

Lifestyles



In a state of Bliss

By Emily Weathers Kennedy

On a cold and rainy day at the beginning of the New Year, I found myself with a delightful task. Weeks earlier my editor, Elizabeth Kennedy Blackstone, and I met at a new restaurant in Lawrenceburg to catch up on our common interest: writing articles for the newspaper about good things happening in Lawrence County. Elizabeth had heard of Bliss Farm Market and Café. I had eaten there once. We both sat in the warm atmosphere and admired the setting. I told her it had once been an antique store run by a Mrs. Lewis from whom I had bought several pieces during my teenage years in the 1970s.

So, we decided to write about Bliss and the Estills who own it. Anybody who could create such delicious cauliflower soup *must* be shared, after all.

When my husband, Kerry, and I arrived on that rainy Saturday, the co-owner of the restaurant, Darie Estill, came to our table with a sample of something delicious—Chai Latte. Her young daughter accompanied her and described what we were sampling. This little girl, dressed in a server's apron, spoke clearly and precisely about this spicy, warm, and yummy beverage and thoroughly charmed us. Later, Darie explained that Chai means tea in many parts of the world including India. So, saying Chai tea is like saying tea tea. This one was something we had never tasted.

Each time I have visited Bliss, hostess Jane has graciously offered samples so that I could choose from



Special teas and related one-of-a-kind products are offered for sale. Bliss will hand mix the tea leaves and seal them into an unbleached tea bag that can be steeped at home.

their menu. This day Kerry and I tasted the delicious chicken salad, as well as the specialties of the day, Granddaddy's Chili and Hearty Chicken & Rice Soup. We had a hard time narrowing down our choices. After much deliberation, Kerry picked the Tuscan Grits dish,



New Mexican Corn Green Chile Chicken Enchilada Grits

and I selected the Roasted Vegetable Salad With Baked Goat Cheese & chicken salad sandwich combo.

Kerry was not disappointed. The bowl of grits featured a ring of subtle pesto, creamy grits, and a center of



Bliss is a popular destination!

roasted chicken surrounded by bruschetta, herbs, with drizzled balsamic reduction sauce and fresh parmesan cheese. It was a taste sensation. My roasted vegetable salad included parsnips, beets, carrots, and sunflower seeds accompanied by a delicious lemon garlic vinaigrette dressing. My

Bliss Farm Market and Café hours are 7:30 am to 9:30 pm Tuesday through Saturday, with lunch served from 11:00 to 2:00. Coffee, tea, desserts, cheese plates, and anything leftover from lunch are available until closing. The first Open Mike Night will be on January 16th and will also feature two local bands. On the 17th is a Winter White Tea including soup, salad, the Three Tier Tray, and a choice of 3 teas. There will be a Valentine dinner on February 14 featuring an inclusive meal with a choice between Moroccan Chicken and Steak Shish kabob entrees.

chicken salad was very flavorful and had grapes and nuts added for punches of flavor.

Our real treat came afterwards, however. Oh, the Cinnamon Swirl Cake our server, Koral, recommended for dessert was divine, but Darie suggested that we talk about the restaurant over tea, and I nearly teared up at the thought. Having not had a “proper tea” since I left England decades ago, I anticipated Kerry's and my favorite beverage mixed and brewed in ways we never imagined and without store-bought tea bags.

Darie's husband, Marvin, joined us as we moved to the window table, and one by one four of their five children (including little Georgia, who met us when we arrived), Darie's brother, and Darie's parents drifted over to say



Cinnamon Swirl Cake

hello. Darie told us that their children enjoy meeting customers and helping out as they can. I smiled as I recalled my father wanting my sister and me to work for the public in a restaurant for the “people experience.” Clearly, Darie's children are well on their way to mastering one of life's great challenges: interacting with the public.

Darie explained that her mother is the baker of things sweet and delectable at Bliss. She said her coconut cake trended as the most talked about dessert on Facebook. Marvin added that at some point they would like to add an evening supper menu and other food offerings, but they would need more space to expand. He explained that right now the restaurant is very busy with the baked treats accompanied by teas and coffees well into closing

time at 9:30. Darie mentioned that any leftover food from the lunch menu is also available as is an assortment of cheeses.

So, what Lawrence County has is essentially a restaurant with a vibrant tearoom/coffee shop ambiance. Folks come in to enjoy food and beverages while using the WiFi in the dining room or the mezzanine that features sofas as well as tables. The upper floor above the mezzanine has been used for a sour dough bread-making class, but Darie envisions a variety of activities including book clubs, demonstrations, music lessons, and other classes (including essential oils, art, sewing, and cooking).

Darie delighted us with the taste sensations of five different hot teas that day, mixed and served specifically to our tastes. We started the afternoon with Cocoa Mate (an interesting blend of green Yerba Mate and cocoa), an Irish Breakfast (my favorite), a coconut variety, and a blend of Assam and Darjeeling leaves. She explained the origins of the leaves as we added our creams and honey or sugar and nibbled our warm cake. Darie offers an afternoon tea with a three-tier tray of treats, something I will savor on my next visit.

I asked Darie how in the world they came up with gourmet grits as their specialty food. She smiled and exchanged a glance with her husband then said, “Hot dogs!”

“Hot dogs?” I was puzzled.

“Can you imagine very many ways of cooking hot dogs? Think of them.” I tried but couldn't stretch my brain that far around a wiener. She continued to say that they visited a restaurant in Charleston mentioned in Diners Drive Ins and Dives. She said there were probably 100 varieties of hot dogs served, and the ones they sampled were delicious. She and Marvin put their heads together to figure out a Southern standard that could be fixed with a variety of styles and came up with grits. I had already tried the turkey and dressing version at Thanksgiving and my favorite Italian version that Kerry sampled today. But, she said there was a shrimp one, a new creation with Tilapia, a version called South by Southwest, and yes, one with hot dogs. They have featured a different one each week with soup specials daily. She said the most popular soups were the cauliflower (my favorite) and Tomato Bisque. We were amazed, especially when Darie added that they only served foods they would eat themselves. “Trae, our oldest son, raises his own chickens and uses only non-GMO feed. Also, what produce we don't raise we buy from small family farms. All our produce is organically grown.”

As we sat in the front window, the ceiling light allowing me to scribble a few notes as we spoke, the rain outside picked up, puddling on the concrete and causing walkers-by to huddle under hoods and umbrellas. Someone outside tapped on the window, and Darie and Marvin laughed and waved. I looked, and the passerby snapped a photo with his cell phone. Then it occurred to me. This was pure magic - something like *bliss*! I was sitting in a window in Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, with my favorite guy and a delightful “new” couple to the area having tea and conversation. It doesn't get better than this anywhere. We could have been in London or Paris, but we were right here at home in Lawrence County.



Above, owners Marvin and Darie Estill, share one of the unique menu items found at Bliss Farm Market and Cafe on the Lawrenceburg Square. They feature a variety of organic grit dishes on their menu. Pictured below are Laura Osborn and daughter, Lily, sharing cashier duties. Hojo Photos



Food photography by Carolina Estill.

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