



A CHICAGO TAVERN

a Goat, a Curse, and the American Dream

Rick Kogan

“There is real affection here, and that is a very sustaining thing.”

—Billy Goat bartender
Jeff Magill



Chicago has a long history of colorful characters with clout, but . . . a tavern keeper and a goat?

William Sianis, the father of Chicago’s famed Billy Goat Tavern, believed in being a good sport and embracing opportunity.

The Cubs pitched him a publicity homer when Billy and his goat, refused entry to the Friendly Confines, became forever linked with the infamous jinx on the team. But the charm of Billy’s eccentric establishment was his way of treating everyone as an equal, and “giving the people what they want.”

Rick Kogan’s *A Chicago Tavern: a Goat, a Curse, and the American Dream* celebrates 40 years of memories that built a local treasure. Kogan vividly chronicles the Goat’s rise from “a subterranean saloon underneath Michigan Avenue” to a network of 7 locations—including one in Washington, D.C.—guided now by Billy’s nephew, Sam Sianis, whose “Cheezborger! Cheezborger!” pitch to customers became a *Saturday Night Live* classic.

Snapshots include:

- Billy’s “provide a show” philosophy that involved swing bands, animals, practical jokes and funny stories, fire gongs, and police sirens for crowds that included politicians, policemen, and newspaper reporters as well as athletes and circus performers from the nearby Stadium . . . and their fans.
- Regulars like renowned columnist Mike Royko, and celebrity visitors like Park Ridge native and then-First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.
- Yarns told around Billy’s table in the V.I.P. (Very Insecure People) Room.
- A documentary filmmaker’s discovery, while scouting great hamburgers, that “all roads led to the Goat.”

“There are no clocks at all in the Billy Goat,” Kogan writes, “and there are days in a row that it never closes.” Kick back and see for yourself that, at the Billy Goat, time matters not at all.



Rick Kogan’s *A Chicago Tavern* is available at local bookstores, through online booksellers, or by ordering directly from Lake Claremont Press.