

Not Your Average Joe

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By Dr. Charles "Cory" Pitts

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, distinguished guests, and members of the society. It is a pleasure to appear on this program with Judge John Lindsey Adams. Knowing that I would be the second speaker of the night, I chose an invigorating, energizing subject and have entitled this paper, Not Your Average Joe.

I don't remember how old I was when I took my first sip. But I do remember as a child, slowly lifting the adult beverage it to my lips. There was a sense of anticipation, excitement, and even a healthy dose of fear. I flinched when the boiling, lava-hot, liquid stung the tip of my upper lip and brought tears to my eyes. The burn was followed by a bitter, acrid taste washing over my tongue and the back of my throat. For the first time in my life, I experienced what it was like to drink... a cup of coffee. It was not pleasant. I understood then what the term "acquired taste" meant. But I knew there was something special about coffee. It was a part of everyday life in our home. There was a fresh pot waiting every morning. It was everywhere. There was a Bunn coffee maker in the pharmacy where my Dad worked. My school teachers seemed to always have a cup on their desks. There was a steaming pot in all of the adult Sunday School rooms at church. It seemed like everywhere I went, there was a hot cup of coffee nearby.

My brother, Brian was talking to his father-in-law, Bill Lankford. Bill had a cup of coffee every morning without fail. Brian asked Bill, "How long have you been drinking coffee?" His answer was somewhat astounding. "Every day since I was five years old. When I turned five, on my birthday, my mother said that I was old enough to start drinking coffee. She fixed me a cup that day and I've been drinking it ever since." Bill was in his mid-seventies at the time. How much coffee is that? The average cup of coffee is 9 ounces. Bill had been drinking a cup of

coffee every day for roughly 70 years. Multiply 9 ounces a day by 365 days per year for 70 years and you will come up with 229,950 ounces of coffee. That's 1796.48 gallons of coffee. But that's just for one cup of coffee per day. If Bill had two cups of coffee a day, that's 3592.96 gallons. Three cups a day would be 5389.44 gallons. That's a tanker truck full of coffee. If you are a coffee drinker, how many cups of coffee do you drink per day? Do the math. How old were you when you began drinking coffee regularly? How many cups per day for how many years?

The average American coffee drinker consumes 3 cups of coffee per day. It's estimated that Americans drink 400 million cups of coffee every day. I am no exception to the rule. I began drinking coffee every day after the birth of our second child, Elizabeth. She didn't sleep through the night for the first year of her life. I started drinking coffee as a means of survival. I remember mornings where I wanted to skip the mug and just drink straight from the pot. In those days, it wasn't about the coffee as much as it was the caffeine. But since that time, I have slept through the night. I have also come to the point where I realized that if I was going to consume enough coffee to fill a tanker truck, it would be worth the time, effort, and money to elevate the coffee I drank beyond your average cup of joe.

For the remainder of our time I'd like to take you on the journey I have traveled to discover the perfect cup of joe. Let's start with a little history.

The History of Coffee

Coffee originated in Ethiopia where coffee plants grow in the wild. While, the original purpose of coffee among nomadic tribes in Ethiopia is a mystery, we do know that in the 1400's it was discovered that coffee beans could be roasted, ground, and brewed. It very well may be

no coincidence that rise of coffee, and the invention of the printing press, coincided with same period of time most scholars claim as the end of the Dark Ages. Maybe there was something about a good book and a strong cup of coffee that woke the world up.

Mark Pendergrass in his book, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How It Transformed Our World*, states that coffee houses began springing up across the Arab world in the 1500's. This is when the popularity of coffee took off. Within 150 years, coffee was one of the most popular drinks in Europe as well. As coffeehouses began to spring up, the business community began to flourish. Coffeehouses became a central fixture in the exchange of ideas. Patrons would sit, talk, and plan over a cup of coffee. The monolithic insurance company, Lloyd's of London, began as an idea in Edward Lloyd's coffee shop in 1688. This was only one of London's 2000 coffee houses.

Coffee found its place in American culture in the late 1700's. It is said that after the Boston Tea Party of 1773, when Americans boarded British tea ships and threw their cargo into the Boston Harbor, coffee became the preferred drink. It was a way to stick it to the King and further assert independence. Pendergrass cites a letter written from John Adams to his wife in which he mentions loving tea, but that he will have to learn to enjoy coffee because drinking tea had become unpatriotic.

Coffee eventually made its way to Christian County and Hopkinsville in the early 1800's. I found an article that mentioned Carter Wood, the son of Capt. Harry Wood, being one the first merchants who would have stocked items such as sugar, molasses, and coffee. These dry goods were purchased in New Orleans and shipped to Canton or Clarksville, where they then were taken to Hopkinsville. It would take three or four weeks for the goods to make their way from

New Orleans, so it is safe to say that a fresh cup of coffee was hard to come by in those days. The best modern day Hopkinsville connection I could come up with is the shop located downtown called “The Coffee Connection.” So yes, there is a literal Hopkinsville Coffee Connection.

Janey and I made Hopkinsville our home in 2008. In the moving truck came our Capresso Coffee machine. It was a gift from my parents, who also love a good cup of coffee. One day when my brother said something to my mother about being addicted to coffee, she straightened her form and resolutely replied in her best central Alabama accent, “I am not addicted to coffee. I am dedicated to it.” Janey and I loved that Capresso coffee brewer. You could place whole beans in the integrated grinder at the top of the machine, fill it with water, and push the timer button before going to bed. We would awake the next morning to a freshly ground, steaming-hot, pot of coffee. It was typically made from Eight O’Clock whole bean coffee we bought at Walmart. We thought we had arrived. At the time, I had no idea that the coffee world was about to enter its own dark age.

Now, hate is a strong word. And I won’t use that word to describe my feelings toward the now ubiquitous trend of Kurieg coffee. But I have to admit, I’m not far from employing it. Yes, every blue moon, when I have no other option, I will press the button and wait for something resembling coffee to be injected into a styrofoam cup perched precariously beneath the high pressure nozzle. Every time I think, “This isn’t how it’s supposed to be.” Yes, it’s convenient, but that’s where the benefits end. How do I know if my cup is 8, 10, or 12 ounces? What do I do when I press the 12 ounce button and have an 8 ounce cup? What’s in that pod anyway? What are they trying to hide? How long has this water been in the machine? Is there

algae growing somewhere inside? I know what aquariums look like when you don't clean them regularly. And why don't people take the pod out of the machine and throw it away after they make a cup? There's something disturbing about opening the lid and there, sitting in the chamber, is a dry pod of used coffee grounds. It's like beginning a meal with someone else's used napkin. And what's with all the flavors? There are at least 200 flavors of Kuerig coffee. Island coconut, Cinnabon Classic Cinnamon Roll, Fair Trade Pumpkin Spice, Raspberry Chocolate Lava, Peppermint Bark, Chocolate Glazed Donut. What's next? Doritos Locos K-Cups? These are not the stories I need to be telling myself before enjoying a cup of coffee. I shudder at the thought of having been lured into the world of one-button, high-pressure, injected coffee-ish drinks. This might have been the case if it weren't for a Louisville coffee shop I walked into in 2014. It was there that I had, what I consider today, to be my first really good cup of coffee.

I looked over the chalkboard menu and randomly repeated words I had never seen. I'll have an Ethiopian Yirgecheffe. The barista then asked, "How would you like that brewed? Hario V60, French Press, or Chemex?" Having no idea what he just asked, I repeated back the first option he mentioned. "Hario V60." He then began talking me through the entire process as I stood across the bar, credit card in hand, and mouth slightly agape. "I am using a dose of 40 grams of beans to 700 grams of water." He weighed the beans on a scale, threw them in the grinder, and then into a paper filter that sat atop what looked like a glass funnel on a beaker. Never once did he stop talking or break eye contact with me from more than a second. He then drew water from a warmer through a tap that had a digital readout displaying 205 degrees. The water, now in a strange looking kettle with a long, narrow, curved spout was poured, ever so gently, over the grounds for three minutes. I took my beaker of pour-over coffee to a table

along with a mug that had been warmed with the same 205 degree water during the three minute pouring process. Then I took a sip. This was coffee, but this was different. It was smooth. There was no bitter bite on the front end. It was flavorful. Not like French vanilla, hazelnut, or mocha choka latte. I could taste fruit. As the coffee cooled, I began to be able to taste chocolate. I was amazed. This one cup of coffee sent me down the rabbit hole of discovering good coffee. Now, years later, I roast, grind, and brew my own coffee beans. My morning routine now includes the same pour over process I witnessed in Quills Coffee in 2014. And while I still have not perfected the process, I have come a long way. I'll share a few things I've learned that may help you move from your average Joe to become more of a smooth operator.

The Bean

The first thing you need to know about coffee beans is that they are not beans. They are seeds. The coffee plant produces fruit called coffee cherries. And much like actual cherries, there is a seed inside the fruit. This seed is surrounded by mucilage, the fleshy part of the fruit. After the growing season when the cherries ripen, the fruit is harvested. The skin and mucilage are then removed by either wet or dry processes. In the wet process, after the skin is removed, the cherries are placed in a water bath for a day or two in order to soften the fruit. They are then run through a drum which separates the fruit from the seed. Wet processed coffee is more common than dry processed. Dry processing, or natural processing, involves laying the freshly picked coffee cherries out in thin layers to dry in the sun. They are then turned regularly to avoid mold or fermentation. Once the cherries are dried, the skin and fruit are mechanically separated and the coffee is stored and rested before being exported. Of these two processes, I

prefer dry processed coffee. Dry processing leaves more of the fruit intact with the seed and therefore will produce more complex flavors.

Since coffee is a crop and therefore effected by a number of dynamics, flavor profiles are as diverse as the regions around the world where coffee is grown. Think of it like this. Honey can be produced and harvested in Kentucky and in Florida. But because of different regional dynamics effecting pollen types, weather patterns, and plant growth, each honey, while tasting like honey, will also display very different flavors.

In a typical year there are roughly 142 million bags of coffee, each weighing 136 pounds, produced by 26 million coffee farmers in 87 countries. Of all the options, my primary choice of coffee is Ethiopian, dry processed coffee from the Yirgacheffe region. Located in Sidama, Yirgacheffe is a small region in southern Ethiopia where coffee thrives. The coffee grown in this area consistently produces a bright, smooth cup of coffee with flavors of berries, nuts, and chocolate. When roasted correctly, I have had Ehtiopian Yirgacheffe that has an intense blueberry flavor. This is the cup of coffee I am always chasing.

One of the strangest and highly sought after coffee beans goes through an entirely different type of processing. Kopi Luwak coffee sells for around 30 dollars *per ounce*. That's right *per ounce*. The Ethiopian beans I mentioned, unroasted, sell for around 6 dollars *per pound*. So what's story with this exotic coffee? Well, here's the straight poop on Kopi Luwak coffee. In Shawn Steiman's book, *The Little Coffee Know-It-All*, he states the following:

As the story goes, when the Dutch first brought coffee to Indonesia for commercial production, they forbade the locals from drinking the coffee they were growing. The locals discovered that a local Asian Palm Civet ate the

cherries but didn't digest the seed. In fact, the seed passed through the digestive tract and out the other end. The seeds could be washed, the parchment removed, roasted, and prepared like any other coffee.

That's right. One of the most expensive and sought after coffees in the world is processed in the digestive tract of a cat. I reminds me of the scene from the movie Elf where Buddy the Elf gives his blindfolded, girlfriend, Jovie, what he thinks is the "World's Best Cup of Coffee."

Jovie: "It's tastes like a crappy cup of coffee."

Jovie (after removing her blindfold): "It IS a crappy cup of coffee."

Buddy: "No, it's the world's BEST cup of coffee."

Sometimes reality is stranger than fiction.

If you are interested in learning more about green coffee beans, different coffee regions, and home roasting, I would suggest checking out the website sweetmarias.com.

The Roast

How a coffee bean is roasted determines much of the flavor profile of the cup. The rule of thumb for roasting is, "The lighter the roast the more you taste the region. The darker the roast the more you taste the roast." As heat is applied to a coffee bean, moisture is released and the bean begins to brown. As the Maillard effect begins, sugars and amino acids are reduced causing the beans to become darker. In the end of the browning stage, the coffee starts to pop. This is called first crack and is the tell-tale sign that the beans have entered the development phase of the roast. Coffee is drinkable at first crack, but the flavors develop more as the beans continue to roast. The longer the beans remain in this development stage, the

more the flavor profile changes. This is where we begin to see the familiar descriptions of light, medium, and dark roast.

Most commercial coffees are a medium to dark roast. For instance, Starbucks only serves dark-roasted coffee. They have names like, blonde, medium, and dark roast. But technically, their lightest beans are a dark-medium and their darkest roast is an oily, blackened, French roast. I used to think very dark oily beans were the sign high-end coffee. I've come to learn that this really means that the beans were roasted to the point where they were just about to combust or they are old. Do you remember the first time you had a Starbucks brewed coffee? I remember mine. My first thought was, "This tastes burnt." I was right. Starbucks purchases coffee from all over the world. In order to produce a consistent tasting cup of coffee worldwide, they rely on a dark roast to remove the regional flavor profile from the beans. That's why I refer to the coffee chain as "Char-bucks."

If you would like to try your hand at elevating your morning cup of coffee, learning to roast your own coffee is a great hobby. It's really not hard and can be accomplished with simple equipment. I roasted my first coffee beans in a hot-air popcorn popper. I have since graduated to a home roaster that allows me to roast one pound of coffee at a time. I purchase green coffee beans from Sweet Marias and roast enough to last a few weeks at a time. It's been an enjoyable process to learn. I've been doing this for almost six years and don't see myself doing it any other way for the foreseeable future.

The Brew

Coffee can be brewed in a number of ways, but there are basically four categories of brewing methods: percolation/drip, pour over, siphon, and press. Most "coffee makers" are

percolation/drip machines. Water is heated in a reservoir, travels up a tube, and then filtered through ground coffee and a paper or metal filter before draining into a heated pot. There is a problem inherent to most percolators that creates bitterness in coffee. Water has to reach boiling point in order for the brewer to function properly. Here's the catch. Boiling water burns the coffee beans. Burnt coffee is bitter coffee. Remember that digital readout in Quills coffee that read 205 degrees? The best temperature to brew coffee is between 195 and 205 degrees. This provides enough heat to extract the right amount of particulates from the beans without scalding the coffee and altering the flavor profile. I prefer the pour over method of brewing because I can set my kettle to a precise temperature and create a smoother cup of coffee.

The process of brewing coffee via a pour over method is not as convenient as other methods. It does require you to weigh your beans and water, heat the kettle to the precise temperature, and take your time pouring the water over the ground coffee. But I find this process offers a slower, more intentional, start to my day. There's something that I enjoy about the way the coffee blooms as I make the initial pour, the smell of the grounds as they steep, and then, that final cup of coffee. Well, there's just no comparison. It's a much better cup of coffee.

There's also a cautionary side of this tale. Once you start elevating your coffee game, it's hard to go back and enjoy an average cup of Joe. Coffee snobbery is right around the corner my friend. Plus, if your wife is a coffee drinker, she'll be hooked for life as well. My wife starts to sound the alarm when our coffee jar starts to run low. "Are you going to roast soon?" But then again, one of the biggest joys I experience in the whole process is setting that fresh,

elevated cup of coffee on her bedside table, kissing her on the forehead, and saying, “Good morning, sweetie. I made coffee.”

Conclusion

In conclusion, while this paper is limited to a brief history of coffee and a rudimentary introduction to the bean, the roast, and the brew, there is so much more to learn about this beverage that 64% of Americans enjoy every day. My encouragement would be that in the morning, as you lift that cup of Joe to your lips, while enjoying that first sip of caffeine-laden goodness, that would you take a second to contemplate the bean, the roast, and the brew, and some of the ways that you might be able to make that cup more than your average Joe.