to the free debut issue of **NoshNews!** Each issue will take you on a culinary adventure through one or two New York City neighborhoods. But that's not all. You'll also get information about neighborhood history, architecture (where relevant), cultural landmarks, and interesting trends. Exploring New York City's neighborhoods in this way is my passion - and it's a great way to see the world without the hassle of passports and luggage!

NoshNews is an outgrowth of Hungry Pedalers Gourmet Bicycle Tours, an outfit I co-founded in 1983, and of a book I wrote with Mark Clifford, *The Food Lovers' Guide to the Real New York*. Hungry Pedalers folded in 1990, when I moved abroad for several years.

When I returned home in late 1994, I resumed pedaling through the neighborhoods I used to know so well. I was amazed to see that some had been dramatically transformed (especially in the South Bronx), while others seemed remarkably unchanged (such as Chasidic Williamsburg and portions of Polish Greenpoint). By creating **NoshNews**, I aim to capture

the spirit of Hungry Pedalers and *The Food Lover's Guide*, but with greater attention to neighborhood details.

I love the energy and surprises New York City's neighborhoods generate, and for me, the small markets and restaurants are a great way to get to know them. These shops, and other small, local businesses are at the heart of what makes these neighborhoods throb. I rue the day when the entrepreneurs I've met are forced out by big chain stores, and in some places this process is already under way. The chains have no personal stake in these neighborhoods, are not part of the history, and add little to their character. The small business owners, who often make great sacrifices so that their families can live comfortably and be well educated, often create the foundation for new investment and neighborhood improvement - and sometimes become casualties of this process.

I hope you enjoy **NoshNews** as much as I love writing it - and please subscribe. (See page 7 to find out how). Let me know what works and how I can make it better - your feedback matters!

Myra Alperson, Editor



Dora Nita of Nita's Bakery

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This issue: Focus on Sunnyside (Queens)

In choosing a neighborhood for the first issue, I wanted one that offered diversity and energy and was easily accessible, yet was not as well known as communities like Jackson Heights and Brighton Beach.

Sunnyside clearly fit the bill. The ethnic range is amazing; it's very close to Manhattan; the area is compact and "do-able" in a day; and it's pretty, friendly, full of surprises, and rich in history. And I really like it. (Okay, so I really like all the places I write about.) Yet for some odd reason, Sunnyside receives little attention in guidebooks (except the **Food Lover's Guide**).

(continued on page 5)



A Sunnyside Gardens courtyard

Special points of interest:

- *The "other" Thalia*
- *The Sunnyside Arch*
- *You have all the ingredients...now how do you use them?*

Getting oriented

Sunnyside can be reached on the #7 train at the 40th and 46th street stops. It runs along Queens Boulevard (equivalent to 45th Avenue). I love the ride: much of it is elevated, with spectacular views of the Manhattan skyline. From Times Square it takes about 20 minutes. The Q32 bus links Manhattan to Queens Boulevard. If you drive, there's parking under the subway overpass along Queens Boulevard.

Queens Boulevard bisects the area into two distinct neighborhoods. Northern Sunnyside is older, more settled, a bit more affluent. Southern Sunnyside is more dynamic, with lots more activity in new shops and restaurants. In the short time since I began this issue, several interesting restaurants and shops have opened; I've mentioned a few. (See Southern Sunnyside, p. 5)

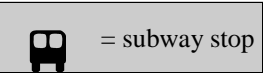
Sunnyside's northern boundary is Barnett Avenue and the southern boundary extends to 51st Avenue parallel to the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. For some reason, there are no even numbered avenues in this area (until 48th Avenue), so if you walk north or south from the subway station, the next avenues are 43rd (due north) and 47th (due south). Greenpoint Avenue moves at a gentle diagonal through

Sunnyside map



HINT: Addresses are logical in much of Queens. The first two (and sometimes three) numbers represent the closest lower-numbered cross-street or avenue, or their equivalents, e.g., 39-21 Queens Boulevard is off 39th Street. (Skillman Avenue would be 41st Avenue. Queens Boulevard would be 45th Avenue.)

southern Sunnyside and creates little triangles of activity – and some tricky intersections. Some do not have traffic lights, so cross carefully!



A few landmarks:

- 1 Nita's Bakery
- 2 El Valle
- 3 La Pollera Colorada
- 4 Thalia Theatre
- 5 Taqueria la Lupe
- 6 Carniceria las Americas
- 7 Oasis Bakery
- 8 King Dynasty Bakery/Empire of India/Dae Dong
- 9 Sidetracks
- 10 Butcher's Block
- 11 Crystal Palace
- 12 Dazie's
- 13 Baruir
- 14 Transilvania
- 15 Massis
- 16 El Shater
- 17 Sunny Grocery
- 18 Cangiano's
- 19 Rincon Latino
- 20 Nancy's Trotteria/
El Tacolote de Woodside
- 21 La Marjolaine

Walking tour

Don't miss **Sunnyside Gardens** (located approximately between Skillman and 39th Avenues, and from 43rd to 49th Streets), one of the great delights of the neighborhood. The "gardens" name is accurate in every way: the area is filled with foliage and flowers. Wander around and check out the block-long (east-west) walkways, where you'll see the common gardens and yards. Don't be put off by gates; they're often unlocked. Some gardens are quite large and reflect residents' idiosyncratic tastes. During Halloween the neighborhood felt like a small town, showing an intimacy and humor in the range of decoration. Lewis Mumford lived at two addresses here: 41-12 48th Ave. (1925-27), then 40-02 44th St. (1927-35). One of the amenities of the Gardens is a 3 1/2 acre community park and garden at 39th Avenue and 48th Street (for residents only). Commercial amenities include a day-care center which Mumford's wife, Sophia, co-founded as Sunnyside Progressive School (47th St. at

Queens Boulevard), now called "Little Friends," and a central parking tower at 48th Street and Barnett Avenue.

In southern Sunnyside, check out the **Jehovah's Witnesses Temple** at Greenpoint Avenue and 45th Street. Once a movie theatre, it still has remnants of Egyptian-inspired ornamentation. If you can't get in (it's usually locked), peek through the glass in the front doors and you'll see rococo murals of nature scenes on the lobby walls and ceiling. This was once one of Sunnyside's great movie theaters; now one multiplex remains on Queens Boulevard.

Along 48th Avenue, you'll see a few ethnic **churches**, including Greek Orthodox church with a small layered spire, and an Armenian church next door to a Korean church. The area architecture doesn't have the flavor, cohesiveness or history of Sunnyside Gardens, but the scale is pleasant and I enjoy wandering the avenues and

side streets, which vary widely in architecture and character.

Parks/picnic sites: I always like to know where I can eat outside on a nice day. Sunnyside has few such spaces and they're small. The best is the **Thomas Noonan playground, where 42nd St., Greenpoint Ave. and 47th Ave. meet.** It has lots of benches and tables – packed on balmy days with elderly folks. **Vincent Daniels Square** at 52nd Street and Roosevelt Avenue is attractively landscaped – but sits in the rumbling shadow of the 52nd St. stop of the #7 train. A playground with benches on Skillman Avenue between 41st and 43rd Streets is convenient if you've shopped on 43rd or Skillman Avenues but is not especially picturesque. ♦

PS: Wear comfortable shoes and bring a backpack! I always find that I buy more than I plan to – and you probably will, too!

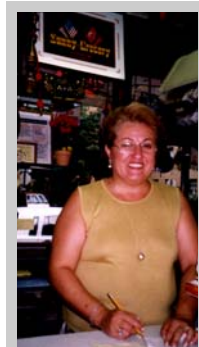
Northern Sunnyside: East meets West Markets & Bakeries

From the 40th St. or 46th St. subway stops, walk along Queens Boulevard to 43rd Street and turn north (to the right if you're facing Manhattan, which you can't miss, because you'll see the Chrysler Building glistening in the distance) toward 43rd Avenue. On your left you'll pass the small **Sunnyside Meat Market** (43-10 43rd St.), whose Romanian owner giggled when I bought a bottle of Drax Beer (with a fanged Dracula, blood dripping from his mouth, on the label). It's marked "Brewed in Transylvania" and is apparently produced for export only. Turn left toward **Massis**, a huge store catering mainly to Armenians, Lebanese and Romanian customers (42-20 43rd Ave., 718/729-3749). Named after a mountain in Armenia, the store was opened in 1991 by Raffi Bezdjian, who was raised in Lebanon by Armenian parents. You'll find a terrific selection from all over the Mediterranean, and in super sizes. I saw huge tins of olive oil, jars of grape leaves, vats of tahini, and many types of feta cheese in big slabs. A specialty is *basterma*, a type of sausage. Bezdjian has a mail order business and a website under construction (www.Massis.com). You can also get gift boxes of pastries and sweets, and Romanian audio and video cassettes and CDs. I was tempted by one of Armenian tango. The website will also include Armenian jokes.

Heading west from Massis, just across the street, you'll find **El Shater** (43-62 43rd Ave., 718/392-2702), an attractive, large market that offers an excellent selection of meats and baked goods; fresh, prepared and packaged foods; plus an international selection of spices, nuts and dried fruits, syrups, cheese and some organic products (including pastas and juices). Co-owned by Hashem Aoufe and Ahmad Osman, from Lebanon, the store opened in 1991 following the retirement of the owners of Pyramid Bakery, a popular Hungry Pedalers stop. The prepared foods include *kibbee* (Lebanese meatballs), terri-

fic *felafel* (fried chickpea balls) and *baba-ganoush* (smoked eggplant dip), *tabouli* (bulghur salad), and *mouardara*, a lovely mixture of rice, onion and lentil. Don't miss the honey-dipped, phyllo-wrapped pastries. Try the *halwat el-jouben*, an incredible pistachio crusted cheese pastry with honey syrup, or the *basbousa*, a honey soaked square made of farina, sesame oil and honey, and covered with pistachio nuts. El Shater also sells cookware and gift items.

A giant 24-hour Korean market, **HAIL**, is across the street (44-70 43rd Ave., 718/937-7432) and offers an enormous selection of prepared dishes and ingredients for Korean cuisine. You can make a picnic meal with containers of *kim chi*, peppery Korean salads, tempura, and seafood. To drink, try cans of sweet rice punch, cucumber juice, or plum juice (which I particularly like), or buy boxes of chrysanthemum tea or soy beverage. In summer, try Korean melon ices.



Nigar Evren owns Sunny Grocery

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Crossing 43rd Avenue again, continue west toward 46th Street. First you will reach **La Pequena**, a small Mexican bakery, where freshly-made breads and sweet cakes that you'll find in Mexican markets are sold (45-20 43rd Ave., 718/472-0261). Turkish immigrants began settling in Sunnyside in the early '80s according to Nigar Evren, proprietor of **Sunny Grocery** (45-26

43rd Ave., 718/937-6256). (Sunnyside has two other Turkish groceries: **Turkleyem** at 47-31 Skillman Ave., and **Yayla** at 44-21 Queens Boule-

vard). There's a great selection of packaged foods and beverages, plus nuts and spices, including a packet of 13 spices if you plan to cook Turkish recipes. There are also some take-out foods, such as the Turkish equivalent to a grilled cheese (or spinach or meat) sandwich called *gozleme*, with Turkish cheese and a type of flat bread. Or mini-pies with spinach or cheese fillings. You can also indulge your sweet tooth with a vast selection of baked goods, including *baklava*. I bought a jar of yummy Sarelle hazelnut cream, often eaten at breakfast on soft bread. At **Yayla** I found a fantastic Turkish Delight with mint, rose and lemon flavors, and a spectacular cheese called *tulum peynir*, which starts off bland, and gradually grasps your tongue with a marvelous tang.

Now head north (left) on 46th Street to Skillman Avenue and turn right to **Cangiano's Prime Meats & More** (46-12 Skillman Ave., 718/786-1160). Joe Cangiano opened his shop as an outpost of the family chain in Bensonhurst. Joe sells not just meats, but also gourmet Italian pastas (such as lobster ravioli), sauces and breads (including chocolate, fig and olive from the family bakery). I resisted the temptation to buy Paesana brand vodka sauce: after tomatoes, heavy cream is the second most used ingredient. Cross the street, and two blocks west you'll find **La Plaza Mexico** (47-19 Skillman Ave.), a Mexican grocery which has a few tables for tamales and tortas.

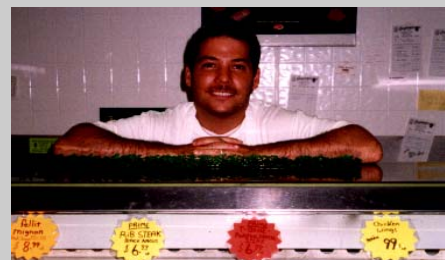
A bit further (into Woodside), **La Marjolaine** (50-17 Skillman Ave., 718/651-0495), a French bakery, offers a yummy selection of breads, made here, and pates (made elsewhere). But I recommend the sinfully delicious cassis, pear and passion mousse tarts, which melt in your mouth, or a packet of madeleines. Dunk them in cappuccino from **Nancy's** (see below). ♦

Northern Sunnyside: restaurants

Off Queens Boulevard, one of the oldest restaurants in northern Sunnyside is **Transilvania** (43-46 42nd Street, 718/786-9401), which offers an ample menu of seafood, veal, poultry and beef stews, as well as entertainment. (It's a nightclub on weekends.) My first visit was on Christmas Eve in 1989 during the uprising in Romania. The dishes were generous, the noise deafening, and the optimism of the crowd was palpable. Recent visits were at lunchtime, when business is slow.

One block away, **Haji's Biryani and Sweets** (43-45 43rd St., 718/706-9718), a Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani restaurant, specializes in tandoori dishes. Though mainly a fast-food place, new owners recently upgraded the interior. Curries are good and reasonably priced and a big box of Indian sweets is \$5. On 43rd Avenue, walk six blocks to 49th Avenue to **Nancy's Trotteria and Grill**, an Ar-

gentinean restaurant (49-07 43rd Ave., 718/651-6802; it's actually in Woodside; Sunnyside stops across the street). Tito Del Gobbo used to serve fantastic cappuccino from his market, Flor de



Joe Cangiano's Skillman Avenue butchery is part of his family's Brooklyn-based chain

Cuba, in Hungry Pedalers days, then set up a grill in 1991 and opened a full-fledged restaurant in 1994. He recently added a Tex-Mex restaurant, **El Tacolote de Woodside to Nancy's**, so you can get Argentinean mixed grill and *quesadillas* in one meal. Be patient: everything is made fresh. The pasta, chicken and *quesadillas* I've had were worth the wait. There's also a private party room. (See **Nancy's** banana crepe recipe on p. 7). **Rincon Latino** is a friendly, inexpensive Ecuadorian restaurant at 48-18 Skillman Avenue (718/424-8169). Smaller than Luisito's on 47th Ave., it offers traditional dishes such as plantain soup, and many chicken and seafood dishes (with ceviche specialties). Most orders (except house specials) are between \$4.50 and \$6.50, including side dishes and one beverage. ♦

Queens Boulevard: Around the world in a few blocks

If you wander along Queens Boulevard between 39th and 47th Streets, you'll find a United Nations of small businesses – markets, restaurants, barber shops, storefront law offices – and an amazing diversity of tastes, sounds, smells. (There are also some terrific thrift shops.)

Getting started:

Exit at the south side of the 40th Street subway stop and walk east toward 39th Street. (You'll see the Empire State Building in the distance). Your first stop would be **Crystal Palace** (39-20 QB, 718/784-4768), a Turkish restaurant that offers a huge selection of cold and hot appetizers (you can make a meal of just these), kebabs (including garlic yogurt kebabs) and shrimp and seafood casseroles. I made a vegetarian meal out of appetizers and salads, and finished with *kadayif*, a pastry of shredded wheat with walnuts and pistachio nuts, cinnamon and honey. A half block up, **La Vienesa** Colombian bakery (39-44 QB, 718/786-2924) looks tired outside, but is busy and friendly inside. Its *arepas* (corncakes) are delicious warmed up with *queso blanco*, a mild white cheese.

The Butcher's Block (41-12 QB, 718/784-1078) is the area's major Irish grocery (wholesale and retail). You can find Irish imports and locally made dishes (black and white pudding, kidney stews, etc.), plus Irish periodicals, cassettes and videos. **Sidetracks** (45-08 QB, 718/786-3570), is a popular gathering place for lunch, dinner (when it becomes a nightclub) and drinks. The cuisine is "American," with an Irish air – but draws a broad local clientele. Wood-paneled with plush booths and upholstered easy chairs around an old central bar, it offers a warm, homey setting that emulates an old-time railroad station. The walls are adorned with black and white photos of vintage movies and railroad scenes. So many people urged me to meet owner Andy Breslin that I expected a patriarch whose family had been in Sunnyside for generations. But Andy is in his mid-30s and arrived in the US only in 1981 from County Meath at age 19. He's the true model of hard work



Eat empanadas - drink ginseng tea

leading to success: He now co-owns, with two brothers, two other Sunnyside restaurants and the Red Lion on Bleecker Street in Manhattan. And (though he's modest about this) he has been a generous donor to local civic groups. He told me that Sidetracks is often where farewell parties are held for Irish families returning home. (Sidetracks recently took over an adjacent space and will soon nearly double in size.)

The **Oasis Express Bakery** (45-18 QB) offers Greek pastries and espresso and has a counter overlooking the boulevard. Though it has a large selection of traditional Mediterranean pastries, I recommend the *mousto kouloura* cookies, flavored with grape juice – a



Storefront at a Colombian grocery

subtle complement to espresso.

Cross Queens Boulevard at 47th Street and you'll find a cluster of Asian shops. **King Dynasty Bakery** (46-21 QB, 718/472-9384) occupies a small space but offers a huge selection of Chinese sweet, bean and meat-filled cakes and dim sum pastries. You can also get Chinese ices (longan, lichee and red bean). **Empire of India** (46-15 QB, 718/472-4100) is one of the area's fancier restaurants with a great selection of curries and Indonesian dishes. I had to have one of those, and ordered a stunning *por ayam* - chicken in coconut cream sauce, with pineapples and nuts, served with *nasi goreng* (Indonesian fried rice). Yum. **Dae Dong**, a Korean restaurant that can seat up to 500 guests (46-07 QB, 718/482-7100), is the flagship of a family business now comprising three restaurants – and was the first Korean restaurant in the metropolitan area. Manager Jenny Cha said her father chose Sunnyside in 1982 because it was easily accessible throughout the Tri-state area. (The others are in Bayside, Queens, and Manhattan's "Little Seoul" at 17 West 32nd Street between 5th and 6th Avenues.) I tried the "Galbi Box" lunch special, a sampler of meat, fish, tofu and vegetarian entrees, salads, condiments and green tea ice cream, for just \$6.95. There's enough for two people, and I loved the range of flavors and textures.

One block down I found **El Molino** (45-07 QB), a Korean-owned bakery that also sells Argentinean empanadas and breads – and American pastries. I fell for the Amaretto cheesecake with chocolate chips. You can get ginseng tea and espresso here.

Moving south, you'll find that the block between 42nd and 43rd Streets mirrors the area's diversity. **P.J.Horgan's** (42-17 QB) is an Irish restaurant with a traditional pub menu; **King Taco**

In the 1980s local realtors tried to market northern Sunnyside as an alternative for families who would probably be drawn to the Upper West Side and Park Slope, but wanted more space for less money. These efforts never "took." Toni Dosik (see p. 6) notes that even though Sunnyside is closer to Manhattan than desirable sections of Brooklyn and Washington Heights, "many people still have a mental block when you say Queens." Realtor Dorothy Morehead says that Manhattan's skyrocketing rents are prompting more people to revisit Sunnyside (especially Sunnyside Gardens), and rents are rising fast.

(42-15 QB), is a Mexican eatery with a huge menu of steak, chicken, pork and sea food dishes. Next door **Kim's Fish Market** (42-13 QB) sells fresh fish as well as sushi and sashimi. **Bucovina International Grocery** (42-07 QB) offers East European and Mediterranean specialties. **Ba Da Wel House** restaurant serves Korean and Japanese cuisine (42-03 QB), and **Malik Grocery and Halal Meat Market**, on the corner (42-01 QB), specializes in products and produce from Southeast Asia. Are you out of breath yet?

Near the 40th Street subway station, **Baruir's Coffee** (40-07 QB, 718/784-0842) has been selling coffee and East European imports since Baruir Nersesian opened it in 1966. His son, Mike, runs it now, and you'll hear mostly Romanian (and can buy Romanian newspapers) here. You can see coffee beans roasting in the window – and smell them from the nearby subway entrance – and sip espresso with homemade pastries. I recommend homemade walnut crescents, which Baruir buys from a local Hungarian woman.



One of Sunnyside's three Turkish markets (see p.

The tour ends at **Dazie's** Italian restaurant, a Sunnyside landmark (39-41 QB, 718/786-7013). Relax. In contrast to the area's newcomers, Dazie's earthy, carpeted ambiance evokes an older Sunnyside, and reminds me of restaurants my parents took me to as a treat when I was little and could wear my black patent leather strapless shoes. Owner Lily Gavin welcomes you in as if this were her home – and, in a way, it is. She bought it over 25 years ago and was a waitress in its predecessor, Mazie's. (Most of her five grown children work here, too.) You can still dress up – or not – kids are welcome, service is attentive, and a pianist plays jazz standards on a baby grand by the wood-paneled bar, while Sinatra classics are piped in when he takes a break. It's also, I'm told, a meeting place for local politicians and business leaders – but that's no surprise because it's one of very few area restaurants of this caliber. The menu offers a traditional selection of pastas (mostly homemade), seafood, poultry and meat entrees, but we chose specials: black ravioli in a wine-flavored seafood sauce and swordfish with asparagus and artichokes. From the mouth-watering dessert tray we shared an enormous, luscious fruit tart. Dazie's has provided a good living for Gavin, who has made a point of giving back by being very involved in the community. (I was told repeatedly that I couldn't write about Sunnyside without meeting her.) She's now benefiting from new luxury residential development and a Citibank office tower in nearby Long Island City, and she may soon also draw customers visiting PS 1, the contemporary art gallery that's merging with the Museum of Modern Art. ♦

Southern Sunnyside: Sabor Latino - and eastern Europe, too

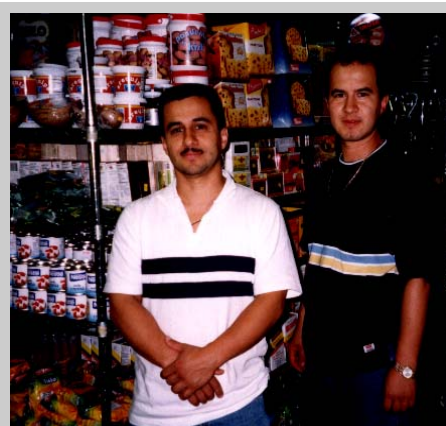
Southern Sunnyside is busier and more dynamic than northern Sunnyside. At least a half dozen Latin American (mostly Colombian) bakeries and markets are clustered on and off Greenpoint Avenue between 41st and 47th Streets. Most shops are *carnicerías* (butchers - *carne* is meat), but they all carry groceries, cookware and other products.

If you're taking the subway, exit at the 46th Street stop and turn south under the Sunnyside Arch at 46th Street and Queens Boulevard. Follow Greenpoint Avenue to 45th Street, and turn left to **Carnicería las Americas** (43-53 45th St 718/937-0553). Owned and managed by brothers Ricardo and Carlos Lopez, who have been in business here for more than 20 years, it's easy to navigate and offers excellent variety. The Lopezes will also explain what different products are if you can catch them during a quiet moment (which is rare - the store is very busy). While most customers come mainly for the meat, you'll find a large selection of fresh and packaged goods from all over Latin America. A specialty is *cuy* (guinea pig) flown in from Ecuador and sold, frozen, for about \$11 - half the cost of fresh *cuy* raised in New Jersey. During my visit, I chose a Peruvian pepper sauce; marmalade made of *boroja*, a fruit that is just now being introduced to North American markets; Brazilian cashew juice concentrate; *dulce de leche*, a caramel dessert served in a gourd, and *lula* gelatin, a fruit similar to kiwi, under the Royal brand. You can also buy fruit pulp to make *batidos* (fruit shakes), common in Latin American and Caribbean restaurants (instructions are on the packages), and "helados del parque," tropical ices, more apt to be found in Mexico City's Chapultepec Park than Central Park.

Sunnyside has quite a few Colombian bakeries, but I always go to **El Buen Gusto** (42-18 Greenpoint Ave., 718/706-0665), because the folks there are friendly and I love their flan. There's a nice selection of *arepas* and cheese breads, puddings, pastries, empanadas, a luscious fruit pie for just \$5, and a counter for coffee (but no espresso, alas). Nearby, **María Daysl Dell** (45-60 43rd St.) sells Mexican

groceries, gifts, cookware and leather goods. Try a packet of "pepitas con chile y limón" - chile-spiced pumpkin seeds with lime. A spicy delight!

Unless you're on a radical diet, don't miss **Nita's European Bakery** at 40-10 Greenpoint Avenue (718/784-4047). John and Theodora (Dora) Nita opened their shop in 1982, a year after moving here from Bucharest. Specialties include luscious chocolate cream concoctions (some dipped in rum), but my first choice was vanilla mousse pastry flavored with chopped fruit. Check out the



Carlos and Ricardo Lopez operate

chocolate "porcupine cake" (the "quills" are almonds).

Restaurants & cafes: Southern Sunnyside is packed with family-style restaurants and informal eateries, mostly Latin American. Don't go for the décor - most are quite plain - the ambiance is made by people and music. The Ecuadorian restaurant **Lulsito** (45-07 47th Ave., 718/472-0233) specializes in *cuy* (\$35 for a small order - call an hour ahead). The menu is only in Spanish but the

staff will explain it. For my own taste of Ecuador, I went to **El Valle** (39-35 47th Ave., 718/707-9926), where I got the daily special: 1/2 stewed chicken, with rice, beans and a small salad for just \$3.00. Even without the *salsa verde* (green sauce), the flavor was exquisite, and there was enough for two. Except for *picada grande*, a platter of fried pork, green plantain, breaded chicken and sausage (\$23) that can feed three or four, no menu item was above \$10, and most range from \$5 to \$8. The "sopas" - hearty soups that are meals in themselves - are \$5 to \$7, and include cow feet soup and stuffed plantain ball soup. I've had delicious Mexican meals at **Taquería La Lupe** (43-16 Greenpoint Ave., 718/784-2528), including, when I was in a rush, terrific spicy *huevos rancheros*, which I "chased" with Jarritos lime soda, my favorite flavor. **La Pollera Colorada** (41-20 Greenpoint Ave., 718/729-8580), is a bustling Colombian eatery whose specialties include *pollo a la brasa* (roisserie chicken), but I relished a creamy-rich *sopa de mariscos* (seafood soup) - a meal in itself. **Mario's** (43-04 47th St., 718/729-0834) is an old-time Italian restaurant that serves dinner only and makes all dishes to order. I never got there myself, but several local folks give it raves.

Two interesting restaurants have opened in southern Sunnyside since I began **NoshNews**. **Un Tango Mas** ("one more tango") is an Argentinean steakhouse (47-53 43rd St., 718/391-0098) that serves *tapas* (appetizers) and grilled steak and has live music on weekends. The interior is elegant and the place looks promising. **Rumi-Huasi Bolivian Restaurant** (44-10 48th Ave., 718/784-5111), one of three Bolivian restaurants in Queens, features *lechon*, a spicy baked pork dish available weekends only, and *sopa de mani*, a peanut-based soup with short ribs, as two specialties. I haven't tried either place yet.

Vacant storefronts don't stay that way for long; besides the new South American restaurants listed above, I noticed new Indo-Pakistani and Mexican markets throughout Sunnyside - and a large new MacDonald's, too. ♦

Focus on Sunnyside (continued from page 1)

Lewis Mumford, the great architecture critic, influenced the development of the landmarked Sunnyside Gardens complex in northern Sunnyside. Inspired by British gardens models, he brought the idea of creating a humane urban environment for middle-class families, including common green space, light, and shared amenities to maintain economies of scale, to planners in New York who were seeking to develop farmland in Sunnyside. The 77-acre complex of low-rise attached houses and some apartment buildings was completed in 1924 and Mumford's family was among the first to move in. Its proximity to Manhattan, its quiet and modest rent attracted so many artists and writers among its young families that it was dubbed the "maternity ward of Greenwich Village."

Although the Gardens represent just one part of Sunnyside, they're emblematic of the area's overall scale and appealing intimacy, which prompted local historian Pam Byers to dub it "small town in a big



Regular customers at Nita's Bakery

city." As I met people during research for **NoshNews**, it became clear that Sunnyside has managed to sustain a small-town feel and its polyglot character without resulting in an acrimonious displacement of any one group. Sunnyside's Irish community remains vibrant, I was told, because young single men and women keep coming to kick-start their careers,

while others return home once they have started families. At the same time, the community is being transformed by newcomers from southeast Asia and Latin America.

Yet some traditions hold fast. Joann Billharz, whose family's plumbing business has operated here since 1947, notes that Sunnyside sponsors New York City's only Flag Day parade.

How do people of so many backgrounds coexist so well? Lawyer Marc Crawford Leavitt, a longtime Sunnysider who practices in the neighborhood, attributes it to a tradition of tolerance and community involvement, and perhaps an above-average number of mixed families (including his own). As he rattles off the nationality of his immediate neighbors, each is different: Irish, Colombian, Trinidadian, an Orthodox Jew. Rather than being a melting pot, however, Sunnyside is closer to the "magnificent mosaic" evoked by former Mayor Dinkins to celebrate the city's diversity. ♦

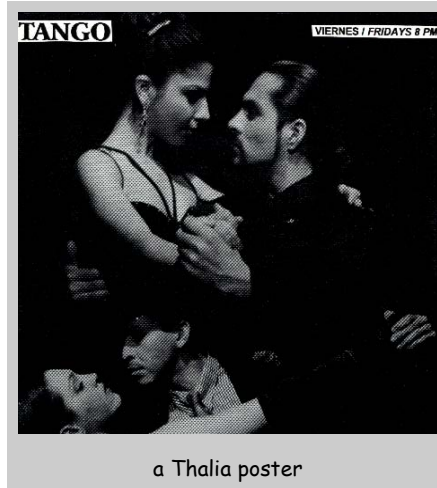
The "other" Thalia

Manhattanites "of a certain age" (like me) may recall the old Thalia movie theater on West 95th Street between Broadway and West End Avenue, which offered a repertory of rare foreign and eccentric modern films. To many film buffs, it became a landmark.

Sunnyside has had its own Thalia, a showcase for Spanish-language theater, since 1977. Located in a former discount store at 41-17 Greenpoint Avenue (718/729-3880), between 41st and 42nd Streets, it was founded in 1969 in Manhattan but moved to Queens because of the growing Spanish-speaking population there. Intimate and attractive, the theater has just 75 seats and is usually packed on its weekend shows, which specialize in various forms of classic Spanish and Latin American dance, including *zarzuelas* and *tangos*. The company also produces Spanish-language drama and sponsors outreach programs to non-Spanish speaking audiences. Each May it hosts an outdoor festival in the playground across the street.

The Thalia's founders were amazingly prescient when they relocated to Sunnyside; the thriving and ever-growing Spanish-speaking community in Queens has resulted in a more friendly demographic profile for theater attendance at a time when the traditional theater-going audience is "graying." According to Kathy

Gaiimo, the Thalia's administrative director, a survey showed that the core audience is between 25 to 56 – and 70% female – which makes the fund-raising process easier than it used to be when she has to convince donors that there's a constituency for its programs. Corporate supporters, including banks and other New York City companies, are now more receptive to the Thalia than in the past, and its reputation is growing. The Thalia's 1998 production of *Tango* had a hit run at Lincoln Center in June of that year.



After-theater eating: You'll have a large selection of restaurants to choose from after the show. If you're still in the tango mood, try **Un Tango Mas** at 47-53 43rd Street, which opened in October (and which I hadn't yet tried, see p. 5). Closer by, Kathy

Gaiimo recommends **La Pollera Colorada** for the rotisserie chicken, or **Mario's** or **Dazle's** for Italian food. She also likes the family-style Romanian restaurant, **Cornel's Place** (41-04 Greenpoint Ave., 718/786-7894), which seats 20 people. As **Cornel's Garden**, it will soon relocate to 46-04 Skillman Ave., with seating for 120 (and the same phone number). Skip the regular menu and go for the specials, such as stuffed cabbage with *mama-liga*, a luscious dish of polenta with cottage cheese and sour cream. I've also had Cornel's terrific hardy winter vegetable soup with home-made bread. ♦

Coming in *NoshNews*

Spring 1999:

Sunset Park (Brooklyn) - and a side tour to the landmark Green-Wood Cemetery. There's lots of history - and great food! Includes Brooklyn's bustling Chinatown.

In later issues, look for:

- Little Italy/Little Ireland of the Bronx
- (and much more of the borough...)
- Multifaceted Harlem: African, Caribbean, Italian - and more
- Kosher Brooklyn
- The "New" Astoria (not just Greek!)
- Polish Greenpoint
- Latin American highlights of Jackson Heights, Corona, & Elmhurst...
...and many, many more neighborhoods

The Sunnyside Arch

One of Sunnyside's more unusual features is the Art Deco-style arch standing at the southern intersection of Queens Boulevard and 46th Street. It was built as part of an economic redevelopment effort in the late '80s, when neighborhoods citywide were being upgraded in an effort to attract new business investment. Antonia Dosik, former executive director of the Gateway Community Development Corporation, a group that focused on Sunnyside, recalls that the arch was designed and built by ArtKraft Strauss, the company that created the Times Square Ball. But she does not recall if there were bids or who designed it. The arch is meant to be illuminated at night, but local folks say it hasn't been lit up in years, and the pedestrian mall below, with widened sidewalks and

extra benches, has deteriorated from neglect. The arch could use a new paint job.

Nonetheless, this intersection is always busy in warm weather. The benches are usually packed and a pet shop and two large markets teem with customers. "Sunnyside always felt like a small town," says Dosik, who moved to Ohio in 1988 to take a new job, but keeps in touch with friends here.

The renovation included a brick promenade on the underpass area at the 46th Street elevated subway entrance. (This is one intersection where north-south traffic is barred.) There, vendors sell belts, wallets, souvenirs and toys. This walkway, plus the activity, provides the only real link along Queens Boulevard between south and north Sunnyside. ♦



The Sunnyside Arch

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I've got the food... How do I cook it?

Sunnyside's shops are not for tourists. The typical customer already knows what to do with the ingredients they buy. Nigar Evren at Sunny Grocery stopped stocking cookbooks at her Turkish store because no one bought them. So if you need help, two shops on Lexington Avenue in Manhattan – about 65 blocks apart – have a great selection of cookbooks to get you going.

For East European, Mediterranean and south Asian cuisine, check the books at **Kalustyan's** (123 Lexington Avenue between 28th and 29th Sts., Tel: 212/85-3451 or 685-3888; fax 683-8458). During my most recent visit I chose Claudia Roden's *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, which seemed to be the most geographically comprehensive for the right price and included many of the ingredients I wanted to try.

Kitchen Arts and Letters (1435 Lexington Avenue at 94th Street, 212/876-5550) is the

"granddaddy" of gourmet bookstores. If you can't find the book you think you want there, Nach Waxman and his staff will help you figure out what it is and then make sure you get it. **NoshNews** is also available here.

You may want to talk to the shop owners themselves. At El-Shater, Hassan Osman, brother of co-owner Ahmed Osman, promised to give me recipes if I had questions about using ingredients, and I'd bet you'd find that other shop owners will also be happy to help.

This issue of **NoshNews** was conceived, written and photographed by Myra Alpers, and helped along with critical suggestions by friends who reviewed early versions. (Thanks!)

If you would like to contribute to future issues, please send an E-mail to NoshNews@aol.com or write to the address listed above.

Banana dessert crepes

(thanks to Nancy's Trotteria – see p. 3)

Ingredients for 6 portions: Butter, 1 liter milk, one cup flour, 6 eggs, sugar, 6 bananas thinly sliced, 151-proof Puerto Rican rum

Mix milk, flour and eggs into a smooth batter.

Over low flame, melt butter in large skillet.

Pour 1/6 of batter into skillet and cook until it begins to turn brown (this happens fast).

Put "two pinches" of sugar over the batter.

Turn batter, add slices of banana.

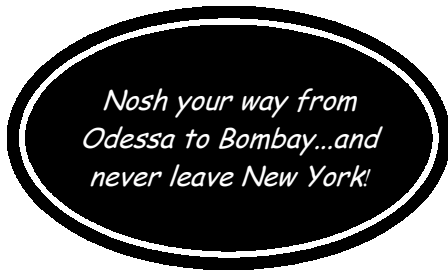
Fold crepe over banana and remove immediately onto ceramic dish.

Optional: Pour small amount of rum on crepe and light it. (Keep away from plastic or paper tablecloths!) Wait for flame to fade.

Eat & enjoy!

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"In my backyard"

Irelish those discoveries of gourmet delights close to home. **In My Backyard** will highlight a few favorites in each issue. If you want to submit your own discoveries, please send E-mail to NoshNews@aol.com or write to me.

ICE CREAM: I find myself plugging commercial brands in this section, but they're worth it. **United Grocery** (2528 Broadway at 94th Street), sells East Indian and West Indian specialties. I especially love **Reena's** Ice Cream in fig flavor. Reena's, which also has an amazing saffron pistachio flavor, as well as mango and a few others I haven't yet tried, is sold in the "Little India" neighborhoods of Lexington Avenue between 27th and 30th Streets and in Jackson Heights along 37th Avenue in the low 70s, but it's nice not to have to travel for it! I found yummy **Maeda-En** Japanese plum sherbet at the produce store **Good Nature** (2603 Broadway at 98th St.) - and have since seen it in other Korean produce stores. It's light and different. Other flavors include mango sherbet and green tea and azuki (red bean) ice cream. Reena's and Maeda-En are expensive - \$3.50 to \$4.50 per pint - but worth the splurge. I've become enamored of **Double Rainbow** ice cream, made in San Francisco, which showed up last fall at **Nationwide Produce** on the southwest corner 93rd Street and Broadway, but which I'm now finding in gourmet shops citywide. The

shop itself is worth a visit. After changing owners several times during the past year, it is now run by two Israelis, who have brought in a large selection of Israeli cheeses, salads, relishes, snack foods, baked goods and other imports. As for the ice cream (which is \$2.99 a pint, relatively cheap for premium ice cream), I love "Perfectly Pumpkin" - but haven't seen it since peak pumpkin time at Halloween and Thanksgiving.

MEXICAN FOOD: The Upper West Side (as in many city neighborhoods) has a growing-Mexican population, and the result is more Mexican shops and eateries. If you love Mexi-

can food, you can get the real thing without going far. I love the selection at **94th Street Deli** (210 West 94th St.), which features not just Mexican foods but carries products from the Philippines, Thailand and the West Indies. The produce and packaged goods - fresh and dried peppers, banana leaves, cactus, little green tomatoes, salsas, mole sauces, Mexican cheeses, and packages of tortillas generally cost much less than what you pay in a supermarket. On weekends they sell homemade tacos.

You don't have to wait for weekends to get homemade tacos elsewhere in the area: taco trucks parked on sidestreets (and on Broadway at 99th St.) now sell them, and other Mexican food, most evenings after 6 PM. The owners are quite entrepreneurial. **Super Tacos Sobre Ruidos**, on 96th Street west of Broadway, offers delivery for a \$10 minimum. Call their cell phone at (917)837-6052. Tacos (I've had the chicken - delicious and spicy!) and tortas (sandwiches) are \$2-\$4. Since I took the photo, the owners have bought a larger, handsome new truck and have expanded their menu, which is now in English as well as Spanish. And the lines are longer. One block south, the folks at **El Palomo** (West 95th Street near the Thalia) sell fabulous tamales (\$1) and rice pudding as well as tacos and tortas. They're at (917)553-0999. ♦



Super Tacos Sobre Ruidos,
96th Street off Broadway