

A Farewell to Wooglin's Owen Miller

Autumn is a somber season, rife with nature's memento mori. The days begin to shorten, a chill makes its home in the air, and leaves wither on their trees and die. It is a fitting time, then, for the demise of a beloved Colorado College icon. On November 16th of this year, Wooglin's Deli and Café will close their doors for the final time.

Wooglin's Tejon street location, which it has occupied continuously since 1989, will be torn down to make way for the new Robson Arena. Of course, the Wooglin's name will live on. A second location is opening on the northeast side of Colorado Springs during the arena's construction, and plans show that the arena itself will eventually feature its own Wooglin's. These new Wooglin's, however, are no worthy successors to the old. The interim Wooglin's appears to inhabit one-half of a two-store strip mall just off a nameless, abandoned highway. Mockups of Robson Arena reveal that it is of a sterile, modern design, and the Wooglin's attached to it will be no different. Made of cold steel and neighboring what seems to be a gift shop, the new Tejon street Wooglin's is set to embody the spirit and charm of an airport restaurant.

The Wooglin's we all know and love is, without a doubt, a special place. I fell in love with the peculiar café the first time I stepped inside freshman year. I was greeted by a hum of college student chatter, vibrant (and clearly amateur) art hanging from exposed brick walls, and the smell of hot coffee, and I felt a wave of nostalgia washed over me. I had never been to Wooglin's before, but it already felt like home. Wooglin's is an idea, an image – a place I'd seen growing up, in daydreams of some faraway life at college. Lit partially by an ivy-covered skylight, and always full of students studying and relaxing at worn-soft red leather booths, with a good number of local Springs characters to boot, the atmosphere in Wooglin's is intoxicating. It was this atmosphere, this physical character, that I fell in love with – because it certainly wasn't the food.

Herein lies the problem with any potential rebirth of Wooglin's – the food, and most of the business having to do with food, seems to be an afterthought. There are a few standout items (the green chile cheeseburger and the banana bread, for example), but in general the culinary experience tends towards the absurd.

I've gone to Wooglin's almost weekly for the past three years, and I believe that the process of me ordering, receiving an order number, and then having my order come to my table has been successfully completed twice. Order numbers are forgotten as often as they're handed out, or just outright ignored. This has resulted in an interesting and uniquely challenging dining procedure, in which your waiter must be located and flagged down from within the perennial toiling mass of disoriented, meandering Wooglin's employees.

Though the intended sentiment is unclear, the ownership also appears to be taking some sort of bizarre stand with their condiment selection. Wooglin's has almost completely ignored the rise of a new, wildly popular condiment sweeping the nation: ketchup. Never once have I seen a ketchup bottle at Wooglin's, despite a quarter of the menu being different varieties of hamburger. Instead, the decision was made to carry only ketchup packets, and not Heinz brand, of course. The packets are supplemented by the Wooglin's hot sauce horde – an entity created purely to mock those who desire more than a teaspoon of ketchup – which consists of seven or eight half-filled bottles of Frank's Red Hot and Siracha, each one crustier than the last, and all aged for a minimum of six months on the Wooglin's bar counter.

Yet still, despite these oddities, I return to Wooglin's week in, and week out. Our strange little college coffee shop, and the noble role it has filled for CC, cannot be taken for granted. The magic of Wooglin's, which captured my imagination from the start, is not to be found in the name, or the food. Rather, it courses through the walls like lifeblood, deeply and intrinsically imbedded in the physical body of Wooglin's. When the ivy is gone, the booths torn out, the brick walls replaced with steel, and Wooglin's is reborn as the diner in Newark International Airport, that magic which has captured generations of CC students will be no more than a memory, like a summer day in the chilling depths of November.