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Elaine's: The Rise of One of New York’s Most Legendary Restaurants from Those Who Were There

Amy Phillips Penn

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A tribute to legendary restaurateur Elaine Kaufman and her renowned Manhattan creative melting pot.

Elaine’s was a world-famous New York restaurant that became home to writers and celebrities. Owner Elaine Kaufman was known to be “New York feisty,” controversial, often rude, always blunt, with the flare of Gertrude Stein and Dorothy Parker.

Elaine was highly respected and also frequently feared, and Elaine’s the restaurant received the public’s love and praise time and time again. Woody Allen held a regular table there, and Elaine’s was even featured in Allen’s *Manhattan* and Billy Joel’s song “Big Shot.” Throughout the years, Mick Jagger, John Lennon, and countless celebrities, politicians, socialites, private eyes, athletes, artists, and the biggest names in Hollywood became Elaine’s regulars.

Most emphatically, Elaine’s raison d’être was to nourish “starving writers” with encouragement, introductions to Pulitzer Prize winners, and free food and alcohol. These struggling authors responded to Elaine’s support with profound gratitude.

Elaine passed away in 2010, forcing the restaurant manager to close shop shortly after. “There is no Elaine’s without Elaine,” she decreed. However, the memories remain and are recalled by a variety of Elaine’s regulars in this moving, oftentimes amusing, collection of personal essays.

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