

NOM NOM: New in Chicago

written by Guest Contributor | March 18, 2015



Prior to moving to Chicago, I made a promise to myself to listen to my body more. Something that is literally impossible to do when you only know how to make garlic bread. I'd like to believe I kept that promise to myself, but I know now that I started cooking because I *only* had my body to listen to upon moving to a new city. This is another tired story of a lonely girl who learned how to cook like a person who actually shares an earth. (And when your dad microwaves Tang and calls it 'tea', that's a difficult lesson to come by on your own.)

So yes, cooking because you're lonely might not seem like the best relationship you can have with food, or as Pacific Northwesters would say "That seems toxic." But I'm honestly all for using food and cooking for sole comfort reasons. I would wake up and immediately be bombarded with the knowledge that I was going to see no one I loved or who loved me (yet) that day. But later I'd get myself psyched knowing I was going to learn how to make schnitzel. (I HIGHLY recommend making schnitzel when tense. What's a better stress-reliever than hitting a pork chop with a hammer? Or a "meat tenderizer" if you're an overachiever.)

This would luckily even get me out of the house and walking around numerous Chicago neighborhoods I've grown to love. You're making schnitzel? Better head to Avondale or Brighton Park, because someone selling your much-needed panko crumbs is going to recite his mom's recipe from memory. Oh, fried shrimp tacos? And you don't know how to make your own sofrito? That's a rookie move, Rogalsky. I'm lucky enough too that Chicagoans will literally talk about anything, anywhere, anytime, very unlike my shame-fueled Seattlites. So while I was at the neighborhood produce market, I'd hear stories about the fate of public schools in Chicago, how beautiful someone's house was in Mexico and how much his brother is still paying for a house there, how Rahm has the face of the devil, how "Honey, if my daughter was here by herself I'd just die, you need to come over so we..." etc. I became

acquainted with a new city in the seemingly most un-unique way– buying tomatoes. (And through *ahem other reasons, but that’s for another column, isn’t it?) Later, I would inevitably make friends, or at least even company, and what better way to introduce someone to the many subtleties of Fairuza Balk’s [horse art](#) (You’re welcome) or even just twirling the curly q’s of small talk , than over a nice stuffed pepper and yellow rice, topped with some goat cheese and dill.

Laura Rogalsky is a poet in Chicago who does not want to move to New York. She currently runs Opaque literary magazine and is part of the K(no)w Army reading collective.