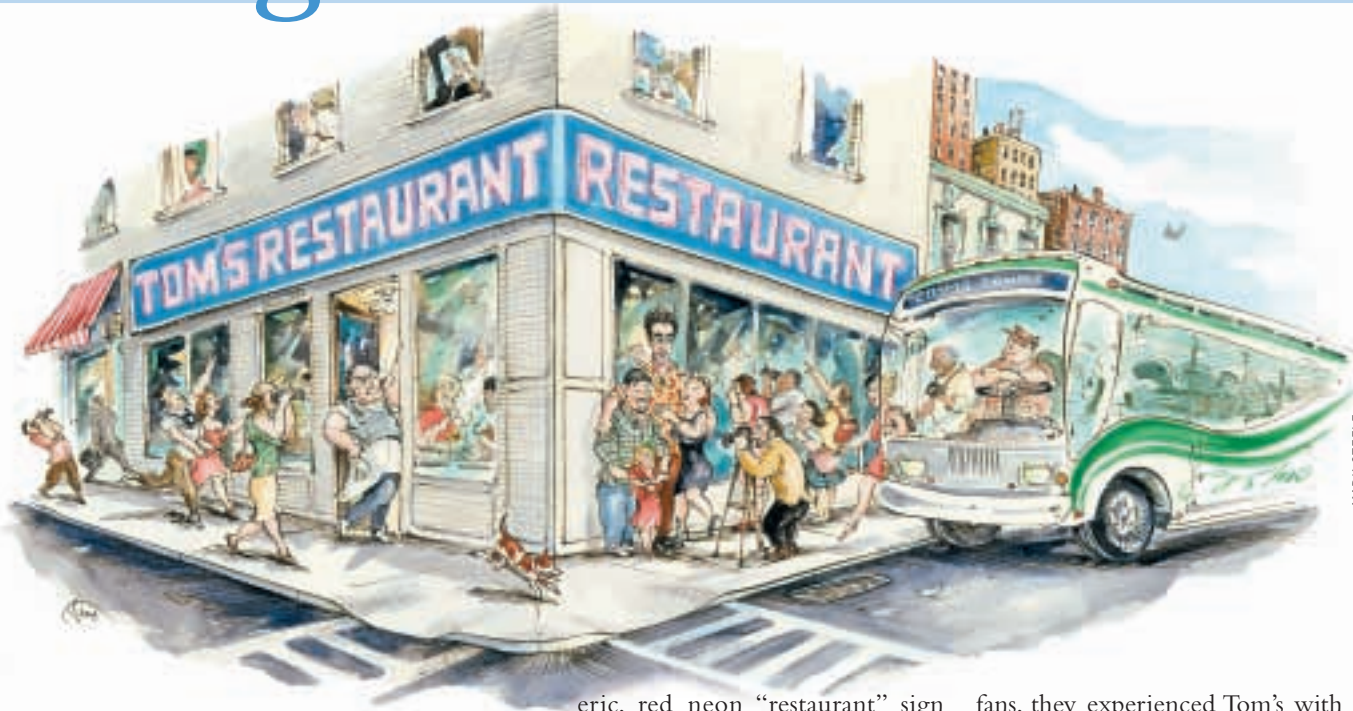


College Walk



MARK STEELE

Peeping at Tom's

Kenny Kramer has milked a living out of being the real-life inspiration for the *Seinfeld* character Cosmo Kramer and he's not afraid to admit it. His tours of the show's famous New York City locales have sold out every Saturday since 1996.

His last tour of the year was Labor Day weekend. After that it was off to Mexico and all places south, the beginning of his annual seven-month vacation. "It's been quite lucrative," says Kramer, a former stand-up comic. "It's prevented me from having a real job."

The 60 seats on the tour bus, at \$37.50 a pop, sell out weeks in advance. The tour, however, would be nothing without Tom's Restaurant, the real-life diner whose storefront and conveniently gen-

eric, red neon "restaurant" sign became the show's most visible New York icon. "It's like Mecca for *Seinfeld* fans," Kramer says.

Not that the tour group goes inside for a meal. A picture with the real Kramer outside of the real diner — whose exterior served as a front for the set of Monk's Café — suffices.

Some other pilgrims, however, like Maria Casalbuono and Betty Giordano, sisters from Melbourne, flock to the corner of 112th Street and Broadway to breach that barrier between fact and fiction. They open the door and go inside.

On a late summer afternoon, the two sisters lunched at Tom's before heading across the Hudson River to Hoboken, where, as members of the Frank Sinatra Society of Australia, they would pay homage to the birthplace of Old Blue Eyes. They were seated in the back of the restaurant, near the bathrooms. They ordered salads. The service was quick, if not curt. Like most

fans, they experienced Tom's with a "What Would Jerry Do?" attitude, though in their case, it was Elaine they channeled.

"Elaine would have complained the whole time!" they said in singsong unison.

Another reason to complain was the size of the place. "It seemed small," Casalbuono said. "It looked much bigger on TV." The ensuing conversation with the two matronly women was a bit awkward, as any parent who has felt compelled to puncture the myth of, say, the tooth fairy, knows: The restaurant's interior was never used on the show.

"You just get sucked into it," Casalbuono said rather sheepishly.

Usually, the staff is left to console the bereaved fan who discovers he has walked not onto the set of a TV show but into a real diner. "They always want to know what booth Jerry sat in," said Tom Nola, a waiter at the restaurant for the past six years. "Haven't people heard of Hollywood?"

Its fame, courtesy of a release form they signed in 1989 when a cameraman and a producer asked to shoot the restaurant's exterior, has been a mixed blessing. Much like the scion trying to make a name for himself, the restaurant's owners feel a little bruised by the shadow that looms over them.

"It wasn't like we were left for dead and *Seinfeld* came and saved us," said one of the owners, Michael Zoulis. "We've been a mainstay in this neighborhood for 60 years." Ipso facto, Zoulis points down the counter to the lunchtime regulars, mostly men who work in the trades and a smattering of students and neighborhood folk.

Tom's Restaurant has been a Zoulis family enterprise for two generations, since the patriarchs immigrated to New York from the Greek island of Kasos more than half a century ago. Most employees

are family members whose tenure at Tom's reaches back decades. Zoulis won't say what role *Seinfeld* has played in the success of the restaurant, but clearly it figures in the ledger. On the restaurant's Web site, the link is featured prominently — along with the connection to Suzanne Vega's hit song "Tom's Diner." The restaurant sells souvenir T-shirts and mugs for \$13.00, both portraying the classic exterior shot seen on the show. Signed photos of the cast and Al Hirschfeld drawings of each character hang on the walls.

The family members who work at Tom's enjoy a lifestyle not unlike Kenny Kramer's. In a typical arrangement, Michael Teromonahos, 56, a cousin who has been working at Tom's since 1971, is substituting as short-order cook for his son, who has been in Greece for the last three months. "It's the so-called

Greek way," Zoulis said with a shrug. "You come here to the U.S. to make money and then go back."

In the seven years since the show ended, after the syndication of *Seinfeld* in 90 countries and amid the incremental release of all 180 episodes on DVD, the distinction between the real and fictional Tom's Restaurant has become arbitrary, with each camp feeding into the marketing of the other. The members of the extended Zoulis family are unfazed by the daily stream of tourists snapping pictures outside the restaurant or making oddball requests, like when a fan recently asked for a souvenir menu.

At the register, Bill Teromonahos, another cousin, who has been working at Tom's for 30 years, gave the order the same interest he would a tuna sandwich.

"One menu," he said. "To go?"

— Jeremy Smerd '03JRN

Return of the Native

She possesses neither brilliant plumage nor an elite address. Powerful tenants do not call for her eviction. Celebrities do not rally to her cause (she has no cause). She is no stylish killer, no media darling, no deadly sex symbol. And unlike Pale Male, the red-tailed hawk of opulent Fifth Avenue, she does not even have a name.

But to those who have seen her poking around in the grass and dandelions in Morningside Park, forag-

ing for wild cherries, raspberries, and acorns, she has inspired much wonder and curiosity. In her rust-brown iridescence, her gamebird ponderousness, she recalls a precolonial Manhattan rife with black bears, mountain lions, white-tailed deer. She is unexpected, anomalous, yet somehow at home, not so much an alien transplant as a pioneer of resettlement on an island where there once flourished, in great numbers, her species, *Meleagris gallopavo* — the wild turkey.

Brad Taylor, president of Friends of Morningside Park, an all-volunteer park advocacy group founded by Columbia undergrads in 1981, says that this specific turkey was first

discovered in May, though no one knows her exact origins (turkey-rich Pelham Bay Park in the Bronx is a good possibility). "She hangs out on the upper level of the park, between 114th and 116th," he says. "There's a spring there, which is probably where she gets her water." Parks Department gardener Marechal Brown, who works in Morningside, notes that the 30-acre park is home to a wide variety of birds, including red-bellied woodpeckers, cardinals, goldfinches, a pair of Canada geese, and, down by the pond, a double-crested cormorant, which arrived last year.

But it is the turkey that has been drawing the most attention. "I called

the Audubon Society when I first saw her,” says Brown, who judges the bird to be on the small side (adult turkey hens generally weigh between 8 and 12 pounds). “She was very tame, and I was worried about her. But they told me that it was better not to move her, since it might traumatize her, and that she’d probably come back to the park anyway because that’s where she wanted to be.” Photographs of the new immigrant have appeared on several blogs, such as Curbed.com, along with comments that reflect the essential awe that springs from a chance encounter with wildlife.

“Only when you see birds up close do you understand the mystery of animals in general and birds in particular,” says Yigal Gelb ’04SIPA, program director for the Audubon Society of New York City. “There’s a magic to it.”

Indeed, the mere existence of a New York turkey is something of a magical event, given the bird’s checkered history in the region, from which it had once been entirely extinct.

In 1609, when Henry Hudson sailed past Manhatta (“land of many hills”), as it was called by the Lenni-Lenape people who lived there, wild turkeys abounded throughout what is now New York State south of the Adirondacks. But colonization brought the clearing of forests for farmland, as well as year-round hunting, and by the 1840s, the bird had vanished from New York. Toward the end of the 19th century, however, farming began to decline and some of the disused farmland was gradually reclaimed by brush and trees. Around 1948, lured by the habitat, a few turkeys from northern Pennsylvania wandered across state

lines and into southwestern New York, and before long, healthy breeding populations were established. Today, due to migration and government-sponsored restoration projects, there are some 250,000 wild turkeys in New York State, according to the National Wild Turkey Federation.

But the survival of a smallish lone turkey in the cliffs of Morningside Park is no simple matter, and it’s not just the threat of cars whizzing past on the surrounding streets, or of unleashed dogs, or of some cruel human with a stone: For high up on the eastern bluff of Morningside Heights, atop the apse of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, overlooking the descending tiers of the park, there lurks, in his nest, a red-tailed hawk, watching for his next meal.

— Paul Hond

Tilting at Cervantes

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There’s no cause for despair like one’s own dubious success.

Recently, running a hand through my thinning bank account, I floated the currents of Amazon.com to buy some used Lit Hum texts on the cheap for my daughter, ’09CC. Stalking the Penguin *Don Quixote* (\$12.96 new), I noticed that Amazon publishes a sales rank for the book. This was “an added service for customers,” a note explained. “The lower the number, the higher the sales for that particular item. The calculation . . . is updated each hour to reflect recent and historical sales of every item sold on Amazon.com.”

Quixote’s sales rank: 80,490. Apparently 80,489 other books were selling better than one of the supreme diversions ever devised by or for the human imagination. What could they possibly be? The obvious smorgasbord of diet-fad cookbooks, of course, along with TV and movie tie-ins, as-yet-unindicted-celebrity memoirs, undigested reportage of current events, a few scraps of cheerful pornography, and the occasional inspired mix (J.Lo’s *Joy of Great Low-Carb Sex in Gaza*). But these and other literary lampreys that infest the best-selling deeps surely couldn’t account for more than, say, 10,000 titles. And the other 70,000?

A thought swam up from the lagoon of vanity.

An hour or so of research revealed that a breezy, little how-to book, dashed off in 1987 by a free-

lance hack from the College class of ’77 (OK, it’s me), is outselling the big guns of the College’s Core Curriculum. This clearly suggested something profound, but all I really felt was a little fist-pump of gloat followed by profound dismay.

Let’s start with a partial, suggestive scorecard. My book, *On Writing the College Application Essay*, based partly on my work in Columbia’s admissions office, costs \$11.16 on Amazon. In the late afternoon of August 17, 2005, it had a sales rank of 1,723.

Here’s how a few Core luminaries, many carved in stone on the frieze of Butler Library, stacked up: Homer’s *The Iliad* (Lattimore translation, \$10.50) came in at 124,008. *The Odyssey* (\$9.75) at 139,596. Dante’s *Inferno* (Mandelbaum translation, \$6.50) at 31,050. Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (\$9.60) at 6,007.



ance of hell, available gratis in the drawer of any Motel 6. But how to account for the sluggish numbers of the *Inferno*, that most delicious trip to hell ever written, at less than the price of a frozen pizza?

I know, I know, that's all fiction and drama and poetry. Comparing my insignificant squib with them is apples and pomegranates. But I'm only too happy to lace up the gloves against the CC boys. The battle against any edition of Thomas Hobbes, for example, would be nasty, brutish, and short (a minute ago, the Cambridge edition, at \$13.00, weighed in at 305,659; the Hackett, at \$10.95, is 146,905). Adam Smith, the fat cat (*The Wealth of Nations*, Modern Library, at \$16.47, was 39,800), would have his ears boxed at his own game, not only by me but also by an older nemesis: *The Marx-Engels Reader*, almost double the price of the Smith (\$28.05), at least took me into the late rounds at 8,371.

Only one book on the Core syllabi could compete, perhaps owing to the recent blip of interest in things Catholic: the *Confessions* of St. Augustine (\$7.15) at 1,566.

Maybe people think it's a Florida celebrity tell-all.

Though I'm embarrassed to be part of the postmodern trump of Cervantes, Herodotus is another matter. The old gossip wouldn't meet the most elementary journalistic standards today, not to mention qualifications for a history department job at a community college: When he isn't retailing hearsay he's making it up — and he *still* can't turn the 100,000 corner (278,434).

So here's my proposal: If the University will put me in stone up there on Butler Library with all the rest of the mediocre sellers — my name is close enough to Herodotus to make the stonework a piece of cake — I'll cut them in on a fat percentage of the royalties on my next title, which, judging from my track record, could exceed the price of two tickets to the Macy's Parade.

Every true story, John Updike says, has an anticlimax. This week, just before finishing these reflections, I checked my sales rank and found it had fallen to 19,172.

I don't even want to *look* at Hamlet's.

— Harry Bauld '77CC

Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (\$6.95) at 157,803. Shakespeare's *King Lear* (\$3.95) at 100,142.

There's more, but let's cut to the capper: The Bible, Revised Standard Version (\$9.56), came in with a sales rank of 33,163.

I understand why things might be a bit slow for an 1,100-page volume urging a cheerless avoid-

Coded Love Poem

O I love Sadie whether laved or furry
As you move rock whether ball or bit.
I won't be a pig, you won't be sorry;
You won't be a prig, and I won't worry.

O I love mitts whether curved or not.
I run outdoors, mad to be in contact with it.
With what? Even in winter you'd be hot.
We have one gun only. Who will be shot?

O I love ships and jelly, ties and brass,
As heat though white is red in thought.
Hide with me beneath the house, my lass.
We'll pass notes in the last row of the class.

If it's night we will buck until freak of day,
If it's day we will rock until fast of night,
And all night long and all through the day,
We'll make love run (make out, make hay).

— David Lehman '70CC, '78GSAS