

Arts & Entertainment

Tess family tradition a quality fish dish

By Mark Davis

As the smell of money rolls in from the stockyards, Joe Tess' restaurant and fish market opens every morning, as it has for the last 50 years. At 5460 S. 24th St. in South Omaha, Joe Tess' is a family bar and bistro specializing in unique fish sandwich and a taste of the past on every platter.

When Joe Tess' first opened in the 1930s it was just a bar. But then Rudy Stephen, Tess' uncle, started to work with the bones in carp. Stephen, who worked for the State Fishery Department, was then given permission to open a kitchen in the bar. According to Jim Murtlik, an old friend of Tess' and now the manager of the Joe Tess' at 6527 Ames St. in Omaha, the fish sandwich caught on quickly and has led to a growing company 50 years later.

Murtlik said that the major reason for the success of Joe Tess' is the family-oriented business techniques that Joe Tess, his wife and finally Bill Falt, the owner of Joe Tess' for the past 18 years, have carried on.

"It's the experience and knowing the proper handling of the fish that makes the difference," Murtlik said. The present owner started as a cook and then worked his way up to the top. Eventually Falt's three sons, William J., David and Dan will know the business and follow in their father's footsteps.

But beyond the personable service that has marked Joe Tess' for the past decades, there is an idea of serving a special dish with uncompromising quality that really makes Joe Tess' an

experience that is worth traveling for.

Tami Allen, a waitress at Joe Tess South during the summer and UNL student during the winter, told of the clientele that frequent Joe Tess'. "We have a lot of regular customers," Allen said, "but a lot of people say they travel a long way to eat here."

At first I was a little hesitant to eat a fish that I was taught to use as fertilizer at most, but after I took my first bite I was infatuated with the delectable meat. Murtlik said that all the fish served are caught in northern lakes and kept alive until the day they are to be eaten. "I think we're the only people that haul live fish," Murtlik said.

If you are opposed to eating carp, there is catfish and other seafoods to choose from on the menu. My dinner companion had a large catfish sandwich and jacket fries while I had a double rib dinner, a side order of about 20 shrimp, some coleslaw with real character and jacket fries. Murtlik said that the cole slaw was made fresh from scratch daily and explained that the reason that there was only one slice of bread with the sandwich was that a lot of people don't eat the bread.

"If they want some more bread or pickle slices we'll be happy to bring them all they want," Murtlik said.

Walking into the original Joe Tess' gives the flavor of the long history behind the bar turned restaurant. The same atmosphere is preserved in the new Joe Tess' on Ames and the newest store here in Lincoln. Murtlik said that plans for stores in Kansas City and Des Moines are being worked on, but they are taking the time to make sure that quality is not compromised.



Richard Kousgaard, the man who cuts the carp in the fish market below the original Joe Tess' place.

Sornberger mingles flavors of Nebraska's women poets

By Sarah Sieler

When people think of Nebraska poets, they generally think of men like Bill Kloefkorn, Ted Kooser, Greg Kuzma, or Don Welch. Comparatively little attention has been given to Nebraska's women poets, like Kathleene West, who has published three collections of poetry; Susan Strayer Deal, who has published two books of poems; and Nancy Westerfield, who was the first Nebraska poet to win a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship.

"All My Grandmothers Could Sing: Poems by Nebraska Women," edited by

Judith Sornberger, is the first anthology that brings together the varied writings of Nebraska's women poets.

"Each time I read a poem I love by a Nebraska woman in a magazine or collection, it adds to my sense of richness in this state's women poets. What I wanted was to give this sense tangible form — to have for myself and to share," Sornberger said, in the preface to the anthology.

Sornberger, a teaching assistant in the UNL English department, selected poems by more than 25 women to be included in the anthology. The women are from a variety of backgrounds and cultures. Some are rural Nebraskans

whose poetry is rooted in the soil, others are from urban centers like Omaha and Lincoln. Some have lived for a time in Nebraska but are now living and writing in other places. Others have brought their memories and love of other places to Nebraska.

Sornberger was interested in the differences, as well as similarities, that she'd find in the poetry of Nebraska women. She said she is pleased with the results.

Maria Lemon, who owns and manages the Editor, a public relations and

writing agency in Lincoln, writes poetry and fiction under her birth name. Maria Mullinaux. Mullinaux moved here in 1968 and claims to be "such a convert" to Nebraska. "There's always something extraordinarily beautiful to prompt a mental adventure" which leads to the creation of a poem or story, she said.

Mullinaux wrote the anthology's title poem, "All My Grandmothers Could Sing/Most Died Young," as "an act of healing . . . to come to terms with my relationship with my mother — and it

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"It's like a big smorgasboard or pot luck dinner where everyone is bringing something that reflects his own tastes," Sornberger said, explaining that the mingling of the various flavors makes a dinner even more wonderful than serving a dish by itself.

One of the contributors to the anthology is Nancy McCleery, a poet who continues to write about Nebraska from a new vantage point in Alaska. McCleery, who has published poetry in more than 30 publications, says that she still writes about Nebraska because "I see it better from a distance."

Four of the contributors, Meredith Campbell, Janet Coleman, Linnea Johnson and Pat Dean, have written and published a book of poetry together called "Front Lines."

worked." The poem is about "how we have to learn as grown-up women to stop blaming mothers for not living their lives as fully as we think they should have" — because they weren't feminists.

Sornberger said she chose the title of Mullinaux's poem as the title of the book because "poetry and music are very closely linked" and the generational feeling of many of the poems show that "the potential of poetry has come down to us from a long line of women who had poetry in them whether it was written down or not."

A free public reading by many of the poets in the anthology will be Aug. 14 at 8 p.m. in Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

