

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012
Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 62:

VFW Post 3911
2200 North Roosevelt Boulevard
Wednesday 9/19, 9:30 pm

Yuengling (tall draft) \$2.50

I felt a little awkward coming here. It was like I don't belong here – because I don't. I'm no veteran, I've never been on foreign soil (Canada and Mexico don't count; they're same freaking continent), and I certainly have never been in a war.



In fact, when you arrive, you have to sign in and put the name of the member who vouches for you. Did you know that? I sure didn't.

I knew there had to be *something*; if anyone could just walk in off the street, there wouldn't be much sense in having this as an official Post of the organization. Same with American Legion, Elks, Moose, Wildebeests and whatever other organizations have their private clubhouses and gathering sites.

But in I would go. It wasn't some act of defiance, some rebellious infiltration to thumb my nose at the mighty military machine. No, no, no, Nanette. It was all in the name of **beer**. A far more noble motive, wouldn't you agree?

The main reason, though, that I wanted to come to this place in particular is that it was once a pretty cool restaurant called The Twisted Noodle. I was only there once, but I liked it immediately and had resolved to put it on the *Check It Out For Dinner Every Now And Then* list. Then it closed. Bang. It was open for less than two months. It was doing pretty good business too. Word was that the owner, who had been in F&B for a lonng time, was just tired of the biz, and bailed when he got an offer. Something like that, anyway.



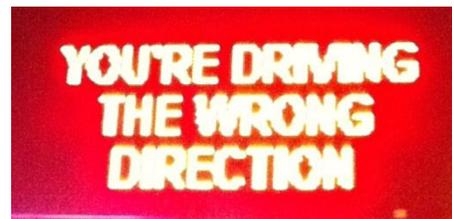
Well, I was miffed. Not quite vexed, and a little sideways of irked. Miffed I was. I felt cheated, deprived. So I reckoned I was entitled to at least have a beer in that building.

VFW purchased it and promised to make it the Cadillac of all Posts. That had me curious too.

Post 3911 is one of those North Roosevelt Boulevard establishments that are singing the construction blues. Four lanes have become two, and you have to be coming in from the eastern outlands to pass by here. The locals know the few side roads, of course – 5th Street will bring you in and 4th Street will take you out -- but it's still a much bigger pain in the ass to get here than it used to be. Unless you always come that way anyway.

It is kinda cool, in a make-the-best-of-a-bad-situation way, to pull onto NRB without looking in both directions, and zooming off in what has always been the wrong lane. A couple of traffic lights have been rendered useless and removed, and turning left into First State Bank, Publix, Sears, Pizza Hut, etc. has become a care-free move.

This night, as I did that care-free pull-in for my 62nd bar, I got a chuckle out of the neon sign out front. The lane closures were in their first week and VFW had posted a simple message to any help out any unfortunate shmuck who may have turned, out of habit, into the nearest lane and headed east: *You're driving in the wrong direction.*



I opened the front door and tried to look like I knew what I was doing. Give it a little of that *Of course I belong here* vibe. That lasted about five feet. The train was immediately derailed by a man standing just inside the door. He wasn't a doorman or any sort of *maitre d'* or anything like that; he was just a guy who had just finished talking to another just-a-guy. But our eyes locked for that critical second, just enough for my *I Know What To Do* demeanor to turn into *What The Fuck Do I Do* look.

He read the look well and pointed towards the wall behind me, "Sign the book," he said, in a friendly way, and turned to talk with another just-a-guy who had walked over.

The book was an ordinary guest book, with four columns, one for the date, one for my name, one for my hometown/post, and one for the name of my sponsor (i.e., the person who was OK-ing me to be there).



The pen, though, was enormous. About a foot long and over an inch thick, this was a King Kong of writing utensils. I'll wager I'm not the first person who had improper erotic thoughts through his (or her) mind upon first laying eyes on this behemoth. But I wrote with it anyway. My signature (yes, it was the coveted Hops autograph) was reasonably legible, but my host was a scribble. It might have looked vaguely like *Elihu Smails*, but it might as well have been an X.

I put down the pen and walked into the bar. The first person I saw, as it happens, was someone I knew. Ha. And he was the barkeep. Double Ha.

Mike used to live in one of the nice units in the mobile home park that I oversaw back in my property management days. He was a good egg -- as Dash used to say -- and he made large batches of a fine BBQ sauce that was kind enough to share with the park staff. He greeted me with a *Hey, I know you!* and poured me a cold Yuengling in a tall and sturdy soda glass. We did the good-old-days chitchat, with the standard *whatever-happened-to* and *I-heard-this-n-that-about* for a while.

I apprised Mike of the Tour, and he gave an approving nod, though, like many, he joked that he had probably done it in a month before. The gentleman seated to my right, wearing a distinctive hat, though, overhead the word and gave a positive response: "Yeah, he's doing the island **right!**"

Mike's been a barkeep for a long time, and he used to have a great gig at Louie's Back Yard (see future chapter), but when Hurricane Wilma flooded the island, she hefted up that big wooden deck and gave it a right old smashing, putting LBY and all of its staff OOB and SOL for months.

The Post 3911 bar itself was nice, especially compared to the stereotypical blandness of a VFW hall. The bar top is sturdy, curves elegantly, and is coated with thick shiny varnish. Cadillac? Not so sure, but it was definitely nicer than other posts I had been to for public functions or receptions or whatever.

There were a couple of other guys that I recognized from being in the shop. We do a lot of engraving work and such for all the military that is stationed



down here. I'm sure they all would have vouched for me, but Elihu Smails was working well enough.

All the braided caps and shiny badges that hung above and around the bar kept reminding me, though, that I had not really earned my keep, and that was bugging me more than it should have been. With my mission accomplished, I downed my 'Gling, bid Mike a hearty

farewell, and effected a discreet exit.

So, that's 62 bars down out of 100. If this were a 100-mile trip, I'd be at the 100 kilometer mark right now, so that's something. Right?

Addendum: November 26, 2012

As it turns out, that large affable gentleman who praised me for "doing the island right" was the Post Commander. I found that out weeks later when I went back to take a decent photo of the place. It deserved better than that crappy, blurry, glarey nighttime ones. He happened to be coming out the front door, saw me clickety-clicking a couple of pickywicks and called out, "Can I help you?"

He explained who he was and felt it was his duty to find out WTF I was doing. Seemed fair enough, so I began to tell him about the 100 Bars and he immediately blurted out, "Yeah! I met you! That's great!"

So I got my pics and more good vibes. Always cool to get good vibes.