

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012

Key West Bar Boondoggle

"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 93:

The Bull

224 Duval Street

www.bullkeywest.com

Monday 10/22, 9:00 pm

Sierra Nevada (draft) \$5.00



The Bull was once a semi-regular hangout of mine, way back in the van-life days of almost 20 years ago. It doesn't really look much different. I'm pretty sure that the big souvenir shop wasn't there in 1994, and the walls might have had different graphics on them, but I'm totally conjecturing about that.

There wasn't a ton of Duvalling going on for me that winter; money supply was low, so I had to pick my spots. Barefoot Bob's got first choice, Hog's Breath probably got one afternoon shift every fortnight or so, and The Bull got several random nights.

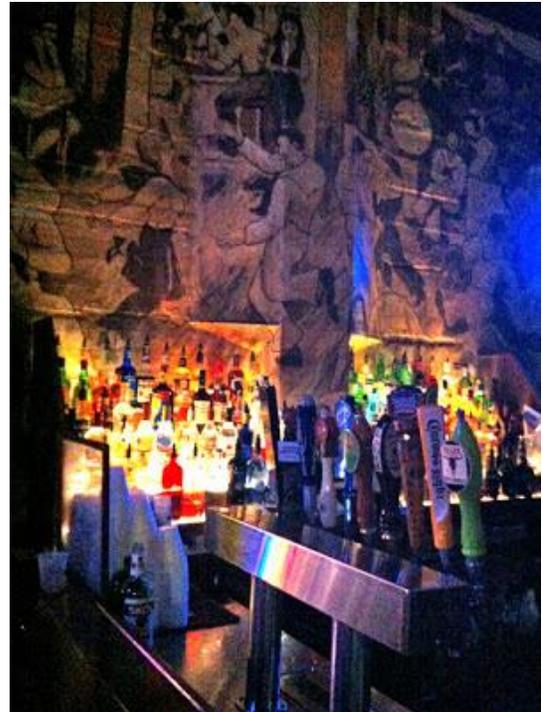


The most memorable was Christmas Eve, 1993. First Christmas away from home. No crisis, though; our family was pretty loose by then anyway, so there was none of that sappy stuff. Actually, I was totally digging sitting at the bar, feeling the warm tropical breeze swirling through the big open windows, seeing the red flowers dangling from their pots in each frame, and watching the shirtsleeved pedestrians saunter by on

the sidewalk. I knew it was cold as a sorceress's mammaries back in Beantown, so regrets were at a minimum. I had my ice-cold Bass Ale, and, for the moment, life was awwwriiight.

The Bull had the coldest damn Bass Ale I've ever had. To this day, I may not have had a more deeply chilled brew without it being slushified. Main reason I went there, I suppose.

Anyway, the ale, the live music, and the atmosphere had me feeling purdy dang good. The only problem was that my funds were dwindling fast. They usually do when you're making \$5 an hour. (That t-shirt shop job was cake, but the pay was as low as it could go.). This would have to be my last brew of the night. Sigh.



I had about a swig left when this guy took the empty bar stool next to me. He gave me a friendly hello and eagerly sought to flag down a barkeep. I suggested to him, "I recommend the Bass. Good and cold."

When the lady barkeep came over, he briskly ordered, "Two Bass Ales, please." I thought little of it, figuring he had come in with a companion, until he placed one of the frosty mugs in front of me.



"Merry Christmas," he grinned, "from my goddamn boss!" We clinked glasses and he went on to explain. His name was Matt, and he worked for a Canadian company that had dealings with

a couple of the Key West hotels. For some reason that even he was not fully clear on yet, it was necessary that he be in KW on Christmas Day to attend to some issue at one of those hotels. He was none too happy to get that news and gave his boss a big bag of shit over it. The boss relented somewhat and, though he still had to make the trip, Matt got a *The Sky Is The Limit* expense account as compensation for major holiday duty. He figured he'd spread the wealth and buy a few strangers some drinks, and run up the company card. It was part beneficence and part vengeance.

Needless to say, this was one bar neighbor that I did not snub. Right now, I was the best friend available, and willingly offered my support. What a trooper, huh?

For the next three hours, Matt and I, along with a couple of other people that he thought "looked thirsty", clinked our chilled mugs and hoisted ales on the corporate dime. Yes, Virginia, there really is a Santa Claus. I hoped his meeting was not an early morning affair.

The Bull is one of those Big Room bars, with plenty of space for bar, tables,



and dance area to co-exist, and a highhhh ceiling. It's a dang coolo ceiling too. You know how I dig ceilings. It's certainly not bright and new-looking like the light-wood-white-beamed ceilings at Duffy's and Tattoos & Scars, but it a classic old squares pattern that just looks good way up there.

There's some heavy underbelly element, for sure, but that's exactly what Bull fans crave. From the barkeeps, to the art on the walls, to the bands and the patrons, not a Fancy Nancy in sight, Dwight. And would you really expect prim and proper in a place that has a bull crashing through its outside wall?

The band was up there rockin' out, as always. Good setup: band up high, over the crowd, facing not just the whole room, but the big open windows as well, luring the pedestrians (people from Pedestria) to *come on in and kick it*

with us. It's worked on me on many a walkaround. I get kind of aimless during my nocturnal Duval strolls, and I'll veer towards anything that catches my eye or ear. That's the whole point of a stroll anyway, iddinit? And numerous times, the band in the Bull is knocking out some lively tune that grabs my feet and reels me in through the door and up to the bar. I almost always go where my feet go.

I never take the tickets from that poor bastard out front, though. I think one of them is for a margarita, and I don't drink those, and the other is something like a dollar off on a Rolling Rock draft. I can be happy with old #33, when all else fails, but all else rarely fails these days, so I don't climb the steps to the Whistle Bar just to save a buck off mediocre beer. I do try to smile and say, "no, thanks" when he offers me the ducats. He must get ignored or spurned a lot.



Fantasy Fest was underway, but a long way from peak. Still, a number of visitors had already ponied up a couple hundred bucks or more for body painting. Almost all of them were women who clearly relished the fresh air on their bare upper bodies, and who sported a variety of artwork by the local masters. Some were floral or spacey, and, of course, some were sticking with the week's *A-Conch-Alypse* theme and brandishing some undead-style decorations. I've never had to go around wearing a bra, but it must be such a relief to be able to walk around without one. Kinda like going commando, but bigger.

Ninety-five percent of the people were simply in normal clothes and just

having a good time. Monday is kind of mill-around night anyway, where you get the lay of the land, catch the vibe, and make your plans. None of the real big parties are on Monday. Plaid Party, Red Party, Redneck Party, Toga Party, Tutu Party, Dungeon Party, Wet T-Shirt Party, all of those and more will fill the idle time till Friday's Masquerade March and Saturday's parade. Oh, Lordy.

I only stayed for one this night. No sign of Matt, my Canadian best friend.