



# Home Of The Smiling Burger: Why I'll Never Name My Son Duane

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**FLYMF March 2006, The Two Years In The Toilet Issue, Volume 3 Issue 3**

I don't know why I applied to work at Red Robin, aside from the fact that they hired 15-year-olds. It was a different world from my last job, a pretzel store called Twist & Shout. Now I wasn't working with other teenagers; I was working with real-life adults who did this for a living.

This made me about as comfortable as Mr. Rogers at a KKK rally.

There was this one waitress, Sharon. She rode her bike to work. Yeah, that seems kind of cool, I guess. Someone riding their bike. How quirky and endearing, right? You say that reading this, but in reality, a 40-year-old woman riding her bike to wait tables at Red Robin isn't really that endearing. It's just weird. And kind of creepy. She was nice, though. She always had gum. OF COURSE she always had gum.

I grew up fast when Red Robin hired me. The protective barrier that separated me from the other employees came crashing down instantly. It was called the Deviation of Hours form. Basically, it was a permission slip for my parents to sign, saying that it was all right for me to work as late as the restaurant needed me. Basically, it was saying that I was now a slave to Duane, the manager. Basically, it was saying that every night I worked my mom would be waiting outside in the car for a half hour while Duane made me roll silverware. Basically, it sucked.

Duane. I hate that name. I didn't like it before Red Robin and I despise it now. It's not pronounced "Dwayne" it's "Duh-wayne" Even worse, if you ask me. Duh-Wayne seemed to have it out for me. I was weak, and he was strong. I was his victim. His puppet. His red-headed stepchild.

"Katie, you're going to be in charge of the host stand tonight because Steve probably couldn't handle it"

"Steve, there's dirty underwear on the floor in the bathroom, go throw it out."

"Steve, why don't you ever step up to be in charge at the host stand?"

"Steve, take this party to section 2"

"Steve, why the hell did you just double seat section 2?"

"Black socks Steve. Go home and put on BLACK socks"

"I don't trust you to be in charge of the host stand. Katie will do it"

"You need to learn what to do when you're in charge of the host stand. Why don't you ever step up to it?"

He also yelled at me if I didn't answer the phone correctly. We were supposed to answer the phone by saying "We're having a FANTASTIC day at Red Robin, home of the smiling burger, how can we help you?" I tried to explain to him that it was just physically impossible for somebody to have enough breath in their lungs to say that whole retarded greeting, but he wouldn't listen. Dick.

If Duh-Wayne was everything wrong with Red Robin, Kim, the assistant manager, was that one small beacon of light. She was only working there while she was going back to school to get her teaching degree. She liked me. She understood that I was just a kid and sympathized with me. She'd even let me go home early on nights that we weren't busy. Duane would make me scrub the floor if we weren't busy. Kim was even responsible for why I almost went back to Red Robin later on, after I left. But that's a whole other story.

The other hosts were all right. I really don't remember most of them. I wasn't as outgoing and fun as I was at Twist & Shout. I didn't have a chance to be. We had some fun times, though. Some of my coworkers were pretty nice. People either looked at me as a puppy that needed to be kicked, or a little brother that needed to be protected. One of the servers would always ask me about my social life and if I had a girlfriend. Another one would ask me why I walked so funny.

That summer I went to Australia for 3 weeks. I told Duane and Kim that I was leaving and would let them know when I was ready to come back. I knew all along I had no intentions whatsoever of returning, but I didn't want to quit. I was too afraid. This was a perfect way out of it. Looking back on it, outright quitting would have given Duane more satisfaction, whereas this would just end up screwing him over somewhat.

So I did the whole Australian adventure thing, came back to the States, and where did I decide to go for my first dinner home?

Red fucking Robin.

"Hey Steve when did you wanna start work again? I put you back on the schedule since I knew you were coming back!"

...Oops.