

The Business

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We'll Call It Short Attention Span Literature

Gina Frangello, who's heading up the new book venture launched by *Other Voices*, thinks the market is ripe for the return of the short story.

By Deanna Isaacs

The last time we talked to Gina Frangello, a little more than a year ago, she'd just finished editing a short-story anthology for a new press, Hourglass Books, operating out of suburban Lindenhurst. *Falling Backwards* was a collection of works by various authors on the theme of fathers and daughters, and its publisher, Bill Scheurer, was bent on revitalizing the market for the short story. Frangello (an occasional *Reader* contributor), who's also editor of the 21-year-old literary journal *Other Voices*, was all for that. Scheurer's business plan eliminated most of the up-front costs: the book would be published "on demand," authors and editors would be paid if and when it sold, and sales would be driven by newspaper reviews. There was just

OV Books launch party and benefit
WHEN Sun 9/25, 5 PM

WHERE Chicago Cultural Center, GAR Rotunda, 78 E. Washington
PRICE \$30, \$15 for students
INFO 312-413-2209

one thing wrong with that plan, Scheurer says now: most daily newspapers don't review anthologies. He declines to say how many copies of *Falling Backwards* have sold so far, but Hourglass, which has yet to bring out its second book, is revamping its marketing strategy. Frangello, meanwhile, is about to launch another short-story collection she's edited—and another new publisher. *Simplify*, a dozen works by Tod Goldberg, is the first release from OV Books, a brand-new book press launched by *Other Voices* that's dedicated to the short story.

OV is going the more traditional publishing route, with an initial run of 1,000 paperback copies and 200 limited-edition hardbacks and a distribution deal with University of Illinois Press, which will take 50 percent of the proceeds. Goldberg was picked as its first author through a national competition: Frangello says they netted 300 submissions (about a quarter of them from writers who'd been published in *Other Voices*), each with a \$25 entry fee, which more than covered the cost

of printing the book. About 20 volunteers handled the first round of blind readings, and the guest judge, Pam Houston, author of *Cowboys Are My Weakness* and an OV board member, selected Goldberg's tales of deadpan weirdness from the work of five finalists. According to Frangello, they got a lot of submissions "where every story was well written . . . but they were all alike—sort of the same story over and over again," while Goldberg's collection had variety. It also had "masculinity"—running counter to what she terms the predominantly chick-lit character of the few short-story collections that get into print these days.

"The prevailing wisdom in the publishing community is that nonfiction sells much better than fiction, genre fiction sells better than literary fiction, and literary fiction sells better than nothing but poetry," Frangello says. The literary short story is supposed to be the hardest fiction sell of all, but that strikes her as a paradox. "We're being told that short fiction doesn't sell, but at the same time we're being told that the attention span of the public has shortened, that people are used to the amount of attention they have to give to a sitcom or a video game. If that's really true, then why isn't short fiction the hot medium right now?"

Frangello's convinced it comes down to marketing: what sells is what can be spun, and short-story collections, with their brevity and variety, don't offer an easy hook. And here, she says, a small nonprofit like OV Books and *Other Voices* (published twice a year, with an annual budget just under \$30,000) has an advantage: none of its roughly 50 workers, including Frangello (who's been there ten years), are paid. "We aren't expecting to sell a million copies," she says. "We want Tod's book to sell as well as possible, but we're not looking to be *The Da Vinci Code*." On the other hand, they'll need at least to sell out the first run "for us to go ahead with the press . . . because we don't want to jeopardize the success of the magazine," she says. If it works, the plan is for OV Books to put out up to three collections a year.



Gina Frangello

Frangello, whose novel *Her Sister's Continent* will be issued this winter by Portland-based Chiasmus Press, decries the dearth of local literary publishers. "We do have a handful of suburban

presses, a couple of poetry presses, and a number of good literary magazines, but beyond that there isn't much," she says. Until someone tells her otherwise, "we're just going to call ourselves inner-

city Chicago's only fiction-focused press." Goldberg lives in La Quinta, California, and his stories are set in places like Walnut Creek and Santa Monica, but Frangello says OV will also have "an inner-city focus" if it survives. And that's not guaranteed. In Chicago, she says, the publishing community is so small and scattered that "it's hard to tap into the resources." There's a community of writers, evidenced by a number of well-attended reading series and open mikes around the city, but, she says, "People keep saying to me, Who's going to come to your launch party? What is the audience? And I keep saying to them, I really don't know. I'm hoping the idea of a fiction-focused press in the city that is nonprofit and trying to put out the best books possible with no overhead in terms of salary will appeal to a lot of people, but I don't know who those people are yet."

Goldberg and Houston will be in town for the OV Books book launch, September 25 at the Cultural Center. Proceeds will help fund the press's next project, a short-story collection by Kate Blackwell, a runner-up in OV's initial contest.

Miscellany

The Poetry Center of Chicago announced this week that producer, writer, performer, and National Poetry Slam champ Lisa Buscani will be its new executive director. . . . A scheduling conflict was blamed for the short-notice "postponement" (no new date has been set) of the Hip-Hop Theater Festival this month at the Museum of Contemporary Art; the only surviving element is Congo Square Theatre Company's production of *Deep Azure*, beginning this weekend at the Duncan YMCA Chernin Center for the Arts. . . . 3030, at 3030 W. Cortland, will house a final night of performances by local writers and musicians Saturday, September 17, at their impossible-to-license venue of four years. . . . Make that One Book, Two Cities: Chicago's latest reading assignment, *Pride and Prejudice*, will be augmented by a stage production at Northlight Theatre, in Skokie. ☐

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Restaurants

Listings are excerpted from the Reader Restaurant Finder, an online database of more than 1,400 Chicago-area restaurants. Restaurants are rated by more than 2,000 Reader Restaurant Raters, who feed us information and comments on their dining experiences. Web ratings are updated daily; print listings reflect the most current information available at publication time. Reviews are written by

Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder.

R

Haute Picks

Kaiseki: Your Dinner Is in Their Hands

In the 70s Seijiro Matsumoto hewed closely to the rules of *kaiseki* when he headed up the kitchen at the Hakata Tokyu Hotel in Fukuoka on Japan's southern island of Kyushu. But at his new namesake restaurant he's willing to be a bit more playful. *Kaiseki*, Japan's version of haute cuisine, originated as a light meal served as part of a traditional tea ceremony. It follows a formal structure with distinct themes for each of the many small courses, and the aesthetics and order of the courses, which incorporate fresh, seasonal ingredients and are meant to reflect the elements of the natural world, are as important as the preparation.

Matsumoto's long-standing affiliation with Matsumoto owner Isao Tozuka began inauspiciously. In the early 80s Tozuka ran a ramen and tempura shop at Broadway and Diversey called Isao's Place. "I noticed a man coming in for lunch... and then again for dinner—every day!" he says. It was Matsumoto.

Matsumoto
3800 W. Lawrence
773-267-1555

He'd just turned in his whites at Ohba, a simple Japanese restaurant downtown. "I didn't have a liquor license," Tozuka continues, "but there was a liquor store next to me. Matsumoto would buy a little something next door and bring it to dinner." The two became fast friends and golfing buddies.

Matsumoto went on to run the kitchen at Daruma in Schaumburg; Tozuka closed Isao's Place and got a job at Itto Sushi on Halsted. There he ran into another Isao's Place regular, Chiyo Kim, a Korean-Japanese student working nights slinging sushi. They soon married and in 1990, at Chiyo's urging, opened Chicago Kalbi at 3752 W. Lawrence. "My mother ran a *yakiniku* [grilled meat] restaurant in Osaka," says Chiyo. "I wanted to open a *yakiniku* restaurant in Chicago that did things in a Japanese way—better meat, more attention to presentation and service—something that would stand above the average Korean BBQ place here."

Five years ago Chiyo began nagging her husband about opening a *kaiseki* restaurant. Customers at Chicago Kalbi had repeatedly complained that they couldn't get *kaiseki* in Chicago. Isao balked. But in January 2005 the storefront at 3800 W. Lawrence became vacant, and when the landlord walked down the block and asked Chiyo and Isao if they wanted the vacant space, he capitulated. The only question was, with Isao cooking at Chicago Kalbi, who would head the kitchen? Isao's immediate answer: "Matsumoto!"

Matsumoto opened August 8 to little fanfare, but word has spread quickly through the Japanese community and on Internet food boards. It's a modest double storefront with an odd color scheme of purple, dark red, and pale yellow. The restaurant and its hostess, the preternaturally sunny Chiyo, are extremely relaxed, but reservations must be made at least a day in advance, at which point diners are asked about any dietary restrictions and whether they'd like seven, nine, ten, or eleven courses—which can run from \$80 to \$150. The rest is left to Matsumoto, or *omakase* (literally, entrusting).

Most *kaiseki* courses have a formal Japanese title

fish-sauce vinaigrette. Entrees are equally superb: an elegant lobster tail halved and served with two jumbo shrimp in a lively garlic-ginger sauce, green curry chicken with Thai eggplant, or sweet-and-sour striped bass, impeccably cooked and served with fried celery greens, shi-

itakes, and crispy noodles. One Rater declares, "I would sell a sibling to raise enough money to eat here more often," while another would "date Satan himself." Service is genteel, and a helpful sommelier circulates in the dining room.

Laura Levy Shatkin



Chiyo and Isao Tozuka with Seijiro Matsumoto

that indicates the theme. *Sumomono*, or things prepared with vinegar, is an amuse bouche of vegetables or shellfish that gets the taste buds going. This is followed by *otsukuri*, or sashimi. Soup comes next. Then *nimono*—boiled vegetables or fish flavored with the holy Japanese trinity of soy, sake, and mirin. Grilled dishes, or *yakimono*, follow the boiled, and are followed in turn by *agemono*, or fried dishes. Depending on the season, there might also be steamed dishes, pickles, hot pots, noodles, and rice. Green tea and a light dessert—usually fruit—cap the meal. Until a liquor license comes through, Matsumoto is BYO sake.

When I ate there recently, the *sunomono* course was a generous portion of crabmeat, finely shredded egg, cucumber, *takuan* (pickled daikon), and seaweed cradled in an attractive long-stemmed glass. Everything but the seaweed had been marinated in rice vinegar—and the juice was subtly infused with the briny taste of crab. The sashimi course followed on a glistening black-lacquered tray: three pristine and buttery cubes of *toro*, or fatty tuna, flecked with real gold and garnished with shaved daikon, cucumber, carrot, and tiny sticks of *wakegi*, a type of scallion. Four raw oysters crowned with a dab of *momiji oroshi* (grated daikon flavored with *togarashi*, a spice blend of chile, orange peel, seaweed, ginger, poppy seeds, and sesame seeds) came in a shot glass of red miso and vinegar.

In a later course Matsumoto mixed themes by presenting an amalgam of grilled, fried, boiled, and

vinegar-flavored items on a single serving platter. Grilled salmon—overcooked to my taste but "just right" to my Japanese friend—was the centerpiece. A roll of deep-fried *yuba* (tofu skin) stuffed with whipped tofu and minuscule pieces of cucumber and carrot got my vote as the humble star of the evening. *Tsubugai* (a snail-like shellfish) marinated in soy, sake, and mirin was an impish take on the concept of "boiled." Vinegar-flavored *renkon* (lotus root) was refreshingly crunchy and a great visual. Finally, cubes of crab-speckled *tamagoyaki* (an egg custard grilled in a square pan) echoed the original grilled piece of salmon.

Baked oysters in white miso were the only misstep. Though the impressive clay dish—my friend called it a doggie bowl—and the contrasting arrangement of green and white strips of *shironegi* (another type of scallion) atop the oysters were reminders of the attention Matsumoto pays to presentation, more oysters were simply too much to stomach.

But Matsumoto's attention to detail rarely flags; he even blends his own soy sauce, infusing it with bonito flakes and sake and then aging it in the fridge. And it extends to the sound system: Japanese pop songs provide a soothing backdrop to dinner. "The Man Who Was Born in Osaka" moved my dining partner to swoon in Japanese, "*natsukashii*," a nuanced word that roughly translates to "how nostalgic." —Peter Tykinski

Rater-Recommended Asian

Amarind's Thai Restaurant

6822 W. North | 773-889-9999

F 8.1 | S 7.2 | A 6.4 | \$\$ (14 REPORTS)

THAI | LUNCH: TUESDAY-SATURDAY; DINNER: SUNDAY, TUESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED MONDAY | SMOKE FREE

☞☞☞ If Arun Sampanthavivat's posh restaurant doesn't fit your budget, try this serene Thai eatery owned by chef Rangsan Sutcharit, a nine-year veteran of Arun's. The room is simple, but the menu, elegant plating, and painstakingly artistic garnishes are hard to beat at these prices—there's hardly a dish over \$10. Fluffy chive dumplings are light as a cloud and served with a black soy dipping sauce redolent of molasses. The crab rolls are also intriguing: cylinders of ground crabmeat and chicken are rolled in tofu skin, briefly fried, then cut on the bias into one-inch-thick slices and set off by a sweet but piquant apricot honey sauce. Soup and noodle dishes are tasty, especially the house noodles—a large serving of delicate homemade spinach noodles with shrimp, crab, and bean sprouts tossed in a ground-chile-and-tamarind sauce. An entree not to be missed is the beef panang curry; while the beef was sliced a bit thin, resulting in somewhat chewy pieces, the satiny sauce was otherworldly. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

Arun's

4156 N. Kedzie | 773-539-1909

F 9.3 | S 9.4 | A 8.2 | \$\$\$\$ (19 REPORTS)

THAI | DINNER: SUNDAY, TUESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED MONDAY | SMOKE FREE

☞☞☞ Chef Arun Sampanthavivat brings Thai cuisine to new heights, using only the freshest ingredients in tantalizing combinations plated so exquisitely that it feels like vandalism when you dig in; one Rater "would rather have framed it than eaten it." When you're seated, you're asked about your culinary preferences and dietary restrictions. The chef decides the rest, preparing a custom multicourse tasting dinner of six appetizers, four entrees, and two desserts for \$85. Appetizers might include masterpieces like fresh crab spring rolls—delicate pieces of succulent crab rolled in rice paper, cut into bite-size cross sections, topped with a sweet-and-sour tamarind sauce, and set off with drops of hot mustard—or a spicy salad of roast duck served chilled on a bed of Thai basil and cilantro, dotted with roasted peanuts and drizzled with a piquant

Coast Sushi

2045 N. Damen | 773-235-5775

F 8.5 | S 7.0 | A 7.3 | \$\$ (12 REPORTS)

JAPANESE | DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: MONDAY-SATURDAY TILL MIDNIGHT | BYO

☞☞☞ Subtle lighting casts a flattering

glow on the wood tables and comfortable woven leather chairs; carved wood chopsticks are another nice touch. Familiar starters include asparagus beef—tenderloin slices glazed in teriyaki sauce and wrapped around asparagus spears—and unique creations like sesame-crust

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