

## Reviews—NEW AMERICAN CAFÉ



*New American Café* by Richard Sanford is a vivid slice of late-seventies life, capturing the chaotic blend of ambition, art, and the hustle of city life. The novel is about Mitch Lanier, a young musician who finds himself navigating the oft-turbulent waters of love, music, and entrepreneurship after his breakup with Melanie, his college sweetheart. The book paints a detailed picture of the struggle to balance artistic dreams with the harsh realities of life. Mitch's partnership with the eccentric Corey McGowan to open a café is both a lifeline and a burden as it intertwines their fates with a colorful cast of characters, from musicians to poets to schemers. The café isn't just a business; it's a symbol of potential and a beacon of hope that keeps them all going.

Richard Sanford does an excellent job of immersing readers in the era with its gritty streets, smoky clubs, and the raw energy of a city that never stops moving. The relationships are messy and real, with Mitch's romantic entanglements reflecting the broader theme of chasing dreams while dealing with life demands. Fans of Hunter Thompson and David Sedaris will love *New American Café* as its subtle pop culture and laugh-out-loud humor match the masters of the genre. *New American Café* is the perfect read for anyone who appreciates a well-drawn portrait of a time and place where art, life, and love intersect in ways that are as exhilarating as they are heartbreaking. It's a must-read for those who enjoy stories about artistic pursuits, urban life, and 70s pop culture.

— **Carol Thompson, *Readers' Favorite Five Star Review***

*New American Café* is a novel of music and discovery. It captures the 1970s musical milieu of Mitch Lanier, who has split up with his girlfriend and is delivering pizzas in lieu of getting a good (but more demanding) job that could limit his musical efforts.

Fellow delivery driver Corey McGowan also experiences his own artistic angst as he struggles to write a novel and make a living at the same time.

The two decide to go for (perceived) big bucks by opening the New American Café. But in the midst of struggling to get the new business off the ground, Mitch's dream of musical success simultaneously seems to be coming true.

As if these elements weren't enough angst, a romance develops with an older woman and business competition clashes with a drug lord's mission, both of which threaten Mitch's ambition and dreams.

Whether he's talking music or pizza delivery, Richard Sanford succeeds in capturing the sounds, atmosphere, and feel of the times:

*Plugged in, the Wurlitzer transformed the front of the store with a retro color infusion. Roman columns, chromatic wonders of red, yellow, and blue, framed the front. A red and yellow arch glowed above the turntable and the carousel of discs. It was delivered loaded, and I played the first test. "Honky Tonk Women" rocked the empty café like a honky tonk garage.*

Sanford is also especially adept at creating adjunct characters and weaving their special interests into the business and artistic struggles that define Mitch and Corey's lives. These supplemental figures, rich with their own lives and objectives, create further depth and insights to draw readers into Chicago's musical and social milieu.

The tension that comes from gang threats and career-busting confrontations is very well developed, enhancing the novel's ability to contrast and capture various life events and clashes.

Libraries interested in 1970s settings, novels about artistic ambitions, and stories that chronicle different types of relationships with an astute eye to exploring their underlying motivations and influences will want to welcome *New American Café* into their collections. It is highly recommended for leisure readers that enjoy well-developed tension and confrontation in their fiction, as well as book clubs looking for stories suitable for group discussions about choice, artistic license, and life-changing events:

*At some inconceivable point in the future, we too will be looking back from other lives.*

— **D. Donovan, Senior Reviewer, *Midwest Book Review***

## **Raw, poignant, and thoroughly immersive...**

Set against the gritty vibrance of 1970s Chicago, Sanford's poignant novel offers a compelling exploration of ambition, identity, and the relentless pursuit of creative fulfillment in an indifferent world. Mitch Lanier arrives in 1977 Chicago chasing musical fame but soon finds himself delivering pizzas alongside the eccentric Corey McGowan after a failed relationship. Together, they launch the New American Café, a venture meant to blend ambition with artistry. However, their plans go awry when they cross paths with a dangerous drug lord, forcing Mitch and his friends to navigate a treacherous clash between survival and creativity.

The novel vividly captures the raw energy and poignant melancholy of a city caught between its storied past and an uncertain, rapidly changing future. Chicago's icy streets, smoky clubs, and bustling pizza joints form a rich, textured backdrop for Mitch's journey. Sanford's prose is sharp and evocative, balancing lyrical introspection with engaging dialogue that gives the characters depth and authenticity. Mitch's world, shaped by pizza deliveries and sporadic gigs, provides an intimate look at the intersections of creativity, love, and self-discovery. Supporting characters like Corey, whose risky dreams mask a complex personality, and Melanie, Mitch's enigmatic ex, further enrich the story.

Sanford's use of a dual timeline, alternating between Mitch's present and flashbacks to his formative years in Chapel Hill, deepens the narrative. This structure highlights how past choices and relationships shape Mitch's current path, adding emotional weight and complexity to his journey. Themes of resilience, disillusionment, and the cost of chasing dreams are woven throughout, prompting readers to reflect on the sacrifices inherent in creative pursuits. *This* poignant, thought-provoking exploration of art, human connection, and the enduring hope for something greater makes for a stunner.

— *The Prairies Book Review*