

Pike Place Market

“Meet the Producer”

By Frank Barnett





in his folding chair with a grin a mile wide and a melon lifted up to his moist lips still dripping from the juice of his last bite. That was, no doubt, the beginning of my long career as a photojournalist and probably also marked the onset of my interest in the produce industry as well. So this story seemed to be one that had been tailor-made for me and has just been waiting for the telling.

It was a Saturday, the 17th of August, less than a year after Dad's birth, that Pike Place Market was also ushered into the world. On that day just eight farmers rolled their loaded wagons to the corner of First Avenue and Pike Street. It must have been a somewhat pandemonious gathering since there was a reported 10,000 eager customers waiting to "meet the producers." By 11:00 am, the wagons were empty and the would-be buyers' disappointment was probably also tinged with hopes for the Market's future. Within a few months, in fact before the end of the year, the Market's first building had been completed and every space was occupied.

Today, a little more than a century later, Pike Place Market has a worldwide reputation as America's premier farmers' market, attracting 10 million visitors annually to its sprawling complex, situated on nine acres and now housing more than 200 year-round commercial enterprises, 190 industrious craftspeople, roughly 100 farmers who rent stalls by the day and 240 street performers. What most visitors don't realize is that there are also more than 300 apartment dwellers living within the market complex who are lucky enough to enjoy





the benefits of living within a public market that overlooks the spectacular Elliott Bay.

On a number of past trips to Seattle I had visited Pike Place Market and, in fact, had even had a photo shoot there for the Washington Restaurant Association. But I hadn't recalled just how truly amazing a place the Market really was. If you're prepared to do some serious walking and stair climbing, a visit to the Market is every bit as exciting as any of the other grand markets of the world.

Early on my first morning, I asked my son to deposit me at Rachel the pig, a giant bronze cast piggy bank that serves as the unofficial mascot for the Pike Place Market. Rachel has been located in the same spot under the red neon "Public Market Center" sign at the Market's entrance for the past quarter of a century. She's actually a real piggy bank that was designed by Georgia Gerber, a local artist and was modeled after a pig of the same name that resided on Whidbey Island. Annually, tourists stuff bills and coins from just about every imaginable country into the coin slot on her back and those funds help support the Market's social services. As luck would have it, there were already three tourists, one who was lovingly "petting" Rachel's ear, who agreed to be my first "photographic victims" during my shoot at the Market.

Pike Place Market was built at the edge of a steep hill and the hundreds of shops that are crammed in throughout the complex on the main and lower levels can be reached by elevator or stairs that lead down from the street level. I decided to begin

home. With the help of their three sons, their orchards produce tree-ripened apricots, cherries, nectarines, peaches, pears and apples – all of which are sold at the Market. During the peak of the season, Rick and Terri have over 50 people working their orchards at any one time.

The rich fertile Snoqualmie Valley is another region that serves as home to several Pike Place Market farmers, including Tong and his wife Maika as well as the couple's son Tuz and daughter Paja. The Xiongs' 10-acre farm in eastern King County grows beautiful dahlias, lilies, gladiolas and sunflowers that are arranged into eye-catching bouquets. The couple originally arrived in Seattle in 1980, having lived in refugee camps in Thailand for half a decade. They've been selling their flowers in the Market since 1992.

And then there's The Souk, which means, "market" in Arabic. The owner of this postage stamp-sized specialty market is Manzoor Junejo who decided to specialize in spices – particularly curries that he personally mixes at his grocery store. Manzoor was originally from Rajistan, which is the north Indian desert region. His arrival dates back to Seattle in 1969 when he came to visit his brother who was working at Boeing as an engineer. In 1971, an important year for Seattle and for coffee-drinkers around the world because that's when Starbucks opened its first location at Pike Place Market, Manzoor opened up The Souk just two doors away. His shop was also one of the first to cater to Muslims in the Northwest and today it's still serving many customers who have been regulars for two decades or more and





frequent The Souk, which is considered by many to be their social gathering place. Among his loyal customers are professional chefs who rely on The Souk for unusual spices and foods.

Toward noon the hunger pangs were beginning to gnaw at me, and as I passed Le Panier, a small French bakery, I decided to drop in for a quick snack. It turned out that Le Panier is its own little piece of Paris right in the heart of Seattle's Pike Place Market. Swinging my camera over my shoulder, I ventured in and purchased a delicious flaky croissant that must have come right from the oven because it was still steaming hot. I learned that this little gem of a boulangerie had been founded by Hubert Loevenbruck and a cadre of French bakers who have been baking breads and pastries in the Market since the bakery's opening in 1983.

When I had finished photographing the Main Arcade, I headed to the stairway that would lead me to the shops on the three lower levels that spill down the hillside. There's a very different feeling down there from that found on the Main Arcade level where there's a faster pace and considerably more activity. I discovered that the farther I ventured down into the bowels of Pike Place Market, the more offbeat – even bizarre, the shops became. It feels cozier down there and at times, more magical. And speaking of magic, the Pike Place Magic Shop – reported to be the Pacific Northwest's longest running magic store is a stop that no one should fail to see.

It's not at all hard to locate. You'll find it blazing in its own eerie neon glow. The first thing you might notice is the antique

booth containing a mechanical fortuneteller behind the glass of her wooden kiosk. It was reminiscent of the fortuneteller they used in Tom Hank's wonderful movie, "Big." Invest fifty cents and she'll actually give you your fortune. The entire storefront was a delightful visual assault of neon signs and giant posters. Inside, the visitor will discover a great selection of books and props for the amateur and professional magician alike, and if you're interested in seeing a great magic illusion, just ask the guy behind the counter. You won't be disappointed.

On the same level as the Magic Shop I discovered another store that also ranked high on my bizarre chart, the Old Seattle Paperworks that looked like it had been in the Market forever. If you love collecting old maps, antique postcards and turn-of-the-century periodicals and advertising art, you'll love this place. Not long ago, its owner, John Hanawalt, conceived of The World Famous Giant Shoe Museum. From the giant poster outside this intriguing shop, I learned about Robert Wadlow, "the gentle giant," who grew to be over eight feet, eleven inches tall. I peered into the viewer on the poster to see "the shoes of mystery," owned by the world's tallest man during his brief life. He was born in 1918 and died in 1940 – just 22 short years.

It was nearly impossible to drag myself away from a wonderful Mexican import and fine jewelry shop called Cintli. At this charming shop, all the employees are fluent in Spanish and I had an eager, knowledgeable and lovely guide named Sarah who majored in Spanish and International Studies. She allowed me to photograph throughout the culturally rich shop where all



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of the artists live in Mexico and are friends of the owner, or are local Seattle craftspeople. The owner, Beto Yarce, who is from Guadalajara, is a third generation jewelry designer. Cintli has been delighting customers for the past six years.

I could go on and on describing my discoveries on the floors below the street level arcade. Almost anything might be found there, from an ornately decorated outfit for your favorite belly dancer from the Pharaoh's Treasures, to fair-traded arts and crafts from Hands of the World, to health food or just plain food, food. And before you return to the street level, you can even pose for a caricature of yourself with your best friend or family member.

After exploring all three of the lower levels, I recalled that I had wanted to cover the performers who "work" the crowds at the market as a-capella singers, guitarists, saw players, mandolinists and harmonica and accordion players. At the Market, they use the English term "busker" that means street performer to describe the musicians, puppeteers and jugglers who per-

form in designated places throughout the Market. There are, however, strict rules regarding the performers who entertain their delighted audiences. There's an hour time limit for each entertainer who is also limited to just 13 designated locations scattered throughout the Market. In addition, horns, percussion instruments and amplified music are strictly forbidden. During the annual Pike Place Market Buskers' Festival, which celebrated its ninth year last September, there are two amplified stages on Pike Street and one acoustic stage in Post Alley. Don't miss the event next year.

Since this is an on-line magazine and not an e-book, I'm going to allow my photographs to tell the rest of my story of the Pike Place Market. As the old axiom goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words." I'm going to put that old saying to the test. I hope you enjoy the rest of my journey to Seattle's Pike Place Market, known as "the soul of Seattle" as much as I did. I can assure that it really is Seattle's soul, and so much more. The Pike Place Market has no parallel anywhere on earth. 