

Borderline Restaurant: Bethlehem's Beautiful Accident

By Joshua Powell | The Powell House Press

Food: 4.9/5 | Price: 4.7/5 | Service: 5.0/5 | Cleanliness: 5.0/5



Photo by Borderline Website

I'm not saying Borderline Restaurant is where you'd take someone you're trying to impress. Unless you're trying to impress them with your ability to identify consistently excellent ordinary food—and I mean that as the highest compliment a place like this can receive.

Borderline is what happens when a diner has a regrettable one-night stand with a Howard Johnson's after last call. Nine months later, out pops this aggressively unpretentious establishment on Bethlehem's Union Blvd., decorated with all the aesthetic ambition of a dentist's waiting room circa 1987. The décor isn't offensive. It isn't anything. It simply *is*, the way beige paint and fluorescent lighting simply exist in the world.

But here's the thing: I go there several times a week.

Why? Borderline has cracked the code that eludes so many restaurants chasing Instagram-worthy industrial chic and farm-to-table pretension. They've figured out that nobody cares if your bathroom tiles are imported from Tuscany—they just want bathrooms clean enough to perform surgery in. Which

Borderline's are. I've been in *a lot* of ORs. Not because I was planning to do a laminectomy in the stall or anything, but I notice these things. Spotless.

I guess I am a regular, though the staff wouldn't know my name. I'm simply "the turkey sandwich guy"—turkey on toasted rye with crisp bacon. Real turkey, mind you. None of that compressed Boar's Head deli industrial complex nonsense. Actual turkey that once had feathers and possibly opinions. The portions are generous in a way that makes you question whether the owners understand basic economics, which is their problem, not mine.

As I said the staff doesn't know my name. They don't ask about my day with that practiced, dead-eyed service industry warmth that makes you want to throw yourself into traffic. They're just kind. Efficient. They notice when your plastic pint glass needs a refill and quietly appear with seltzer (or, on sloggier days, Diet Coke) without making a production of it.

More importantly, they understand the sacred pact between restaurant and writer. *I go there to write.* My plate empties. I keep typing. The staff keeps not caring. No pointed glances at watches. No passive-aggressive check drops. No manager hovering like an anxious hummingbird worried I'm squatting on prime real estate during lunch rush. The WiFi is fast—genuinely fast, not "we have WiFi" fast—which in 2026 should be standard but somehow remains a unicorn.

The soups are hot and tasty. This shouldn't be remarkable, but after you've been served lukewarm "artisanal" bisque at places with exposed brick and Edison bulbs, you develop an appreciation for soup that understands its assignment.

The prices won't make you weep, and the food—simple, unpretentious, reliably very good—scores high not because it'll change your life, but because it won't try to. It's close. It's clean. It's competent. It's there when you need it, like a really good utility infielder or a properly stocked medicine cabinet.

Borderline isn't fancy. It will never be fancy. And thank God for that.

The Verdict: In a world of restaurants trying desperately to be something they're not, Borderline has the radical courage to be exactly what it is: a perfectly fine place that does the basics exceptionally well. Five stars for not giving a damn about stars. Five more for understanding that sometimes a writer needs a turkey sandwich, reliable WiFi, and to be left blissfully alone with a very good sandwich.

Writer's Note: No discounts or free food is ever accepted. Hell, I don't even get priority seating. I just honest reviews.

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