

Bar Hoppin' With Hops
The Second Century Tour
Hops MacBarley's 2013
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #153:
Irish Kevin's
211 Duval Street
www.irishkevins.com/
Sunday, 21 July, 12:00 AM

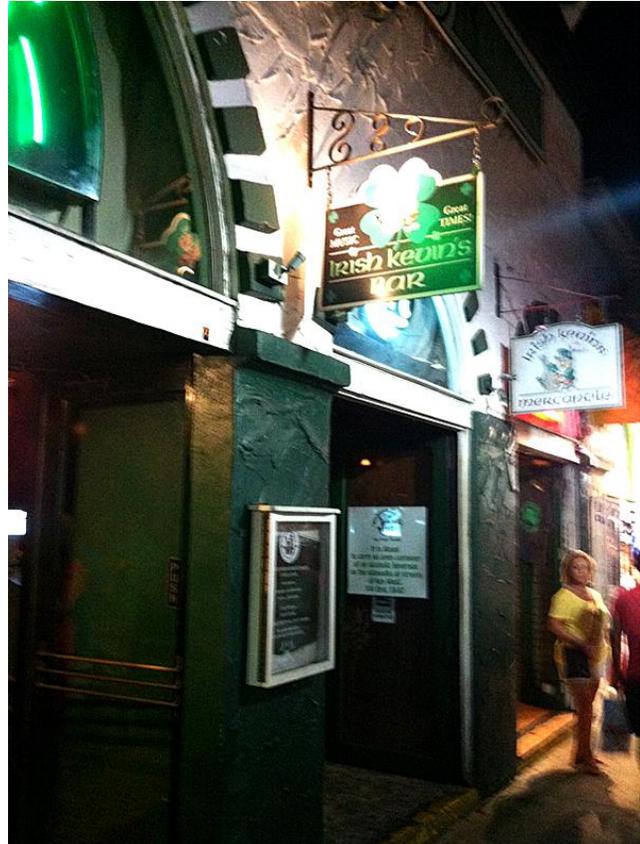
Coors Light (bottle) \$4.50

One of the seldom stated goals of last summer's *Peace, Love & IPA Tour* was to complete the 100 Bars In 100 Days *without* having to include Irish Kevin's. It's a popular place, it holds a lot of people (430 official capacity) officially), and it gets loud and rowdy just about every night, so they don't give a titmouse's ass whether I frequent their establishment or not. The place is just not my style, though. It's the Animal House of Key West. Drunken-Frat-style pounding with a sticky floor and the same pervasive and enduring smell of stale beer that I remember so well from Molly's and the Rathskeller in my college days.

Molly's, a classic cheap college bar in Brighton MA, was about a 15-minute walk from campus. They had Nickel Beer Night on Tuesdays. *Five cents* a beer. Lordy. It wasn't exactly an ice-cold bottle, though; it was more of a seven-ounce, bathroom-style paper cup, filled with half foam and half some vile swill that they just squeegeed off the back of the urinal. But it was *only a nickel*, so we bought them by the trayful and downed them with alacrity. *Twenty* beers for a buck. What a country.

Of course, back then, you could readily purchase your favorite brew for only \$1.49 *per six-pack*, so it's not really as insane as Nickel Beer Night would be today. Still, it was as good an excuse as any for ditching the books early on a Tuesday night and slip-sliding down that icy hill to old Mol's. On some winter nights, that climb back up got downright treacherous.

I only went a few times, despite the economic aspect. Molly's was just not my kind of place, kind of like Irish Kevin's now. Even in my younger days,



cheap beer was not my thang. Molsons and Heinekens were what you'd typically find in my cooler. The Golden Ales were good, but I was into the more esoteric Molson Ales -- nicknamed the Blue Boats for their distinctive caps. I even had a hand-painted version of their bottle cap on the vinyl cover for the spare tire on my first couple of vans.

Now, atmosphere-wise, IK's is indeed frat-ish, but if you're thinking *cheap beer*, think again, Ben. *Fo-fitty* for a bottle of Coors Light. Fo-fitty! I had cavalierly offered to buy Brian a beer and I was expecting, like, two bucks. When the beer babe said "nine dollars", my flabber was gasted. And this wasn't even at the main bar; this was just a big portable box that they rolled near the door. She plucked two bottles out of the ice, just like it was one of those two-dollar special deals that always pop up all along Duval on festive days. Fo-fitty. Dayumm.

This Hop was about as impromptu as they get. It was Day 50 -- jussst flipping over to 51 -- with 52 bars in the bank, so there was no urgency. [Ha. *But, officer, it is **urgent** that I get to a bar!* Ha.] The Second Century Tour was still ahead of pace. B&J and I had taken this Saturday night off from Hopping, sidestepping the pressures of the Hop and doing some carefree quaffing at Gecko, WOB, Greene Street Cigar, and 90 Mile. As we left the blues lounge, fairly well lubricated though we were, the consensus



was that the famous One More was in order.

We walked the two blocks back to Duval, and I was just saying regretfully that no new Hops were within easy walking distance when Jan grabbed my arm and pointed halfway up the block to the bright green neon letters of

Irish Kevin's. "Yes, there is!!" exclaimed cheerfully. There was a certainty in her tone that would not be denied, so with a WTF demeanor, the three of us hooked arms -- no, *Jan* was in the middle -- and strutted on over here

like goddamn royalty. But that regal feeling dissolved like a dash of cinnamon in a holiday IPA as soon as we crossed the threshold.

This was not my first time in IK's. Shortly after moving to KW, I gave it a try a couple of times, watching the Guinness chuggers, being unimpressed with their skills, and wondering if I still had the sub-one-second, open-throat talent that served me so well in such contest in college. This slender half-miler out-chugged many a burly shot putter in those days. Those days ain't these days, though, so I never took the bait. Chugging is a thing of the past now that craft beers have arrived on the scene. It would be a shame to chug a Dogfish Head. Gotta savor a fine brew like that. I wouldn't have a problem

chugging a Bud Light, however, just to get the damn thing over with.

I was weaned as a chugger anyway. As a party-eager teen, I could not come to terms with taste of beer. To be fair, we're talking Schlitz, Carling Black Label, Pabst, Bud, Miller, Schaefer, Narragansett, Rheingold-- all the classics -- so having to down four-plus of those without wretching was too much when simply splitting a pint of Smirnoff's blue label was such a quicker route to the same end.



"Acquiring a taste" was a slow process (review list above), so there was very little sipping and savoring going on. I'd knock out my twelve ounces in no more than three hits, with the final one usually being half the can. Bad beer is bad, but bad *warm* beer was intolerable. Hey, even tepid crafties can get pretty blecccchy.

Kev's had a good crowd going on this Saturday/Sunday cusp. The three of us squeezed into a tight spot along one of those narrow stand-up counter things. They have a lot of those. They could have stools around them -- and maybe they did when the night began -- but I didn't see any around us.

Either the staff had shuttled them out of harm's way or the beefy chuggers had mistaken them for pretzels.

We were festive. All three of us had some bounce in us and the solo entertainer was playing the type of music that was easy to bounce along to. He wasn't wildly talented, but he was good enough vocally and guitarally, and he had the necessary knack for getting the crowd, well, bouncing. And singing along. That's that task of all who play the elevated IK stage: get 'em bouncin', get 'em singin', keep 'em boozin'.

I was good and drunk here one ... morning. And I don't mean one o'clock I the morning. This was right around the crack of 10:30 AM and T-Dub and I adjourned here after outlasting the four kegs that Hog's Breath had put out as an after-party for their Thanksgiving weekend 5K race. We were done running by 8:22, the conscience was clear, so it was beer and bagels for breakfast. Then just more beer, and more beer, until they finally suggested that we bug out.

T-Dub then announced that Taz was playing guitar and singing as the opening act at IK's, so we shifted venues and started paying for beers here. But they were more potent beers, some kind of dark ale that was not quite Guinness, as I recall through the fog and years. We were not the only patrons, but just about. Taz put on a good show. She's totally hooked on fitness now, though.

A few years later, when big brudda Yeast MacBarley came to town for the first time, he was immediately drawn into Kevin's as we walked past it on our way to the Gecko. I said *no no big bro*, but he insisted. He's been a drummer in surf bands and such since he could sneeze, so the clamor and lighting and rowdy revelry struck a chord (ha ha) in him (ya, I know, drummers don't play chords; it was irony). We came in, stayed for almost a beer, and then he turned to me and said, "ehhhh, where was it you wanted to go?"

That, I do believe, was the last time I had been in here. I have often stood across the street, though. On my Duval Stroll evenings, when I bring a six-pack or so with me and spend a couple-few hours just casually walking up and down lower Duval and its immediate side streets, digging my earbud tunes and sipping my koozied bevs, one of my favorite places to pause and observe for a while is the corner of Duval and Charles, that alleyish side street that leads to Smokin' Tuna Saloon. My spot is right under that little tree, in the shade, as it were. Red Garter is right there, with the Tree Bar, Angelina's, and Rick's. Sloppy's, Gecko, IK, and Fogarty's are across the street.



The foot traffic can be downright dizzying at times, but the most fun ones are the ones that stumble or tumble out of Kev's. Fighting, weeping, puking, plenty of extremes. Sometimes the bouncers or even KW police play a role. It's good cheap entertainment.

One night, a foursome of Miami boys -- who must have had good IDs because they looked to me like high school juniors -- came out of IK and went into a little huddle at the gate of the alleyway beside the building. It was pretty obvious that some kind of drug thing was going on. One of them kept looking over his shoulder at me. After a couple of minutes, as they were getting ready to go back in, that kid came across the street and walked up to me.

Now, I had a bottle of beer in hand, earbuds in ears, and a dark t-shirt with **WTF** in bold white letters on the front. I thought he was going to ask if I needed any drugs, but instead he surprised me with, "you're not a cop, are you?"

"Yeah," I laughed, pointing to my shirt, "I'm from the department of **W**atermelon, **T**obacco, and **F**irearms, you dumbass." Miami moron had to

chuckle at himself over that one. He rejoined his group. I saw them all laugh, give me a nod, and go back into Kevin's.

I know, it wasn't *extreme*, but I just remembered it and it was kinda connected to this bar.

OK, OK, the Hop. Right. So, B&J&I made our midnight move here, paid our fo-fitties and claimed a space at the countertop. The entertainer was gettin' the crowd goin' so we rollicked along as well, doing our best to get in the IK motif. At one point, the singer asked us all to raise our glasses for something or other. Well, Jan didn't have a glass. No problem, though, plenty to be had. She grabbed a half-full glass of what looked like beer, wine, and booze sloshed into one and raised that with us. No, she did *not* drink from it, but that did become her glass for all subsequent raisings. (No, spellcheck, I did not mean *raisins*.)

The three of us were *waaaay* over the average age in this big room. Most looked 26-ish, with a few 30's, and maybe some adventurous 40's. So, it seemed an odd choice when the singer chose *Ring of Fire* by Johnny Cash. I just didn't imagine that many of these folks had any of the man-in-black's CDs in their collection.

What was more whacked than that, he followed it up with Billy Joel's *Piano Man*. He was a verse into it when I looked at B&J and asked, "Does anyone else think it's odd to play this song on a *guitar*?"

As if the singer heard me, or maybe just caught a collective vibe from the crowd, he changed the words in his final chorus to "Sing us a song, you're the gee-tar man."

And then his show was over. Awwww. Our drinks were done anyway – except for Jan's – so we decided to close our show as well, very satisfied with our unscheduled Hop.