

## Fieldnotes Teresa Blair

November 14, 2007

The interview was held in the “meeting room” in Teresa’s Restaurant on HWY 185 in Bowling Green, KY. When I called Teresa about doing an interview with me, she agreed, but could not place a face with my name. When I arrived with a small gift of flowers, she asked me what the flowers were for, and was obviously surprised and relieved when I told her that I would be the one doing the interview scheduled this morning. She went on to say that she knows hundreds of people by sight, but not by name. She stepped behind the counter, poured us both a cup of coffee and headed for the meeting room.

We left the door to the room open so that she could continue to hear what was happening outside the room, which means that there will be lots of “diner” background noise from the bussing of tables and customers and waitresses talking.

The interview went well, although I felt as though I should have had more direct questions for her. The interview was still somewhere in the forty-five minute range, so I suppose there was enough for us to talk about regardless of the shortage of direct questions. With the focus of small town diners as extensions of home and family the interview topics ranged from the copious collectanea in the restaurant to the staff and the customers, as well as Teresa’s biological family. During the interview, a waitress I later learned was Teresa’s sister, Connie, refilled our coffee and brought us extra cream.

I have been a customer at Teresa’s for fifteen years and have had many hugs and back pats from Teresa while we kept up on how her life was progressing. Teresa has quite a story without the restaurant. She has had at least four marriages, has faced economic hardship herself and has raised four boys on her own, one of which (Robbie) died in a motorcycle crash recently. She and I share a passion for motorcycles so, even when things were good with her, we always have something to talk about.

It still came as a shock when, at the conclusion of the interview, Teresa told me she had something personal to say to me. She went on to relate the story of her youngest son, Clint, who is eighteen years old, in high school and is gay. She told me that he had “come out” to her right after Robbie had died and that it was extremely hard for her to cope with the fact that her son was gay. She said she felt responsible for his homosexuality and worried that she had done something or allowed something to happen that caused Clint to be gay. She conveyed to me that it was the realization that she had many gay customers, me among those, who she had loved for many years and that that realization was what had finally made it possible for her to accept that her own son would grow up to be a normal man regardless of his sexual orientation. I teared up a bit, gave her a real hug and let her know she wasn’t alone and could call me if she needed any information or help on the topic. It was nice to know that she trusted me enough to talk about the situation and that I had made a positive contribution as part of her extended family.

I ordered my usual Breakfast Special, took some photos, talked to some of the regulars (even exchanged recipes with two regulars), many of whom have been going to Teresa's for years and now are bringing their children. I recognized several faces in the restaurant and all the waitresses smiled and said hello as they passed.

I noticed with a new awareness the clients' business cards posted in various places in the restaurant and even embedded in the acrylic tables. I now know that Teresa does that because she feels as though family should take care of each other. I also learned that none of the decorations in the restaurant are Teresa's, but are brought in and installed by customers, making the restaurant a true extension of their homes as well.