



Hers is a remarkable story of a highly educated woman (with a double doctorate in psychology and criminology from UC

Berkeley) who saw a need to help those whose lives were shattered: ex-con career criminals, prostitutes, drug addicts and pushers, and murders – all with nowhere to turn. Her vision was that if given a choice to turn around their lives either by living in a strictly regulated, disciplined, but highly motivated community or by continuing to live miserably and die a likely unhappy and premature death, this population would opt for the former. So Mimi and the late co-founder John Maher instituted the Delancey Street Foundation in 1971. Guidelines include strict regulation, self-discipline, and entirely earning one's keep in order to systematically ascend each and every rung of the ladder to a better life.

We met a few of the residents: our waiter, Romero; the hostess, Rena; and adjoining Crossroads Café manager Brett. From their stories, it was apparent that some residents were just dealt a bad hand. Romero rattled off an exhaustive list of prisons where he's been an inmate since he started getting into trouble as a 13-year-old. Rena, today a radiant beauty, was born smack-addicted to a mother who died when she was five. She never met her father. Rena went to jail covering for her far older, abusive, first boyfriend, which began a vicious cycle. Brett's jail career began when he was a teen in Texas, following the footsteps of his father. Now Brett is an articulate and soulful spokesperson for the Foundation, who, like Romero and Rena, credits his rehabilitation to Mimi's compassionate protection. My heart ached

Home Is Where the Heart Is

BY ROY STRASSMAN

The Delancey Street Foundation Restaurant

The Delancey Street Restaurant – and café – isn't just an eatery; it's a sanctuary replete with a resident godmother. Located on the Embarcadero and meriting its own eponymous street name, it is in so many respects an amazing establishment. The Delancey Street Restaurant is a living testament of both the human spirit and its "American Mother Theresa" co-founder Mimi Silbert. On display here is so much goodwill, redemption, compassion, and pain-transformed-into-service – to begin the litany – that I became a hypercompressed, supercharged particle of dizzying emotions that far surpassed my capacities for maintaining any journalistic distance. Suffice it to say that I was deeply moved by this very atypical establishment.

Let's begin with Mimi, who came to our table with a joyous, effusive, and heartfelt welcome and then insisted on remaining standing. Little did we know that she recently suffered six strokes and was battling several late stage cancers throughout the entirety of her diminutive, 4-foot-11-inch-high, 90-pound body. Despite her seemingly frail physical appearance, her immense energy and spirit are such that welcoming and delighting us as her honored guests seemed to be all that mattered to her. All this natural and gracious humility from a woman whose list of accomplishments, awards, and accolades would more than fill the allotted space for this piece.

Mimi is a bright beacon, even among humanitarians, having been the guiding light in providing space and inspiration to turn around and resurrect many thousands of given-up-for-lost lives. She has been recognized by renowned spiritual leaders, celebrities, and politicians, but remains ever focused on her mission of service to those whose lives' dice had spun snake eyes.

» **Delancey Street Restaurant**
 600 Embarcadero St.
 San Francisco
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delanceystreetfoundation.org/enterrestaurant.php

learning their stories but was lifted by their courage and determination to recover and lead productive lives of service.

As for the food, the restaurant serves distinctly American style cuisine, and although it is not Michelin-starred, it is certainly of very high quality, which considerable commendations from San Francisco Chronicle reviews. The food is ridiculously inexpensive – a true bargain for your dining dollar. The marquee out front is inviting and somewhat high profile, while the atmosphere inside is unpretentious and relaxed. The well-lit and moderately quiet dining area is spacious and comfortable – there is even a bay view! An adequate selection of beer and wines is available, as are café and espresso drinks.

We started off with a staff-recommended assortment of appetizers. These included crispy Calamari rings, Bruschetta, Izzy's drunken prawns in a spicy beer sauce, a grilled Portobello

mushroom, Spanakopita, buffalo chicken wings, and finally Alejandrinos, which are delicately fried wontons stuffed with Jack Cheese, olives, and jalapenos – Yum! After this appetizer platter, we could have easily fast-forwarded directly to dessert, but we didn't.

Somehow on this night our carnivore fangs were so bared, so for the mains we tried the grilled rack of lamb swaddled in a Zinfandel sauce and the bourbon-glazed rib-eye steak, both served with mashed potatoes and sautéed squashes. We rounded out our selections with the seared scallops, accompanied by snap peas and Szechuan noodles, and the crab cakes in a medley of fresh vegetables.

The homemade desserts were noteworthy, and despite being served on unprepossessing crockery, they were about as good as any I've ever tasted. The best-in-show accolade goes to the warm – actually fresh-out-of-the-oven hot – Valrhona chocolate pudding cake, with heavenly coconut ice cream, which could

have been billed as Valrhona chocolate soufflé a la mode (ooh-la-la!) and have fooled happy me. Also excellent was Herbie's Corner Drugstore Hot Fudge Sundae – with homemade fudge, hand-whipped cream, and pecans. The house-brewed coffee was hot, strong, and bean rich, and the lotus tea was lovely.

I consider it be both mitzvah (a good deed) and a spiritual teaching to patronize Delancey Street. In addition to enjoying a good and affordable meal in a crisp environment with exceptionally kind people, you will be making a contribution to the most worthwhile cause of this nonprofit foundation – whose residents are transforming not only their own lives but also the lives of those around them. You will also see what compassion and the power of the human spirit can accomplish for the fallen. And you might even glean something about yourself.