

Visiting the Pinball Wizard



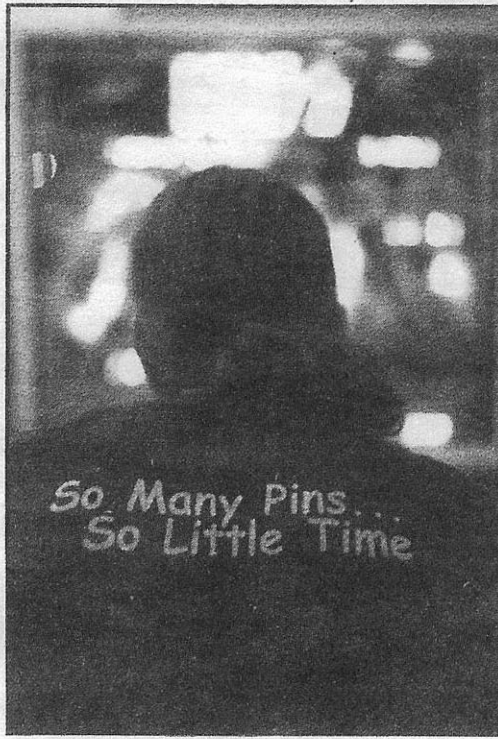
Travelogue
By Lisa Parker

"I've never cried when getting a gift before," says Kevin Carroll, owner and operator of Lyons Classic Pinball. "But this was a pinball machine and not just any pinball machine—a KISS pinball machine!"

Carroll's wife, Carole, gave her husband the vintage rock and roll pinball game for his 39th birthday, much to his surprise. The couple kept it tucked away in their Lyons basement for a year, playing obsessively and reading up on how to beat it. Unhappy in their jobs, the Carrolls found solace in the silver balls, lights and sounds of the KISS machine. "It's a little escape," Kevin explains. "We used to

smattering of classic video games like Tempest, Centipede and Discs of Tron. The Carrolls sell T-shirts and hats and host pinball tournaments every month—the next is scheduled for

Photo by Matt Weedman



Nov. 10. But most of the people who walk through the door are not experts, Kevin says, but just people checking out the old games they remember playing 30 years ago.

"Most people just try not to lose their ball," he says, of the vast majority of his clientele. "But when you can spend time with a machine, you really learn how to play it."

come home from work and beat this ball around in this box." But eventually the Carrolls' obsession with pinball outgrew the game room in their basement.

"One morning I found Carole down there in her birthday suit," Kevin chuckles. "And she looked at me and said 'Go away, I'm about to beat the high score!'"

Just about then, the couple knew they were on to something.

Kevin quit his job as a plumber—which he says he never particularly liked—and found a little space along Main Street in downtown Lyons to set up shop. The Carrolls opened the doors to Lyons Classic Pinball in 2003 with 21 machines and a dream to spread the joy they had discovered to others. Almost three years later, Lyons Classic Pinball has 32 well-operating machines and more than 100 waiting in the wings.

Captain Fantastic gleams alongside Banxai Run, the Addams Family, Evel Knievel and The Black Knight in the front room of Lyons Classic Pinball, across from the rare two-player game Joust. More modern titles like Indiana Jones, South Park and Elvira lurk in the back rooms, snuggled up to a

There are targets to be downed, alleyways to be lit and gateways to be opened within a pinball game, explains Carroll. And knocking at the silver balls is more addictive and fun than any video game, in his opinion, because of the element of luck. "Most experts say that pinball is 70 percent skill and 30 percent luck. In a video game, you just learn the pattern and then you can beat it. In pinball, that 30 percent keeps you coming back."

Kevin slips a key into the front panel of the glittering KISS machine and sets it up to play for free. Gene Simmons stares menacingly out from behind the glass case.

"The Black Knight will slay you," interrupts a deep, flat voice from three machines over.

"Now, go down that middle alley on your skill shot," explains Kevin, seemingly oblivious to the crazy noises and flashing lights all around him, "and it will open this gate here. Knock these targets down and you get a free ball."

The ex-plumber smiles as some folks drift through the front door and start feeding the change machine with one-dollar bills.

"I love my job," he says, beaming. "I've never loved my job before."

Destination: Lyons Classic Pinball

Distance from Fort Collins: 70 miles

Driving Time: 1 hour

Directions: The fastest way to get to Lyons is by taking Interstate 25 south until exit 243 for State Highway 66. Take SH66 west for about 15 miles until running smack into downtown Lyons. SH66 becomes Main Street, where Lyons Classic Pinball sits at #339A.

Money Spent: \$25

Notable attractions:

- Oskar Blues. 303 Main St., Lyons. 303-823-6685. Just around the corner from pinball heaven, Lyon's oldest brew pub serves up their very own Dale's Pale Ale with a side of live music the likes of the Johnny O Band and Nick Moss and the Fliptops.

- Left-hand Trading Company, 401 Main St., Lyons. 303-823-6311. This store has amazing antiques. Huge oak bars hulk next to Chinese armoires and vintage cowboys boots. Beautiful fireplaces and marble-top tables will tempt even the most frugal of antique lovers.

- Kurt Carlson Skatepark. Corner of Broadway and 4th streets, Lyons. Perfect spot to drop the kids off for an hour or so while browsing the shops along Main Street.

Worth The Trip? Kevin Carroll is so into pinball that just chatting with him made the drive to Lyons worthwhile for me. And then there are the games themselves, of course. But if pinball just doesn't turn your crank, Lyons has enough camping, hiking, biking, antiqueing, rafting and quaint little cafes and coffee shops to keep anyone entertained.

Need Help Planning? Give Lyons Classic Pinball a call at 303-823-6100 to make sure they'll be open when you get there. For general Lyons info, check out the visitor center at the corner of Broadway and 4th streets or call the Lyons Historical Society at 303-823-6692 for details on historic walking tours.

Highlight: Getting beaten at the vintage KISS pinball game by the man himself.

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November 9 - 15, 2005
YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER