

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep On Hoppin' Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #268:

Key West Bite

920 Caroline Street

www.keywestbite.com

Saturday, 19 February 2017, 8 PM

Shipyard Export (draft) \$5.50?

Another familiar address. That is unfortunate, of course, because it means that the prior tenant had shut down and moved out. It's survival of the fittest in this densely-packed KW bar landscape, and it takes a hardy soul to take up the challenge, especially in the footprint of someone that didn't thrive.



Joe's Place (#246) was the most immediate predecessor here, with JDL's Big Ten (#45) before that. Of course, in pre-Hop days, PT's Late Night was on this spot for quite a while. I still miss that place.

Anyway, it was the name of this new occupant of 920 that caught my fancy. It's good play on words, iddinit? It a homonym for a local landmark, and it tells you that there is food within. Kudos to the one who thought it up.

Partly because of that "Bite" part, I decided to make it a Friday night late-supper hop as well as a bar hop.

So, I parked Trekkō The Wonder Bike in the concrete parking garage next door, and walked over. The place was jammin'! Full to capacity, and rockin' to a live band. Some guy was at the front door, looking in and vidding it with his phone. That's OK, sure, but he was blocking the door. I gave him a *scuse-me* with a shoulder tap, and the douchebag actually had the nerve to try to block me out, like he couldn't have anyone walking through his precious video. I had to call foul on him. He wasn't even a patron of the bar; he was just some jamoke walking by. It wasn't his son on stage or anything like that, he had no claim to an unblocked view. If he wanted uninterrupted access, he should have chosen someplace other than the doorway of a busy bar – especially one that *I* was trying to enter.

So my *scuse-me* tap became a get-the-fugoutatheway jostle as I bumped by him into the bar. I could've *squeeeezed* by, but that would have been just a little more accommodation than he deserved. Block me out? Block this out, ya douche.



Once in, I realized it was even more crowded than I had thought. People were everywhere. OK, not on the ceiling, but everywhere that gravity allowed. This was clearly a special celebration or benefit for someone or some ones. Every table was occupied, every bar seat taken, and people standing two-deep behind the bar stools.

It occurred to me that getting supper was not gonna happen. Placing a food order would have been ridiculous. Staying for a beer would *not* have been as nutty – and I did wait for a little while, without much progress -- but, for some reason, food was taking precedence. Having forgotten to eat lunch, I was seriously yearning. This was a lively party, for sure, but my best-bet eateries would be closing up soon, so I resolved to go get a nibble and come back. Viddy-douche was long gone when I headed out.

Some of this happened, followed by some of that, down in the Duval area, and, well, I never did make it back that night.

So, that's 550 words about a Hop that *didn't* happen. Good exposition though.

Fortunately, my resolution had been fairly vague, and the "come back" part could be applied "whenever." I mean, why limit yourself? That just makes the resolution harder to fulfill. Many, many New Year's rezzies fall apart because they are too restrictive. Although, I will say that I have held fast to the NY Rez that I made about 30 years ago: Make No More New Year's Resolutions. It's been easy to keep.

Saturday night at Key West Bite was verry different: no special party, no band, and, well, no people. What a difference a day makes. It sure was quieter. And brighter too.

There were four people there, plus two staff. There was a group of three down the left end of the bar, then an empty seat, then a solo guy, and an empty seat to his right. I settled my buns onto the backed wooden stool, at the right end, and awaited the barkeep.

She broke off her friendly conversation with the group-o-three and came my way. She was not very tall and spoke with what seemed like an Irish accent. I think she said her name was Ann Marie. There was a bit of shyness in her, too. I recognized it. I was that way sometimes as a barkeep.

Not everyone is naturally glib, you know. Making comfortable small talk is a skill that is useful as all get-out to a bartender, but you can kinda tell when someone is not especially comfortable with it. I can talk a blue streak with people I know, but feel awkward in face-to-face with strangers. So, yeah, I think that was her deal too. It was kind of cute, really. At least, with her, it was cute. It probably made *me* look like a retard.

I ordered up a c-burger and ff's and cozied up to my Shipyard. Thennn, I began to notice the guy on my left. He was white-haired, with a white Uncle Sam beard. I thought he might be made of stone. He sat straight-backed and looked directly ahead. The only breaks in his pose came when he would raise his Bud bottle, then bring it to his lips and tilt it, and reverse the process to return. There are robots who move far more naturally than this dude did. He was like the first generation of Disney's animatronics. He never once looked in my direction. Usually you get at least a glance, just a quick check to see if you're a loony or a terrorist. But there was not one hint of acknowledgement from Stony Sammy.

My burger came quickly. Why wouldn't it? The cook had nothing else going on to delay it. I was only halfway through my beer. So much for ordering a second one when the food arrived.

It was a good cheeseburger, though it fell short of excellent. Fries were hot and slim, just the way I like 'em. Good, too, but not great, too. In fact, they were exactly what I was expecting. The price was pretty good, so you expect pretty good food. There's an inverse formula at work in the restaurant world: if the price is really good, the food will be kinda bad (i.e., fast food paces); if the price is bad (i.e., outrageously high), the food oughta be goood. But, in the middle, both are just pretty good. I'm totally fine with a pretty good world.

The backroom barkeep had been like a piece of the furniture. He had been motionless, just sitting on a barseat, on the customers' side of the bar, slumped like a dead man with his head on his arms on the bar. I couldn't blame him at all. He was one skinny dude, with dark blond hair hanging to the bottom of his shoulder blades. I liked the look. Reminded me of me in college, except I wasn't quite that slim. Facially, he looked like he might've been Stephanie's brother. You know Stephanie. Yeah, her.

When my burger was put up, he roused himself to deliver it, which he did cheerfully. To his credit, he looked like he was happy to have something to do. He didn't return to slumpville. For the rest of my stay, he did some wandering around, little chit-chat, straightened some chairs, anything to keep busy. I didn't see him do any cleaning, but, shit, for what he was getting paid, I wouldn't have cleaned anything either.

Just as I was finishing my burger and my beer, the threesome rose and departed, leaving just Sam and me. I was daunted, I admit it. I paid my tab with Ann Marie, and scarified myself.

I liked the place, and did resolve to return again. Sometime.

