

# **Robert “Yeller Dog” Marsh**

## ***As seen through the good eye of Jim “King James” Stateczny***

Robert “Yeller Dog” Marsh was one of the original celebrities in the early days of chili. I am not sure as to when he started cooking chili, but I do know that he won the first Czhilispiel Chili Cookoff, held in October of 1973, in Flatonia, Texas. I have been told that early on, Robert had the charisma to get people interested in cooking chili, and getting many to participate. Unfortunately, I didn’t become acquainted with him until early 1977. What I do know, is that if it wasn’t for a man called Yeller Dog, chili cookoffs probably wouldn’t be what they are today.

I first met Yeller Dog, in the town of Leon Springs, Texas, where he operated his chili parlor. Yeller Dog’s Chili Parlor became a popular spot in a little town located northwest of San Antonio, just off of Interstate 10. The chili parlor was a typical Texas beer joint, which also featured food and entertainment. Of course his signature dish was what he called “Hoot ‘n Holler” chili. He also featured burgers, sandwiches, steaks and a dish he called “Hoot ‘n Holler Pie”, which was variation of what we all know as Frito pie. At first the chili parlor consisted of three rooms. The bar room, the pool room and the main ball room. The main ball room was a small room that could hold about thirty people, with tables and chairs, a small dance floor, and a place for musicians, such as myself, to entertain the crowd. Eventually Yeller Dog realized that a remodeling of the establishment was essential, and so with the assistance of local carpenters, such as Jerry Labbe, the facelift was completed in a very short period of time. The parlor now consisted of two rooms. The main bar room, and what used to be the main ball room, became the pool room.

In July of 1977, his chili became so popular, that he developed a dry powder mix, which he had professionally packaged, and marketed in the San Antonio area. He applied for and received an official US Trademark on September 5, 1978, for the name “Yeller Dog’s Hoot ‘n Holler”. The trademark, serial number 73133352 and registration number 1101639, was later cancelled on March 13, 1985.

Yeller Dog's Chili Parlor continued to increase in popularity, and the crowds on Friday and Saturday night were most impressive. Otto and Gracie Krum, two of the parlor regulars, decided a real stage was in order, and so the two of them built one. Yeller Dog was also famous for anointing regulars with nicknames. Prior to entering one of his pool tournaments he decided that I was too well known and needed to enter the tournament via the use of an alias. And so I became "Jack Reed". Bob Wisdom, was anointed the title of "Dr. Wisdom – the Knower of All, Seer of All, and the Doer of Nothing". Gary Greive, who loved Cajun music, was assigned the title of the Tupelo Mississippi Flash. Other regulars, who I told that someday would go down in the annals of chili history, were Howard Huntzinger, Oscar and Fredna Black, Manfred Beck, Klem Titzworth, Calvin Wright, Jim and Sandra Jackson, the entire Delgado family, Jerry and Trixie Labbe, Ron Dobson, Jingles, Ralph, Sally, Sue, Jan, Tom, and Dennis Thomas the welder. This was an establishment like few others, where all of the regulars had talents they never hesitated to use, to improve the appearance and functionality of the chili parlor. Occupying the other parts of the building the chili parlor occupied was a small gas station and a new BBQ place, owned and operated by its head cook, Rudy. For a time all three establishments shared the same restrooms and ice machine.

Yeller Dog was the kind of person who could inspire people to do things. Jim Kuhlman and I became the primary entertainment at the parlor, playing music on most Friday and Saturday nights. At the end of this biography I will include the words to some of the chili songs I wrote, which also help tell the Yeller Dog story. Yeller Dog enjoyed joining us on stage, and playing the tambourine, while I played his theme song "Yeller Dog's Chili Parlor".



During his operation of the chili parlor, Yeller Dog was an active participant in area chili cookoffs. The picture to the left was taken at one of these cookoffs, where it appears that the team did well. From left to right are Yeller Dog, Gary Greive –

the Tupelo Mississippi Flash, and myself. As you might imagine, this picture was taken many years ago when we were all much younger, skinnier, and still had hair.

During this time, Jimmy Carter was the President of the United States. And, simultaneously, his brother Billy was making a name for himself. Part of Billy's escapades was to brew and can a beer called "Billy Beer". As a bar owner, Yeller Dog felt that he should purchase a few cases of this new product for sale at his bar. Once Saturday night, while we were playing music at the chili parlor, and after Yeller Dog realized that "Billy Beer" was far from being a top seller, he joined us on the stage and proclaimed that a dance contest was in order. Judges were appointed, the dance contest was held, and prizes were awarded to the top three couples. I do not remember the names of the winners, but I do remember the prizes awarded:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Place – One six pack of Billy Beer
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Two six packs of Billy Beer
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Place – Three six packs of Billy Beer

At the end of the night we noticed that some of the winners had left without claiming their prizes.

Probably his greatest accomplishment was being a primary player in the endeavor to have chili proclaimed the official dish of Texas. During this process, he and a group of others gathered in San Antonio to cook the largest pot of chili ever known to man. I wish I could recall more of the event details and participants but as of now I can't. I do know that this event was staged in downtown San Antonio, at an area known as La Villita, the home of the annual Fiesta event called "Night in Old San Antonio". The official proclamation by the Texas Legislature took place on May 11, 1977.

During the late 1970's, Yeller Dog did a radio show on KBUC radio, in San Antonio, Texas. The show was a weekly five minute program known as the "Chili Cast", which aired at 1:15, on Sunday afternoons. The mission of this program was to talk about chili and promote chili cookoffs. After Yeller Dog departed, a mutual

friend of ours, Bob Carlson, talked me into continuing the program. With the assistance of Dr. Wisdom, we continued the tradition for close to three years.

I wish we had a picture of his famous chili truck, but as of now we don't. Dr. Wisdom recalls the following about the very unique pickup truck:

*I can't remember the name he had for the truck, but it had two chrome exhausts that were two or three feet taller than the truck. It had an electric control panel under the dash that controlled the siren and set off smoke bombs under the truck. I also remember seeing the road going by through the holes in the floorboard.*

Another of the innovations that Yeller Dog introduced to the chili world was the use of the cannon. This was a combination of oil drums, painted yellow, and welded together. A light concoction of gun powders was scientifically mixed and



loaded into the cannon, with the final touch being the loading of an appropriately sized beach ball. As you can see, the results were quite spectacular. Later, CASI decided to prohibit the use of pyrotechnics in the reason of safety to all involved. It could also be that alcohol was being consumed at the time, and maybe the focus of those involved

was not as good as it could be.

In 1979, Yeller Dog decided to stage a huge jalapeno eating contest. Texas Monthly did an article on Yeller Dog, prior to the event, and Hughes Rudd, of CBS reporting fame, came to Leon Springs and covered the event. Unbeknownst to all of us, this event would be the end of Yeller Dog, and his chili parlor. It seems that Robert Marsh was not his real name. And when his wife, from a previous life, saw the event advertisements, she recognized her missing husband, and consequently, on the day after the event was held, Yeller Dog disappeared. Shortly afterwards the chili parlor's name was changed to "The Tavern of Leon

Springs”. Today, the entire complex is occupied by one very successful business called “Rudy’s BBQ”.

In October of 1979, the entire Yeller Dog Gang assembled for one last cookoff and



performance. It seemed logical that we would travel to Flatonia, Texas, and attend the annual Czhlispiel Cookoff, remembering that Yeller Dog was the winner of the first Czhlispiel held. This appearance would mark the end of the Yeller Dog Gang and the creation of a new show team called “King James and the Misfits”.

In the early 1990’s, at a cookoff in Houston, Texas, I had the fortune to be reunited with my old friend. But now, his name was no longer Robert Marsh, but rather his real name of Steve Hamlin. At the cookoff, Yeller Dog, Dr. Wisdom and I had the opportunity to perform one last time at a chili cookoff, during the showmanship competition. As usual we took first place, and we presented Yeller Dog with the associated trophy, and some other memorabilia he had left behind over a decade ago.

Today, I am totally unaware of his status, but in closing I will tell you that Yeller Dog was a great friend of mine, and he will always occupy a special place in my heart.

Following, are some of the songs that I wrote, and he and I performed together. The lyrics kind of help put the story of this chili legend together. The first three songs were written before the disappearance of Yeller Dog and were regularly performed by the group of Jim Kuhlman, Yeller Dog and Jim Stateczny

## **Yeller Dog’s Chili Parlor**

Northwest of San Antonio, out of IH 10

In the little town of Leon Springs, down the road from the Settlement Inn

Be a unique Establishment, be run by a friend of mine  
And if you like chili, his be fine, fine, Fine

### **Chorus**

Let's go to Yeller Dog's Chili Parlor  
That's where I want to go  
Let's go to Yeller Dog's Chili Parlor  
Between San Antonio and El Paso

Yeller started cooking chili, many years ago  
And he won so many cookoffs, that it started getting old  
So the only thing that he could do, was turn professional  
Now he's cooking chili, be the favorite of the crows

There's a club out there that you can join, and it ain't hard to do  
Just buy one of Yeller's T-shirts, sit down and drink a brew  
Then get yourself an official cap, and tell the waitress thanks  
You've just become a member of the Yeller Dog Gang

You can meet some famous people there who might even shake your hand  
Like Judge Roy Bean, Dr Wisdom and the Tupelo Mississippi Flash  
There's a guy that plays the accordion, and sometimes the kazoo  
And then of course there's Yeller Dog who'd like to welcome you

Have you ever had a Jalapeno flavored Lolly Pop  
Why they go good with beer and wine, or even soda pop  
Or try a Hoot 'n Holler Pie, or any of the Tex-mex line  
And if you like chili, his be fine, fine, fine

## **Jalapeno Lolly Pop Song**

It was out in San Angelo, on the Texas Plains  
Where a man called Sam Lewis, found his claim to fame  
He took a Jalapeno, and mixed it with some sweets  
And now he's got a Lolly Pop that just can't be beat

He calls it Jalapeno, and he sells it everywhere  
In grocery stores, local bars, and even county fairs  
If you're feeling down and out, and need to change your ways  
Locate your nearest tavern, approach the bar and say

### **Chorus**

Won't you give a Jalapeno Lolly Pop  
Give me a couple for the road  
Won't you give a Jalapeno Lolly Pop  
Its the Lolly Pop that keeps me on the go

Now Paris has its restaurants, with food fit for a king  
And Yeller Dog makes chili, which we all love to eat  
But there's a man out in West Texas, who makes a Lolly Pop  
That goes good with beer and wine, and even soda pop

I like to drink my Pearl beer, and some like to drink Lone Star  
There be all kinds of favorites consumed in every bar  
But when it comes to Lolly Pops, there can be no doubt  
The one called Jalapeno, be the favorite of the crows

## **Czhilispiel Song**

### **Chorus**

Well I'm heading down the highway, going to Flatonia, Texas  
I'm going to the Czhilispiel, It's the biggest event of the year  
They've got a whole lot of good entertainment and a chili cooking contest  
I'm gonna eat some chili and drink some cold Shine Beer

Every year when October comes around  
The people of Flatonia block off the center of town  
They put up a beer tent the size of a football field  
And then they have what they call the Czhilispiel

The first Czhilispiel was held in 19 and 73  
It was won by Yeller Dog with his Hoot n' Holler Chili

Since then it keeps getting bigger and bigger every year  
And the people keep drinking more and more of that Shiner Beer

So come on out there's a lot for you to do  
There's an art show, a carnival and just a whole lot of good food  
Eat some chili and have yourself a real good time  
As you go to the street dance on Friday and Saturday night

Now we've got something really extra special for you this year  
We're going to introduce a brand new can of beer  
You can thank Shiner Beer and a man called Speedy Beals  
They canned a beer and they called it "Czhilispiel"

The next two songs were written after the departure of Yeller Dog and became two of the more popular songs performed by King James and the Misfits.

## **The Yeller Dog Gang**

### **Chorus**

Well the dog might be gone, but the gang lives on  
We are the Yeller Dog Gang  
Don't you call us defunct, and don't you call us dead  
We're stronger than before, we're the best we've ever been  
The tradition lives forever, and we look ahead  
To when Yeller Dog comes back again.

In 1977 I met Yeller Dog, the man  
And at his chili parlor we became the best of friends  
We toured the state together, singing chili songs  
But we can't no more, the dog is gone

Now as for why he left us, well we can just suppose  
And as for where he's gone to, well, nobody knows  
But I truly miss him, because he was my friend  
It ain't the same without Yeller Dog the man



## **Proud to be a Texan**

Texan's love their chili, be the King of the Lone Star State  
And there ain't no beans in chili, that we just can't tolerate  
When you're down in Texas, I know you're gonna hear:  
Waitress a bowl of Texas Red and an ice cold Texas beer

### **Chorus**

Well I'm proud to be a Texan, natural born  
And I'm gonna stay a Texan, forever more  
You've heard a lot about Texas, but you better remember one thing  
Thanks to a man called Yeller Dog, chili be King

We've got the best in professional football, with the Oilers and the Cowboys  
And the teams of the Southwest Conference, always rank way up there in the  
polls

But when the game is over, and I've let out my last cheer  
I'm looking for a bowl of Texas Red, and an iced cold Texas Beer

Well down here in Texas, we be mighty proud of all our beer  
And the only beer that real Texans drink, is brewed right here  
Shine, Pearl and Lone Star, are the names you're gonna hear  
So get yourself a bowl of Texas Red, and an ice cold Texas beer

Football, beer and chili, be King in the Lone Star State  
And if we didn't have them, I don't know how Texas could be so great  
And in 1977 Yeller put chili at the top of the list  
When he talked the Texas law makers into making chili the official dish