

Sharon Mesmer Miguel Tries To Order Garlic Bread



This particular evening at Mario Batali's restaurant Po, was the brainchild of Eliot Katz. Eliot had gone to Rutgers with MB, and the two of us had had drinks and appetizers at another of MB's restaurants, Babbo, with MB himself once. This evening, it was MA – Miguel Algarín – rather than MB, Eliot, Nancy Mercado and myself. (I was the odd one sans Rutgers connection.) I think Miguel might've had a few before he sat down with us, which was okay as we'd had quite a few while waiting for him. He seemed to recognize me from the Nuyorican, but the recognition flickered. After he settled in the waitress came over and asked what we wanted.

"Garlic bread," Miguel said. "And those skinny breadsticks."

"I'm sorry, sir, we don't have garlic bread or breadsticks," the waitress said, politely. Po, though cozy, was definitely not a homey old neighborhood place run by a sweet old couple from Parma.

"No garlic bread?" Miguel said. "This is an Italian restaurant, right?"

"We don't have any garlic bread tonight, sir," the waitress reiterated with great dignity and patience. Nancy, Eliot and I held our breath and shot furtive glances at each other. "Can I bring you something else? The appetizers are listed on the menu" – she nodded at the menu underneath Miguel's elbow.

Miguel looked at the menu underneath his elbow and, as if gleaning its contents by osmosis, asked for something with pesto on it.

"I'll see what we have," the waitress said, gently sliding the menu away as she took the other orders.

While we waited for our food, Miguel held forth. When the food came, a waiter presented him with what looked like sausages in squid ink.

"What is this?" he asked, brow wrinkled.

"Grilled Italian sausage with black olive pesto."

"Black olive pesto? What's that?"

The waiter looked at us. Eliot explained, in his magnanimous way, that it was pesto made with black olives along with basil.

"Did I order this?" Miguel asked. Eliot gently recalled the conversation Miguel had had with the waitress. Miguel shrugged and began eating. "What kind of Italian restaurant doesn't serve garlic bread?" he mumbled as he speared a sausage with a fork.

Sharon Mesmer is a poet, fiction writer and essayist. She has work forthcoming in *Luna Luna* and *On The Seawall*. She teaches creative writing (fiction, poetry and creative nonfiction) at NYU and the New School. Her most recent poetry collection, *Greetings From My Girlie Leisure Place*, was voted "Best of 2015" by *Entropy* magazine.