

Feb. 12, 1993---

On a pleasant Friday night in August of 1965 the Beatles appeared at old Comiskey Park. The next afternoon the mop-tops were downing Atomic Busters at Margie's Candies, an ice cream parlor on the Northwest Side.

"They brought in five girls and paid for all their sundaes," said 78-year-old owner Margie Poulos last week in a conversation over a chocolate shake. "The girls had their Beatle banners. They sat in the back booths and it was really crowded." The Beatles did not bring their opening act, Cannibal and the Headhunters.

The Atomic Buster consists of six scoops of ice cream and assorted fruit with banana cuts. The original Margie's creation is topped with sugar wafers and whipped cream, and fudge is served on the side. These days if a band goes out for Atomic Busters after a show, they're probably some mind-altered aggregation from Seattle.

Did Margie have a favorite Beatle?

"John," she said. "He was the only one who talked to me."

Margie's Candies has been running from the same 1960 N. Western location since 1921. Margie is celebrating her 60th year as owner and operator. Margie said the candy store-ice cream parlor looks almost the way it did when it opened.

Original Tiffany lamps hang above the soda counter. Margie's waiters wear starched white shirts and black bow ties. Crimson boxes of Valentine's Day candy are stacked in neat rows on 72-year-old stands as they have been for the past 72 Februarys. (Except that today, an impressive eight-pound box sells for \$135).

If he's around, Margie's 52-year-old son, Peter, will show you the hand-painted corners of the old stands. They were covered with wood in 1940, but the Poulos family is thinking about stripping them back to their original state. They're currently restoring the marble around the soda fountain.

In April of 1932 Margie met her future husband George at the candy store, which was then the Security Sweet Shop. George was an ex-Golden Gloves boxer who started the shop with his father. So, of course, Margie was courted with candy, flowers and chocolate shakes. Margie loved chocolate shakes.

A year later Margie married George and they bought the shop from his father. The sweet shop was renamed in honor of the 18-year-old bride. In 1941 Americans went to war, and George was sent overseas. Margie had to learn the business from

her father-in-law during her husband's absence. "It was hard at first," Margie said. "The key thing was learn how to mix the cremes, how to make fudge, what to buy and how to buy it. Some of the ingredients I use are still a family secret."

George came home from the war in 1944, but his time with Margie was short. In 1954 George died at age 44 of an ulcer. Margie has run the business since. She never remarried.

Margie has seen generations of passion pass through her door. Some couples came in after attending a community sing at the nearby Oak Theater; others have brought their children to show where Mom and Dad met. Margie watches the iridescent parade, usually from a corner behind the soda fountain, near the telephone and a portable black-and-white television.

"Everybody complains I'm here too much," said Margie, who over the years has kept the store open from 9 a.m. until midnight. "But that's my lifestyle. First thing in the morning we get ready for the chocolate dipper (Christine Gain) to hand dip the candy. She sits in the window. Then I get coffee ready. The waitresses come in and we get ready for a light lunch.

"In the afternoon packers come in to pack the candy. I might go out for a few hours, but I always come back for the evening when it gets busy. I'm used to being here. And, it's always been a pleasure when people thank me."

So find some time this Valentine's weekend to scoot over to Margie's. Keep an eye peeled for the sweet woman standing behind the soda fountain and think about John Lennon.

Just say hello.