

Wayne and Kathy Rice

The Kirk's Restaurant Adventure

By Wayne Rice

The following is a recollection of thoughts about Wayne Rice's adventure at Kirk's Restaurant in Hinton, West Virginia:

December of 1992, Proctor Kirk got an idea. As I was getting off work at Kroger, he came by and asked me if I would meet him at Kirk's. It was closed for annual maintenance. My wife, Kathy, had been working for him for a while at that time. When I walked in the back door, he said "How would you like to own this place?" I immediately said "OK". He said, "You don't have to answer right now." But somehow, I knew what he was going to say before I got there. He didn't know it, but it had been a strong desire of mine to have my own business, a restaurant, for quite some time. No one really knew. It was my yearning between me and God. I had asked him frequently over a long period of time. As miracles do happen sometime, in His perfect timing, He dropped it right in my lap. I didn't have any money. Kathy and I just had a lot of work experience and the will to go that extra mile, even when you don't think you can go another step. There is no other way that I can explain, how we ended up at Kirk's.

We had been there for approximately 15 months when the girl that was to open on that day, called me at 5:30am and said there was a very strong odor of gas in the restaurant. I told her to leave the door open and get out. I called the gas company, and they were there in minutes. A bad leak was in the pipes that ran through the concrete floor. They shut off the gas, walked around with the meter, then shook his head and told me I was the luckiest guy he'd ever known. "This place should have blown to bits with this concentration of gas." He looked up and said, "Somebody up there likes you." I said, "I know". That morning I called my friend, Lee Bennett. He brought two guys with him, and they worked through the night cutting pipe and running pipe through the ceiling. The next morning, we were open for business, unbelievable!

Through the years, we have been blessed with lots of talented people that have made Kirk's work. It was really like a revolving door of people and personalities continuously changing the atmosphere in small ways, but still staying the same.

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Kathy and I have many to thank along the way for making it, “our success”, possible. From Proctor and Nannie Kay Kirk, for believing and trusting us, to all the employees and family over the years that helped make things happen, we are indebted to them all. Nobody knows how hard we all had to work those busy, busy summers. I thank those dear employees who stuck with us until the end. This includes all the maintenance workers, salespeople, truck drivers, and our kids that sacrificed right along with us. I’m sure there are other valuable folks that I’ve forgotten.

When it’s all said and done, the most important person and most dependable was my wife, Kathy Rice. I couldn’t have picked a better partner in this marathon of 30 years than her. She has always been with me, giving strength to my weaknesses, picking me up when I would stumble. We are a team that is hard to beat.

There are many stories that I could tell about this 30-year span, but I cannot do it without giving most of the credit to God, first. He was there holding us together every step of the way, right down to the day of closing. When it was time for us to leave, it was He that orchestrated that event. We had known that it was time for us to leave, but we couldn’t make the decision. I won’t give the details, but an unusual chain of events happened with no warning and it was over. Again, my prayer was answered.

On September 16, 2022, we closed, not to reopen. We were going to keep it quiet, but someone posted it on Facebook. We were swamped all day, right up to closing. Thoughtful patrons sent flowers, best wishes, congrats... They all came out, to our surprise, to get their last meal at Kirk’s. What a glorious end to a triumphant journey in business it was. We were humbled. We are in hopes that a new beginning for someone else will start a new chapter for Kirk’s.

HHSMAD’s Observation: For thirty years Wayne and Kathy ran Kirks’ restaurant providing delicious and hardy meals to the citizens of Hinton. They consistently provided a warm friendly atmosphere enjoyed by many individuals, families and large groups. Their fine food and the restaurant’s welcoming atmosphere have been enjoyed by thousands of visitors from far beyond the borders of Summers County.

Wayne and Kathy Rice, We Salute You!

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