

PUDGY'S

BY DANNY FAIRCHILD

Fall is a great time for a trip to Galena, IL. The weather isn't too hot or too cold yet, it's just about time to get started on holiday shopping, and the autumnal colors really set a lovely scene. And the food. There is no lack of great food options in Galena.

But how many times have you come across the following scenario: You're getting your Galena on. You're with your friends and/or family. Maybe they're in from out of town and they're experiencing Galena for the first time. You're stopping in the various shops with various cheeses and various hot sauces with lewd names. You go back a few stores because you realize that your bestie Chris got separated from the herd and you know they'd love to try the habanero cranberry cheese log. But that habanero cranberry cheese log only made you more hungry and it's time for lunch. That's when lines get drawn in the sand. Pizza? Pasta? Burgers? Other? You think you're going to come to a consensus amongst yourselves? You're not. You're just not. You're lucky Jordan hasn't slapped that accusatory look off your face. And Jordan is lucky that Casey is in a really good place right now and is willing to put up with a lot of Jordan's crap, otherwise...hoo boy. And Jamie? Watch out for Jamie. Jamie will slice every throat in the place if a restaurant decision isn't made right... now.

There is a better way. A way that won't end in vendetta. It's so easy and neat and tidy, you'll be thanking me. You'll think you've been doing Galena wrong for years. Now let me preface this by saying that all restaurants in Galena are wonderful establishments and all have their times and places. And those times and places are wonderful. But if you're looking for something easy, quick, delicious, and universal...you gotta get yourself to Pudgy's. Picture this: You go down one side of Main Street Galena, doing the whole Galena thing. Graze on the free samples as you see fit. Contribute to small businesses and to sustain capitalism for yet one more day and in the most enjoyable fashion. When you get to the end of the shops, you grab yourself a Chicago-style hot dog (or however you like your hot dog or veggie dog) or an Italian beef. You take a load off for a few minutes while you eat, or grab and go. Then, energy replenished and hunger appeased, you do the whole other side of Main Street. And you end up right back at your car when you're ready to go. How perfect is that? Very perfect is the answer to that question. And the best part? Nobody dies.



You'll first identify Pudgy's by the big Vienna beef sign on the side of the building. You might recognize this as the most reliable sign in determining whether the Chicago-style hot dog you're about to eat is indeed a Chicago-style hot dog. I am not from Chicago, so I suppose

you could completely be a jerk and discount my opinion on the matter, but I tells ya: It's a great authentic Chicago dog experience. But I'll get to that.

Upon hearing that there's a hot dog joint named Pudgy's, you'll likely think of a big, burly guy slinging

wieners on buns. That's a perfectly cromulent image for a hot dog joint. I would totally eat a hot dog from that guy. But no. Pudgy's is named after the mother of owner, Donna Grobarek. And friends...this ain't no dirty water hot dog stand. Donna and company put more time and care into a hot dog experience than most restaurants put into whole entire restaurants.

As you walk in, you're going to immediately feel invited and welcomed by the decor. "Quaint" is too quaint of word to describe it. Try...whimsical. Yeah. Pudgy's is whimsical. Assorted pastel metal chairs that...seriously...have there been recent developments in metal chair technology? Seems everywhere I go that has metal chairs has been most kind to my bum. Viva la ergonomics! They're cute, too. But not cutesy. Once you're in, you'll walk right past the iced tea and self-serve soda fountain and place your order.

The menu isn't extensive, but I would rather have few choices done right than pages of choices done not so right. I could say that your choices are either a hot dog or an Italian beef. But that's not fair. That's like saying when you grow up you can either go to college or get a job. What do you study? Where do you get a job? What do you get on your hot dog? How do you like your Italian beef? It all depends on the individual.

As you know, I always comment on the bathrooms and after a few hours of shopping you'll want to know. I'm happy to report that while they are single-occupant, Pudgy's bathrooms are clean and comfortable.

In my visit to Pudgy's I had the Chicago-style dog (because people gotta know if it can truly be called a Chicago-style hot dog) and the Italian beef. Sounds simple, but there's lots to talk about here.

Friends, I may not be from Chicago, but Donna is. So while I don't expect you to take the word of my small-town Western Iowa origins, I do expect you to take the word of the yellow mustard, bright green relish, chopped white onions, dill pickle spear, tomatoes, sport peppers, celery salt, and yes, the genuine poppy seed bun! Donna knows where she's from, friends. Don't question Donna. Or do question her. She's really nice and will answer your questions. This wasn't my first Chicago dog experience by any stretch but it was certainly one of the best. And if you got yourself that itch, Pudgy's is happy to scratch.

I'd like to try the chili dog next time because I want to try Pudgy's chili. "Wait!" you say. "You mean Pudgy's doesn't just open a can of chili and heat it up if we're lucky?" No, friends, they don't. The only thing that Pudgy's doesn't make themselves is the Vienna hot dogs (cuz duh) and the giardiniera, of which there's two varieties hot and mild. And I want to find out where they get the giardiniera 'cuz it's good! It's got olives in there. And I just learned I love olives in my giardiniera.

The Italian beef. You think you're just going to order an Italian beef sammich? Fools. Fools, the lot of you. This is Chicago-style Italian beef so you got options here: Dry, wet, or dunked. Dry is for those who want to eat their sandwich like a sandwich. Recommended for those grabbing Pudgy's to-go. Wet means your sandwich gets a ladle of the au jus that the Italian beef (Donna's own recipe) is cooked in. And dunked? Well... it's dunked in that au jus. Fork and knife required for dunked, good table manners aren't. This was some genius Italian beef, friends. My only regret is I didn't request the giardiniera before I was a disgusting human and downed a whole Italian beef and Chicago dog.

Let's talk sides. When we talk sides, we're talking fries, potato salad, and tomato salad.



The fries. Remember how I said Pudgy's makes nearly everything themselves? That goes all the way to hand-cutting their fries. I tell you...I'm flattered by any place that hand-cuts their fries. It's like they're trying really hard to sleep with me. Maybe that's because making food is how I try to get laid. Shrug. These fries are great. Think Five Guys fries but made from local potatoes. Donna tries her best to use all local veg. In fact, she's looking for a source for her tomatoes for her tomato salad, so if you can be her tomato person, or know someone who can be a tomato person...there's probably medication for that.

The tomato salad. Pudgy's uses those beautiful gem-like multi-colored grape and cherry tomatoes. Mix that with cukes, Spanish onion, and a lovely, bright vinaigrette and you got a beautiful and delicious thing to nosh. You know what it looks like to me? Remember the end of *The Goonies* when the Spanish-speaking housekeeper discovers the rich stuff in Mikey's marble bag and they pour out the gems and everybody goes "Ohhh!" It's like that. But 'cept the tomato salad is delicious and makes more sense than a pre-teen boy still running around with a marble bag in the mid 1980s.

The potato salad. I've written before about how difficult it is for restaurants to make their own potato salad. Too labor intensive. Donna at Pudgy's don't care. She makes that potato salad, friends, from a family recipe several generations old. And guess what? Bryce, prepare yourself: That potato salad? THERE'S BACON IN IT! (mic drop).

So yeah. Turns out you've been doing Galena wrong your entire life. Luckily, Pudgy's is here to make sure we never stab our shopping buddies again. But if you DO stab your shopping buddies, make sure Donna doesn't see. She's helping Galena by starting a community watch to make sure less protected individuals are safe.

Thanks for all you do, Pudgy's! ■

PUDGY'S
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PUDGYS.BUSINESS.SITE

Hours: Mon–Thu: 11 AM–3 PM; Fri–Sat: 11 AM–2 PM and 6:30 PM–1 AM; Sun: Closed
Prices: \$3.75–\$10.75

DANNY FAIRCHILD

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