

# Steve Dolinsky remains a hungry hound



**RICK KOGAN**  
*Sidewalks*

Having sampled two flavors of gelato in tiny spoons, Steve Dolinsky ordered a small scoop of pistachio, saying, “Just one scoop. I never waste calories on something if I’m not in love with it.”

This is what Dolinsky does. He eats. And, like a war correspondent on the front lines, he reports back to us from the increasingly active and calorie-loaded culinary battlefield, most visibly twice a week in his “Hungry Hound” segments on WLS-Ch. 7.

He was in Labriola Ristorante & Cafe, a relatively new and snazzy addition to the Michigan Avenue dining scene and a place that Dolinsky knew well. He favorably reviewed its slightly older outpost in Oak Brook in 2011 and recently had this to say on TV about the new place: “(It) is a little bit different ... in the sense it’s really two restaurants under the same roof — a more casual cafe doing breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week. Then in the back, a slightly more upscale restaurant doing lunch and dinner seven days, and if you happen to be walking down Michigan Avenue, a pretty good call.”

So, how’s the gelato?  
“This is quite good,” he said, after pulling an empty spoon from his mouth.

It was a mid-afternoon last week. He had just attended a memorial service for Bill Rice at Gibsons restaurant and he said: “It was lovely and a bit sad but also some good stories. In this business, Bill was everybody’s idol.”

Rice was a food and wine journalist who worked for Food & Wine magazine, the Washington Post and for 17 years at the Chicago Tribune before retiring in 2003.

He and Dolinsky for a time shared a small world, being among the relatively few people whose careers were devoted to writing and broadcasting about food and wine and the places that serve them. It is a much more crowded field now, filled with bloggers, free-meal scammers and all manner of food-related information sources, some very good and useful and some not. Dolinsky has been at this for more than 20 years and so totes a lot of experience and credibility.

“Steve has gotten where he is by outworking just about everybody in the business,” says Phil Vettel, the Tribune’s restaurant

critic since 1989 and a frequent, if voice-only, presence on WGN-TV and CLTV. “He goes absolutely everywhere. I joke that when you go to City Hall to apply to open a restaurant, you get three things: your business license, your occupancy permit and an autographed picture of Steve Dolinsky.”

Dolinsky’s business card attests to his cover-the-waterfront hustle: “food reporter, travel writer, co-host/producer of ‘The Feed Podcast,’ media trainer, culinary experience curator, and food & beverage consultant.”

He has won a number of prizes for his work, including in 1996 when he took home what would be the first of a shelf-full of James Beard Awards, one of the food industry’s highest honors. He was carrying with him at Labriola a photo from that ceremony. It showed him standing with that goddess of gastronomy, Julia Child. At that event she gave him a piece of advice he has ever since tried to follow: “Everything in moderation.”

He is an affable and energetic person. Forty-seven years old, he looks years younger and also remarkably fit for a fellow in his pack-on-the-pounds profession. He is often recognized when out in public, and the most common refrain from strangers is, “You’re that food guy.”

Given the familiarity we feel for those people who populate our TV screens, we know so little, if anything, about their personal lives. So, here: Dolinsky is married to Amy Dordek, a marketing consultant who he met on a blind date in the mid-1990s, and they live in the Wicker Park neighborhood with their two children, 18-year-old Madeline, heading to the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in the fall, and 15-year-old Max.

“You should see my son plow through a bunch of oysters. He prefers Kushi oysters from British Columbia,” he said, smiling. “And my daughter is a wizard ordering at any Chinese restaurant.”

Dolinsky was born in St. Cloud in central Minnesota and raised in a kosher household — no pork, no cheeseburgers, no shellfish, etc. — which helps explain the enthusiasm and excitement he has ever since felt for different foods. “I realized that there was another food world out there, and I have spent my life since about 12 making up for lost time,” he said.

He attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison, graduating with a degree in broadcasting, which paved the way for jobs at small TV stations in Escanaba, Mich., and Davenport, Iowa. There he covered news and a bit of sports, produced his own pieces and shot them too.



NANCY STONE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Steve Dolinsky, one of the hardest working guys in the food biz, began his run on WLS-Ch. 7 in 2003.

**“Steve has gotten where he is by outworking just about everybody in the business.”**

—Phil Vettel, Tribune restaurant critic

He came to Chicago in 1992 to work as a general assignment reporter for the then brand-new and Tribune-owned CLTV. In 1995 he began hosting its new “Good Eating” program, and over the next eight years turned out 52 30-minute shows a year, as well as doing some writing and radio work on the side.

It was in 2003 that he was hired by WLS-Ch. 7 and began his long, popular run on that station. He also kept writing for a variety of publications (the Tribune still among them) and

offered media training to chefs in other cities. He has done more radio work (The Feed weekly podcast is with renowned chef Rick Bayless), consults with companies about local dining experiences, conducts food tours of foreign countries (i.e. Cuba) and ... well, he is likely the busiest man in the food biz ([steve-dolinsky.com](http://steve-dolinsky.com)).

“I’ve known Steve a long time and have him to thank for introducing me to WBEZ radio. He started the first food blog there, and recommended me to take it over when he left,” says Louisa Chu, a longtime food journalist and a recent addition to the Food and Dining staff at the Tribune. She goes on: “I was in the Chinatown food court one night recently, tasting an obscure dish while the kid who owned the stall explained its history to me. I thought I’d found a real local food first. Then he shows me a business card. He had already met Steve. If it’s worth putting in

your mouth, no matter the language, Steve will probably have already been there.”

Naturally, Dolinsky has been courted by various national food shows. “One producer asked if I ever yelled,” he said. “I don’t. I come from a reportorial background. I am not flamboyant and won’t let myself be transformed into something I’m not. I just won’t fake it.”

His gelato finished, Dolinsky said, almost shockingly, that he is not going out to dinner later. He does eat at home, and he even cooks, his specialty these days being a “nine-hour, slow-roasted pork shoulder.”

“It’s not really that hard to make,” he said. “And it’s pretty good.”

*“After Hours With Rick Kogan” airs 9-11 p.m. Sundays on WGN-AM 720.*

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