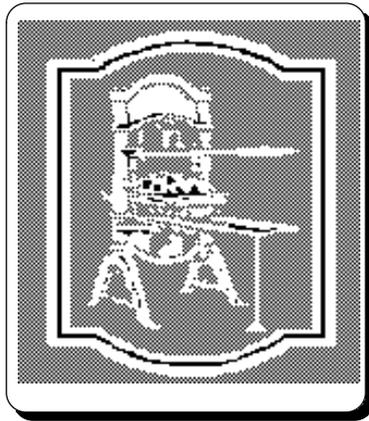


The Fine-Arts Bluesband & Poetry Press

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***Zinky's Market  
& Other Memories***

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This Saturday morning I drove down to Brockton (about 12 miles) as I do about once every other month. I used to live in Brockton, in a neighborhood called the 'Lithuanian Village,' and while I lived there I developed a taste for the wonderful, fine-grained 'Lithuanian Health Rye' bread which was baked on the next block, at the Kilkus Bakery.

Kilkus bakery was a converted house with a large wood-fired brick oven built onto the back, and a back yard full of firewood and scrap wood used as fuel. They baked two varieties of rye, light and dark, and I used to walk down to pick up some fresh, unsliced loaves. Sometimes, if we also needed some eggs or milk, I would walk up the block from Kilkus to the little corner store called 'Zinkowitz' Market,' a place universally known as 'Zinky's.'

Zinky's was a tiny place, dominated by an old wooden walk-in 'icebox' at the center of the store, just behind the counter. The heavy old butcherblock counter was usually staffed by one or more of a group of older people who seemed to be the joint owners. They sold the usual run of corner-store basics along with a range of Lithuanian and other Baltic specialties, including their unique, homemade fresh Kielbasa.

Although I lived in this Lithuanian enclave and really enjoyed their specialty foods, especially the bread, I was born into an Italian family, and Italian foods were my true staples. Luckily, Brockton also had a large Italian neighborhood at the other end of town, where I found a little meat market that made great sausage, a terrific prepared 'braciolo,' and all the other Italian specialties I ever needed.

I grew to appreciate what it was like to be a 'regular' in these little neighborhood specialty shops while I lived in Brockton. After I moved from Brockton up to Boston, I found a new local Italian meat market where now I stop for conversation and supplies almost every Saturday morning. I never had to find a replacement bakery, however, because I was able to buy unsliced Kilkus bread at a local Jamaica Plain hippie/health food store which had a regular schedule of deliveries from a variety of ethnic bakeries in the area.

Even though Boston provided me with Tony's Italian market as a hangout, and easy access to a variety of ethnic specialties, I found that I would still make an occasional drive down to Brockton for 'povisions.' I'd get some sausages or a braciolo from my old Italian market, and then visit the Kilkus bakery, buy some absolutely fresh unsliced Rye, and then sometimes stop in on Zinky's. For a time, when Kilkus was closed on Saturdays, I had to buy the bread at Zinky's, where they always had a fresh supply. It was an easy drive down to Brockton, and I liked the feeling of continuing to patronize these small specialty shops where, remarkably, I was still recognized as a semi-regular.

After a few years up here in Boston the hippie store's deliveries of Kilkus bread became somewhat less reliable, and when they had it was always the machine-sliced type which I felt was sliced too thin. (They would slice it on demand at the store in a noisy old machine they kept at the counter.) On my next trip to Brockton, the teen-age boy at the Kilkus counter explained that his uncle, who made the deliveries, had been sick, and lately had sometimes refused to take the trouble to carry the unsliced loaves.

A few months later even the sliced loaves stopped appearing at the few Boston stores that carried Kilkus, and my next trip down to Brockton found the bakery closed. I thought that they had decided to close on Saturdays again, so I trudged up the block to Zinky's. As I glanced down at the bread counter the friendly old lady who was there that day with a couple of her friends said *'you're looking for the Kilkus bread, but that's all gone.'* She explained that a wall of the old Kilkus oven had cracked, and that to repair it up to current codes was just too expensive for the remaining family members to afford. No more Kilkus! I was devastated. The little bakery, whose bread in its heyday had been distributed as far away as New York City, was gone.

There was another Lithuanian bakery on the next block whose bread the folks at Zinky's carried, and their bread became a fairly reasonable substitute for Kilkus. On my trips to Brockton I would occasionally weave the blocks in my old neighborhood on my way up to the 'new' bakery, driving down by Kilkus, just in case someone had bought up or reopened the place.

About a year after Killkus closed, on a quiet Saturday, I entered the 'new' bakery and saw a flier on their door. Zinky's had closed. The new bakery had bought their recipe for Kielbasa, and the poster advertised the fact, and promised to try to fill the small but continuing demand for it and for the other ethnic products of the old neighborhood. I chatted with the lady at the bakery counter about memories of Zinky's; their posters of the old prewar Lithuanian currency, that great old walk-in ice chest, and the local eggs in the old style 3X4 cardboard packages they used to sell. The ladies at Zinky's used to fill the egg cartons when you bought them, taking the eggs fresh from a supply they kept in the ice-box. The new bakery had the same eggs, in the same old-style cartons, but prepackaged and waiting on the counter.

When I left that day I drove to the next block and cruised slowly by the boarded up corner store, and then on past the Killkus bakery. The screen door at the bakery was open, but the place was still closed.

So when I drove to Brockton this morning it was nice to be greeted by the lady at the 'new' bakery, who lied to me and told me she had saved the few fresh unsliced loaves just for me, and it was bitter sweet to drive down the next block, past the two closed up places, Zinky's and Killkus. They still stand empty, weeds and trees overgrowing their beat-up old storefronts.

- *August 21, 1993*

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