

# Omar's Restaurant

(Continued from page 12)

waitresses are more graceful, relaxed and natural.

That naturalness is particularly alive at a table where Emam Nathaniel Omar sits with a few other young muslim men.

A long-time regular patron at the Salaam and Omar's, Emam Omar is Resident Emam at Masjid Elijah Muhammad 2H on 39th Street in Chicago. He enjoys chatting and dining with "the brothers"—the ordinary little people who frequent the restaurant.

The quiet laughter and dignified discussion at Emam Omar's table suggests that Omar's Restaurant is the community place to be—a real community gathering place. It's also a place where a growing number of national and international travelers stop to dine and socialize.

Former Salaam patrons as well as newly acquired ones include business and professional persons, factory workers, clerical workers, famous personalities, foreign government officials and others.

In addition to Emam Omar, other interesting regulars at the restaurant include El Hajj Muhammad A. Hasan, a young woman college professor, a garrulous young electrician, a Lone Ranger-type motorbike rider who

wears spurs on his riding boots, and several others.

Omar-On-The Nile's smooth-functioning waitress staff is directed by assistant manager Debrasa Omar. She is responsible for much of the courteous, efficient service at Omar's Restaurant.

Gloria Muhammad, Lillian

people.

"And that's what I had in mind when I started the training program here when it was named the Salaam Restaurant, Mr. Omar said. He was speaking of a corps of young Muslim men whom he trained to be waiters, busboys and other restaurant personnel.

*"And though I was working at places where many chefs dreamed and wished they could work, I just wasn't satisfied until I went to work at Wells Restaurant in Harlem where my people could get the benefit of my knowledge."*

Hammond, June R. Royster, Marilyn Avent, Betty Simms, and Casandra Love are the other waitresses.

Mr. Omar is satisfied that the waitresses are developing into the exemplary culinary servants which the late Nation of Islam leader the Honorable Elijah Muhammad (peace be upon him) envisioned when he opened the restaurant in 1968.

"He told me that when he was a boy growing up in Georgia, he'd observed how well Bilalian waiters and waitresses treated Caucasian customers in southern restaurants. He (the Honorable Elijah Muhammad) told me that he made a vow to himself that one day he'd grow up to become a man who would build a restaurant which renders good food service to his people," the Bilalian

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad often said during that time that Bilalian waiters and waitresses at first-class restaurants had developed an antipathy towards serving Bilalian patrons. Therefore Mr. Omar's training of the youngsters in the Salaam tradition was rooted in the purpose that they must be extra patient and concerned with customer satisfaction.

Henry Omar's varied restaurant experiences began many years before the Salaam.

"I started out in Florida, where I was raised as a boy," he began describing those experiences during a recent interview in his office.

"I began working as a waiter, cook and chef in some of the finest restaurants in Jacksonville. And it

was really a pleasure and great opportunity for me to serve under some of the greatest chefs in the world. I learned a lot from them from those men who were masters at their crafts."

From the Florida restaurant circuit, Mr. Omar went to work in railroad dining cars, working on such prestigious lines as the Penn. Central and the Chesapeake and Ohio before he eventually settled in New York City.

In New York, Mr. Omar began working as a chief waiter and maitre d' at some of the city's finest restaurants and hotels. He worked at Zack Gabriels in Brooklyn and the Hotel Pierre which was located near Central Park in Manhattan.

At Zack Gabriels, he would prepare food for as many as 3,000 diners in a single day, and so his culinary skills were substantially enhanced.

"And though I was working at places where many chefs dreamed and wished they could work, I just wasn't satisfied until I went to work at Wells Restaurant in Harlem where my people could get the benefit of my knowledge."

Eventually Mr. Omar came to join a group of Bilalians known as the Nation of Islam and was given the opportunity to work in a restaurant which allowed him to reach his peak as a national restaurateur.

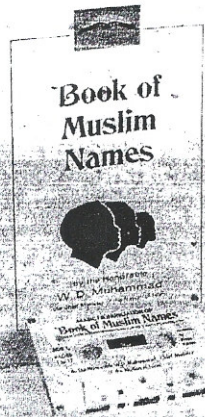
"I remember when Henry Omar (Continued on page 29)

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