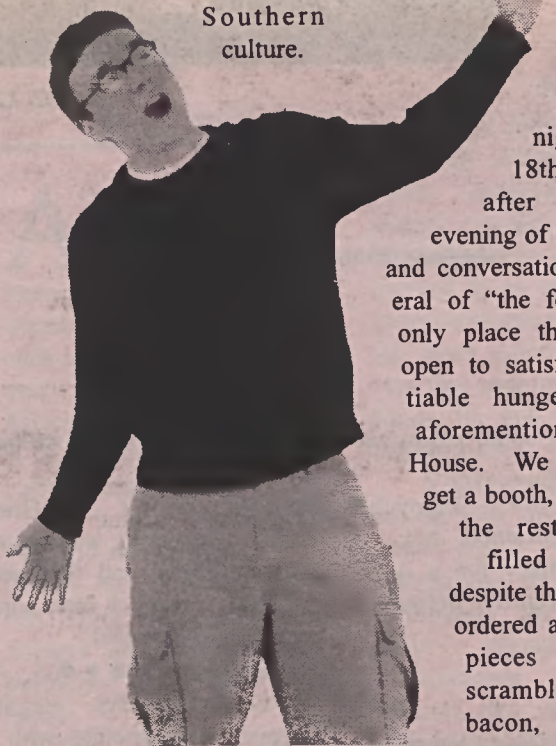


The Man in the Yellow House

S. JAMES M. PHILLIPS

OK, so I admit it, I'm a Yankee. Northerner, city slicker, moron, whatever you want to call me, all that matters is that I'm just not from around here. I moved from Baltimore, Maryland to Durham, North Carolina, in 1998 when my father got a job with the almighty Duke University. Now, as anyone else who has moved to the South from some other, less important place knows, the culture down here is just a bit different. I still remember my first hush puppy, my first sip of sweet tea, and the first time I used the term "y'all." Just out of curiosity, at what number of people does "y'all" become the plural "all y'all?" In my four years in the south, I have not yet been able to figure that out. But that is beside the point. The moment I stepped foot onto the magnificent state of North Carolina, I

fell madly in love with Southern culture.



The thing that fascinated me most about the South was the vast array of fine dining establishments which were completely new to me. Everywhere I looked, some new culinary adventure called my name, beckoning me to experience exciting new southern delicacies. Bojangles, Chick-Fil-A, Cracker Barrel, it was all a heady adventure in a delectable wonderland. Never before had I tasted such complex flavors, drunk such refreshing beverages, or seen restaurants of such pure aesthetic beauty! Through this lover's mist of new restaurants, one particular chain loomed large, demanding me to partake of its plentiful meals. A place so good that I could not begin to comprehend its very goodness. Its yellow sign called to me from the interstates and roadways of North Carolina, whispering, "James, eat here, eat here, eat here" like a siren calling me to my untimely demise of cholesterol and fat clogging my healthy arteries. Of course the restaurant I am referring to is the one and only, the irreplaceable, Waffle House.

I believe that I first went to Waffle House late one Friday night, on my 18th birthday, after a long evening of board games and conversation with several of "the fellas." The only place that was still open to satisfy our insatiable hunger was the aforementioned Waffle House. We managed to get a booth, even though the restaurant was filled to capacity despite the late hour. I ordered a waffle, two pieces of toast, scrambled eggs, bacon, and home

fries "all the way" with coffee and orange juice to drink. I do not think I have ever been more satisfied with a meal in my life. The coffee was a perfect blend of generic-brand motor oil and pond slime, and had just enough grit in it to satisfy any true coffee drinker. There is nothing quite like coffee with extra pulp.

The uniformity of taste of the rest of the meal truly impressed me. It is very rare in this day and age to be able to go to a restaurant and order four separate food items and have them all taste approximately the same. That is a sign of true quality, not to mention exquisite taste on behalf of the chef. The fact that the food is made on the grill right before your eyes also adds to the appeal of the meal; it assured me of the complete cleanliness of the establishment. I was even more comfortable about my dietary safety eating at the Waffle House than I am eating in the PFM, which is quite an accomplishment. The aromas of the place also struck me, and added to the general appeal of the restaurant as a whole. The mixture of old gym locker and wet muskrat was so overwhelming that all I could do was sit back and enjoy the potent, yet eerily pleasant, fragrance.

The food, smell, and appearance of Waffle House are only a small part of the restaurant's appeal. The people who inhabit the little yellow food house are the real reason for going. A general rule for commercial establishments of any kind is that if it stays open twenty-four hours a day, it is bound to attract some very interesting people, especially late at night. Visit Wal-Mart at 3:30 in the morning and this rule, actually call it a scientific law, will be proven. However, Waffle House takes this law and

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two teeth and someone who only had one ear.

Whenever I am at Waffle House, boisterous conversation fills the air, assaulting the ears with stories of wild times told by even wilder people. Invariably, my friends and I encounter some person who wants to prey on innocent high school students and engage us in all sorts of truly interesting conversation. A friend of mine, when he discovered that I was writing a piece on Waffle House, told me that his most ethereal experience in one of the many Dub-Houses across the state was when a man attempted to sell him and his friends rail road tracks. Someone walk-

ing up to your table and saying: "Hey man, y'all want to buy some rail road tracks? I got the tracks right here, man!" is the type of thing that is just not that unusual at Waffle House. It's a whole different world in there.

I feel many things about the wonderful establishment that is Waffle House but someone else has said, actually sang, something that I feel truly encapsulates my innermost thoughts and feelings about my favorite late night eatery. The song by former Go-Go hitmaker Belinda Carlisle "Heaven Is A Place on Earth" contains those intimate thoughts, because at Waffle House (not to be confused with The Waffle and Pancake House in Butner, NC), heaven truly is a place on earth. I encourage all of you, my four readers, to spend as much of your hard-earned money at Waffle House as possible. It's definitely worth it. Also, I encourage you to purchase Belinda Carlisle's 1988 album "Heaven on Earth" if you want some true musical enjoyment.

To Richard Conley,
Ours is a strange and wonderful relationship & you're strange and I'm wonderful! J/K. I heart you. & Sarah

To Alexis, Court, Kat, Nikka, Jen...
Luv U GUYS! ~Alexis, Court, Amber, Kat, Nikka, Jen, Mia, 3B girls, cheerleading team, Ground E and 4B.
Happy V-Day!
Tonya G.

To: Vera Dadok
Hey Sexy,
Thinking of you,
and d***! I don't know what to write.
-Jed

To Julie Pickard:
Baby, your eyes are dangerous, in more ways than you know. You can lay on my couch anytime. Our weekend cannot come soon enough.
Kyle R.

To: Second Beall
The sight of each of you makes my heart smile. Thanks for being such sweet hallmates.
Love, C. Watts

To Mom, even though I'm away from home now and not able to see you, I just want to let you know that you will always be in my heart for all time. Love,
Harein

To Chris Goulette:
I hope you always have all the happiness that you've brought to my life.
Happy Valentine's Day.
Kasee

To Cristóbal Palmer,
Amorito; Cada día, te quiero más. Tienes mi corazón, mi estrella, mi amor. ¿He dicho que te quiero?
Ciao, Megan

Dear Nick,
I want to confess my passionate and undying love for you. Happy Valentine's Day!
Your Secret Admirer

Brenda Horrel,
Some call it luck, Some call it fate, Whatever it is, You were worth the wait!
Love, Odie

To Taylor Harrison,
I want to thank you for all you've done. You've been, above all, a true friend. You were there for me when I needed you the most and even when I didn't. I want you know that in my heart you're irreplaceable and I love you immensely.
Crystal Glenn

To my Sweet Barry,
I love you with all my heart. You are my everything, my rock. Have a Happy Valentine's Day.
Love always,
Dawnelle

You know who you are: eye hart ewe aw! much love and even more peace, Sarah

To Lilangi, Yoon-mi, Anh, Laura, Blair, Jamie, Katherine, Anjni:
To all my girls! I love you guys! You guys are the best in the world! Friends always!
Love, Mary

To Emily,
Rock candy, pop rocks, music, dancing, the ocean, mountains, stars, and the moon-I can't wait to experience more. Happy V-day and one year.
-xoxo Steven

To My Steven,
Every day I see you my heart grows more fond of you. I will always cherish the memories we have made together, and look forward to the many more to come.
Love Always, Emily

To Dhruvi Patel,
You are my dearest bao-bay, Your smile makes me smile; You are there when I need you. You mean the whole world to me!
Love Always, Andrew Chen

To Emery Chen,
Happy Valentine's Day!
Mahaki Ta Wa I Ne!!
Love ya,
Spirit Leader,
aka Homie T

Dear K. Electra,
Here's to one smart, awesome, and beautiful girl and the best month I can remember. Here's looking at you, kid.
Love, guess who

To Akhil Hedge:
Dear Akhil, You make our hearts throb. We love you dearly and hope you return our love by making pizza.
Vig and Krsihh