

Dish Omaha – July 16th, 2025

Jeff: Time for Dish Omaha featuring KVNO's resident foodie, good morning, Diane.

Diane: Good morning, Jeff. It's time for our Remember When series. And today we're going to talk about Piccolo Pete's. You've been there? You were there?

Jeff: Oh, of course, yeah.

Diane: Yeah, it was one of Omaha's longest-running Italian restaurants. It made it 81 years.

Jeff: I miss the neon sign.

Diane: The neon sign was pretty fabulous. Joseph Piccolo opened a grocery store on that site in 1922, and in 1933 his son Anthony, who had married a Caniglia, turned it into a beer garden. And it opened the year Prohibition ended. So, people who wrote about it back in the day said it was like a scene from a movie, people spilling out into the street, big mugs full of beer, just celebrating 13 years of dry times. The name was inspired by a song, but there was actually no Pete in the family.

Jeff: It just sounded good.

Diane: It sounded great, right. And in the beginning, it was really more of a dance place and a beer hall. It had a big disco ball, a big dance floor, and then they just made more and more room for seating. By the 80s they could seat 400 in that restaurant, believe it or not. The menu was real heavy on steaks and chops. New York's were \$2.75. Veal parm was \$1.35. They had pizza.

Jeff: \$2.75.

Diane: Yeah, I know, right? That you could get a cheese pizza for 80 cents.

Jeff: Sorry, trying to wrap my brain around that one.

Diane: Oh, I know. Here's a dollar. Go get a pizza.

Jeff: Keep the change.

Diane: Yeah. The sides were like a lot of the Coniglia-inspired, you know, spaghetti, masticoli, ravioli. The wine list, they told you what red wine went with and what white wine went with, which was great. And then they said, if you don't know, the almondine grenache rosé for \$2.50 goes with everything. (laughter) I know. In the 80s, most of their dishes were under \$6, but you would spend \$21 to get the Chateaubriand for \$2, and you could get a lobster tail and filet for about \$13. Now, you must, as a South Omaha kid, have memories of going to Piccolo Pete's.

Jeff: Yeah, I went there, and we didn't go out to dinner a lot, but on occasion, a special occasion, we'd go there.

Diane: Yeah.

Jeff: Of course.

Diane: It was a special occasion. We asked our listeners and got some great stories. Listener Heather said that she loved the chicken noodle soup when she went with her parents. That was her memory. Miranda went every year on her birthday from the age of 10, and she really talked about the little area up front where she would sit with her family of 20 that would all go together. And she said you could get, I don't remember this, you could get a York peppermint patty and some pickles on your way out. It's kind of an interesting combo.

Jeff: Pickles and patties.

Diane: There you go. Listener Marjorie said it was a special place for her family, especially her dad. They all went after he passed, and there's a whole picture she sent it to me, of her whole family in that huge mirror.

Jeff: Ahhh.

Diane: It was really special. Terry said that she remembers the fancy lamps with the lava drip near the entrance and that the little white bowls of pasta were always served with your steak.

Jeff: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Diane: And her grandma would call it Moscacholi.

Jeff: Moscacholi.

Diane: Carolyn would go with her grandma, and her grandma would always spot Warren Buffett. And she would always go over and just plop herself down at Warren Buffett's table, and she said that she would clutch her purse super tight to her and Carolyn's mother would say, Warren Buffett's not going to steal your money, Mom. (laughter) So, the final owners were Anthony Piccolo's daughters. Their last night was New Year's Eve 2015, and the way they described it in an article I read is, they came in with music and they wanted to go out with music, which I found lovely. You mentioned the sign. The sign was auctioned off, and some say it wound up in the Neon Sign Museum in Reno.

Jeff: Huh.

Diane: Yeah. So, for those of you who are still pining for Piccolo Pete's, I did manage to score their marinara recipe, which we're going to put up on the blog.

Jeff: Oh, wonderful. KVNO.org, our blog Scherzo.

Diane: Yes, yes.

Jeff: So, we'll have that there.

Diane: And a bonus recipe. You'll have to go to find out which one that is.

Jeff: Okay, okay.

Diane: I'll just end with this because it really struck me. Miranda, who was talking so lovingly about the restaurant, said, "It's really funny how a restaurant can play such a role in your life". And I think that's true.

Jeff: That's so beautiful.

Diane: Thanks.

Jeff: Diane, thanks so very much. And again, those recipes will be posted at KVNO.org.

Diane: Thank you, Jeff.