

SATI BABI



FAMILY FOOD

By *Stacey Muncie* Photo *Joe Garza*

"When you go in the Philippines and ask for 'barbecue', it means 'meat on a stick'," explains Martin Miranda of the Filipino street food. "It's a very common, typical treat being sold on the street in the Philippines." But when Hauteans think of meat on a stick, one name likely comes to mind: Sati-Babi. That's because the family-owned business has been serving the savory shish-kabobs from its base of operations in Terre Haute for over 30 years.

It was during a conversation with my sister last fall that I was first clued in to the fact that Sati-Babi is a local enterprise. She had recently mentioned picking up some Sati-Babis at the State Fair to her coworkers at the Indiana State Museum in Indianapolis. Having assumed that everyone knew what Sati-

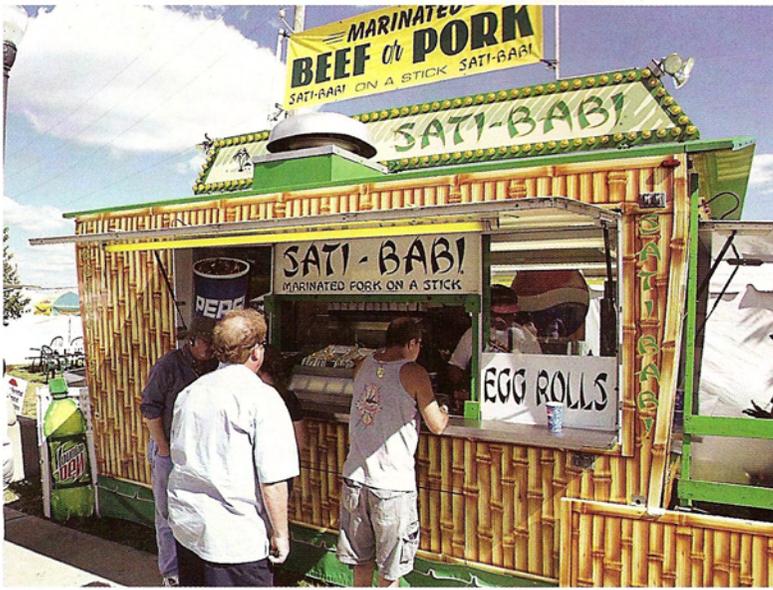
Babi was, she was shocked by the puzzled looks she got from her coworkers who had never heard of it. Curious, she searched on-

line, only to find the Sati-Babi website and learn that it was based right here in Terre Haute. So she did what any good Hautean foodie would do - she called her Hautean foodie sister. "Did you know that Sati-Babi is owned by a local Filipino family?" she asked. I did not, and I figured that if I didn't know, then probably a lot of other people were in the dark as well. With the festival season right around the corner, I contacted the Miranda family to get the scoop on the legendary shish-kabobs and the folks who make them.

The story of Sati-Babi is a classic American tale of hard work and an entrepreneurial

spirit applied to a dream, albeit not Tony Miranda's original career pursuit. Tony began by pursuing a medical degree in the Philippines, but when he fainted at the sight of blood, those plans were scrapped. Instead, he chose to pursue a degree in business. In 1968, his studies brought Tony and wife Fe (pronounced Faye) to Terre Haute and Indiana State University, where he would eventually attain an MBA. It was during this time that he began refining his recipe for the marinade that makes his variation of the common Filipino barbecue unique. Preparing batch after batch of marinated shish-kabobs, he taste-tested them on coworkers

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who would tell him whether they thought it was too salty, too sweet, or needed some other change. Tony eventually settled upon the ideal combination of ingredients for the marinade. Once he'd perfected the recipe, he memorized it and destroyed the written copy. Like the recipe for Coke, or Colonel Sanders' seven herbs and spices, the Sati-Babi recipe is a closely guarded secret. Tony, along with sons Victor and Martin, are the only ones who know how to make the savory sauce.

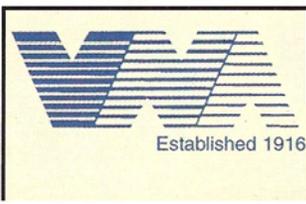
For his unique product, Tony created the name Sati-Babi, which is derived from the word "sate" meaning marinated, and a variation of words which mean "pork" in Filipino dialects. The name, which is a registered trademark, has become synonymous in this area with the festival staple, as generations pass down the tradition of going to get a

Chicken, and are shocked to find out that it's local. In fact, I've been hard pressed to find anyone who did know that Sati-Babi is a local creation. "I'm proud of the fact that it's a unique product, born out of my dad's idea, right here in Terre Haute, Indiana," Martin says of the tasty skewers.

In 1973, Tony started selling his product at a small restaurant with only three tables worth of seating on Wabash Avenue. Later, he moved the restaurant to the building which now houses Jimmy Johns at 11th and Wabash. "He is an entrepreneur," says Martin of his father, Tony. The family also catered, and Martin, who has been working in the business for as long as he can remember, laughs as he describes helping with events while dressed in costume. "He made me and my sister and brother wear these kind of Hawaiian outfits when we served

food," Martin chuckles, recalling his childhood tears and reluctance to dress in the tropical garb, and big sister Leonora's reassurance that, "It'll be okay." His sister, Leonora Miranda Clark, grew up in the business as well, often helping to make the egg rolls that the family sells alongside their Sati-Babi. "Dad always says my sister rolled her way through college," Martin jokes.

In the 1980s, the business shifted from the restaurant and catering, to a concessionaire enterprise, bringing Tony Miranda's Sati-Babi to folks at festivals throughout the Wabash Valley. From the end of May to October, the Sati-Babi stand serves up egg rolls, lemon-shake-ups, and of course, shish-kabobs to hungry patrons. "You knew when festivals came, you were gonna work," Martin says of the family business. "I can imagine if my dad was a farmer, we all would have worked the farm." The Miranda family's old-fashioned work ethic and cooperative spirit has carried Sati-Babi beyond the local festival circuit. Although they primarily work festivals in Indiana, "My dad has taken Sati-Babi as far east as Yankee Stadium, as far west as the Iowa State Fair, as far north as the Wisconsin State Fair, and as far south as Key West." Martin adds, "I'm proud of the fact that we provide a service elsewhere, and bring money back into the local economy." The Mirandas work up to twenty festivals a year. Their schedule necessitates that the food, which is hand made by the family, be prepared in advance beginning in early spring. "Product is made in the off season and frozen. If we've done the right thing, by the end of May we've got enough to last until September." But sometimes sales exceed



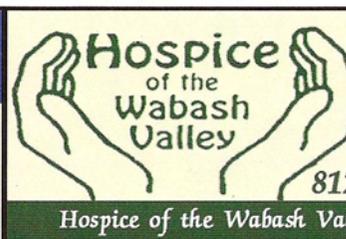
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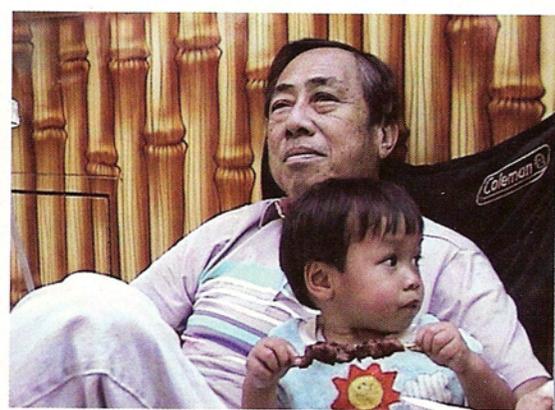


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the amount of product they've prepared. Such was the case last fall during the Covered Bridge Festival, when Victor was at Mansfield selling Sati-Babis while Martin stayed in Terre Haute and made more product in order to keep up with the demand.

Sitting at a stainless steel table in the family's county-inspected commissary, Martin threads chunks of marinated pork onto bamboo skewers as he talks about the process involved in making Sati-Babis. "It has to do with color," he says, explaining that the meat marinates for approximately 3 hours, until it has reached the desired hue. The family then begins assembling the shish-kabobs, laughing and joking as they work, "On the best of days, we're here making food and having a good time." Tony, Victor and Martin get a lot of this quality time together, because they make approximately 50,000 Sati-Babis every spring - enough to provide nearly 85 percent of

Terre Haute's population with a skewer each year. And while the Mirandas enjoy working together, making that many Sati-Babis is a lot of work. "What you see now is what keeps competition away," Martin says as he quickly spears piece after piece of the hand-cut pork.

But 50,000 shish-kabobs aren't the only thing keeping the family busy. They also make two sizes of egg rolls, large ones and small ones similar to the traditional Filipino lumpia, as well as their top-secret sauce, which is then used to marinate slices of Boston butt for the Sati-Babis. The egg rolls are filled with a mixture of beef and pork, which is ground together with water chestnuts before being tucked into an egg roll wrapper and rolled into the familiar shape. In addition to preparing enough food to feed thousands of hungry festival-goers, they also produce enough extra sauce to sell it by the bottle. It's even available for mail order via their website, satibabi.com. Martin recommends it not only for meats, but also as an addition to stir fry, fried rice, or even tofu "if

you like that Sati-Babi taste" but don't eat meat.

The enticing smell of Sati-Babi being cooked in the open air of a festival or fair is what attracts first-time customers. But it's the taste imparted by Tony Miranda's secret sauce that keeps them coming back, year after year. That flavor, perfected over 30 years ago, prepared each summer by the Miranda family, and sought after by generations of festival patrons, is what makes Sati-Babi unique. Martin says occasionally, people will ask him about the secret sauce, wanting to know what's in it. He says he sometimes teases them, asking, "Do you really want to know what it is?" When they say yes, as they always do, he calls them closer, as if preparing to divulge the family recipe. Pausing a moment for dramatic effect he tells them, "It's love." Martin laughs as he tells me this, then smiles as he reflects on the dynamics of the family business, the stress and struggles, and good times and hard work along the way, "I say it jokingly to them - but, yeah, it really is."

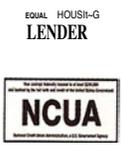
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