

## Bar Hoppin' With Hops

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

Bar #307:

### Hank's Hair of the Dog Saloon

409 Caroline Street  
Friday 2/1/19, 8:15 PM

*Crazy Lady (draft) \$6*

Like so many of the Hops these days, there was a repetitive aspect to this one. Hank's is so new that their only sign is a banner that has been roped onto the roof, but the venue itself is far from new. The most recent occupant of this space was Grunts (#32), who hung in there a good long time, surviving a couple of pre-Tours closings, before finally letting go.

Hank's was just in time to host a couple of nights of music in the fairly new phenomenon called the Mile Zero Fest. The MZF is a music festival that features all kinds of country and rockabilly bands. The one playing here

definitely falls in the latter category. Going by the name Billy The Squid, they were fronted by fiddle, banjo and harmonica and, yes, they could rock 'em all. It was a good party vibe. I'm not gonna be looking for them on iTunes, but their live energy had everybody toe-tapping.

The front yard, usually a fairly serene space with quiet, low-light dining, was filled with a couple

dozen colorful plastic armchairs — the style that you might get in a set with a wooden picnic table, except without the woodiness — and every seat was taken, with standees filling the space behind, and overflowing onto the dark Caroline Street sidewalk.



Tiki torches were in full blaze along the short picket fence. I took a slow-motion video of one of them. A controlled fire is a pretty hypnotic thing anyway — as is a waterfall, an aquarium, or a lava lamp — but in slo-mo, it's riveting to watch the brilliant swirls flare and roll and separate and vanish.



Way back in the day, as a punkass teen of a Hops, I stopped my sophomore Chemistry class cold one morning by raising my hand and asking out-of-the-blue, "Mr. B, what is fire?"

That elicited chortles from many of my classmates and an outright guffaw from one jarhead. The teacher gave me this WTF face, but it was more of a *nobody has ever asked me that before* look rather than a *don't interrupt me now you idiot* look.

I quickly followed it up, as much to the guffawing goofball as to the teacher, "I mean, does it have a chemical composition? Everything is made of something, right? Even air is made of more than one thing, y'know? What elements are in fire? Carbon? Hydrogen? Oxygen? Does it have molecules? What becomes of them?"

Mr. B paused before responding, letting it all sink in. The room had gone quite quiet. He looked at Guff-Goof and said, "You want to answer that?" The suddenly sheepish GG wordlessly declined.

We did not have Google back then. We could not just learn on a whim. A source was needed. Encyclopedias were too much of a pain to locate, wield and comprehend, so asking a teacher was the best option. Mr. B would have preferred that I had not chosen the middle of his baffling lecture on covalent bonding to get all curious about flames, but he did take the moment to revel in being the font of knowledge.

He opted for simplicity, at first. "It has none of that; it's just energy from a chemical reaction released as light and heat." I was happy with that, and there was an "ohhhh, OK," vibe throughout the classroom. But, then he got carried away with the whole font of knowledge thing and got on a roll, which we, being typical high school kids who knew this was not gonna be on the next test, quickly tuned out.

I do have to give Mr B credit, though, for another major enlightenment. One of our lessons included a valuable bit of information — taught, noted, studied, and reinforced through rigorous testing — to wit:

Test question: *What is alcohol?*

Correct answer: *Alcohol is a solution.*

That would prove to be a game changer.

And it was a certain blend of that very solution that I was in search of here at Hank's.

So, I slithered my way through the music-loving crowd, down the side alley, bypassing the full yard and packed porch, and headed for the back door.

The Garbo's Grill trailer was still back there, all silver and gleaming against the back of the property. I hear the food is excellent. I looked at the menu once, though, and nothing appealed to my ridiculously prosaic tastes, so I've never checked it out.

Even though all the entertainment was outside, Hank's inside was full too. I guess cuz the bar is in there, hm? Lots of other solution seekers. One guy picked up his cup of beer and walked away from his seat, so I swooped right in. The guy had left a bottle behind, though. I didn't notice in time and got hosed.

In a crowded bar that has more than one bartender, it is difficult for said tenders to keep track of everyone's status, especially when outside entertainment means that people pop in, grab a swaggle and go back out. A hunkered-down patron is easily monitored. The transients just cause confusion.

So, right after I settled onto the barstool, the male barkeep looked my way. But before my eyes could meet his and manifest my thirst, he spied the bottle, assumed it was mine, and scanned onward in search of need. Bah! Hosed by the leftover.





I promptly slid the offending article as far away as my arm could reach and hoped my next opportunity would come soon. As an extra flag, I loosely held a sawbuck in my relaxed hand, laid casually in front of me on the bar.

You don't need to wave money at the barkeep. They don't take kindly to that. Having it out is enough. Waving it in their face just creates an *I see it, you dipshit* vibe that is not good for the relationship.

Happily, the young blonde woman was scanning the opposite direction, saw my flag, my empty area, and my puddle of drool, and immediately came to my rescue.

Now, with beer in hand, and Hop consummated, I could relax and enjoy the vibe. It seemed that not a damn thing had

changed in here. And why would it, really? Grunts was a cool little place with a lot of character — vintage signage, old Coke machine, raw wood, cozy room — so Hank's would be too.

I was gonna go back outside, but the band had just wound up their set and were — ready for it? — *disbanding*. Har har har. Deciding to sit-a-spell instead, I figured I'd get out the phone and start composing this Hopter on the Notes app. I always do my best writing at a bar. I've told you that before. Maybe a couple of times. Hey, we're on about Page 900 or so by now, so I'm sure there's been some repetition. And some repetition.

Before I could act on that impulse, though, I was ambushed by conversation. A 30-ish dude from Maine saw the distinctive Patriots logo on my shirt and struck up a pro-Pats convo. Super Bowl LIII (pronounced ***fif-tee three*** in Latin, apparently) was less than 47 hours away, so I was displaying and he was rooting.

Of course, we talked about ice fishing. What else do you talk about with a Mainiac during the winter months? He wasn't that into it himself, but his father was a diehard icer: shed, frying pan, whiskey, power augur, et al. I'm not really much for fishing, so I didn't have a lot to contribute, but I wonder what kind of a convo he might have had with a local angler. Apart from the water, the gear, and the fish, there's not much else in common. I reckon that would be plenty, actually.

He was a good Joe, though. I bet if we had crossed paths in a New England bar, we never would have interacted. But when you're far from home, as he was, loyalty to the hometown team creates instant friendships.

My Mainiac friend left me to return to his wife, and I took the bottom half of my beer for a walk up Duval.