

Bar Hoppin' With Hops

The Keep Calm and Hop On Tour
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Hop #324

The Dirty Pig

320 Grinnell Street

Saturday, November 23, 2019, 7:45 PM

Jai Alai IPA (draught) \$6? \$7?

This was a good night to grab a glass of brew and a plate of food. I had been saving this Hop for just such a night. Hops are often purely liquid affairs, but occasionally I like to eat. Eating is good, yes? We all gotta eat, right, Jerry?



And this is especially true when the Hop is a restaurant as well as a bar. Now, *some* would say — though not I, surely — that The Dirty Pig is



primarily an eatery. But, if that were true, would I even be here? No, no, and no. Supper was supplemental; imbibing was primary, such is the nature of the Hop.

Tourists sometimes are seated next to me at my various Hops, and they sometimes ask me for recommendations for restaurants around town. I tell them what I know about some of the best-known places — which is pretty extensive after all these years -- but when they ask me, "What's your favorite place?" I reply, "Hey, I live here; I can't afford to eat out. Maybe Subway once in a while, or Pizza Hut on Tuscany Tuesday. Otherwise, I'm eatin' a salad for lunch at work and grillin' a cheeseburger at home for supper."

So, tonight, ah, tonight, was a special night. I was gonna have me some professional victuals.

And I was still half a block away when the sound of live blues music wafted past me. It got a little bounce going in my step. When I reached the sidewalk at the front door, the aroma of burning wood wafted past me. There was a lot of wafting going on tonight. More than usual.

This doorway was familiar, of course. It has different adornments, but it is the same portal through which I passed to hop Finnegan's Wake (#5), Backspace (#), and Lucy's Retired Surfer Bar (#) before this. Finnegan's was a long-time staple on this corner; Backspace was a bad fit before they even opened and, thus, folded up quickly; and Lucy's relocated with good success to the 200 block of Duval.



First thing I saw as I passed through the portal was the band. The stage is immediately to your right so you get entertainment from the get-go. The band was made up of older folks – go figure, older folks playing blues music – with a woman up front on vocals and harmonica. They were in mid-tune as I strolled by, nodding approval, on my way to the bar.

The one thing the folks of Backspace did well was to redesign this interior. The large, high-ceilinged room is a good look. The ceiling itself is cross-



hatched bamboo, with bamboo beams. The wide silver air circulation pipes, rather than being hidden, are proudly displayed, as if they are the primary attraction of the room.

But they are not, of course; the **bar** is; and the bar is long and welcoming. There were only a couple other patrons seated at it when I pulled back the curved-arm, padded bar stool right near the register and taps and made myself at home.

I recognized the barkeep, though I cannot tell you his name. It might have been Robert, so that's what I'm calling him. I could've asked, I suppose, but then I'd have to *remember* it, and that's a lot work. Easier to make one up.

Robert was miffed. Dare I say “vexed,” even. Not at me, though, which was good. But things, for the moment at least, were just not going well in barkeepland. Been there, so I knew enough to back off and wait my turn.

I had arrived right in the midst of a credit card snafu, an elaborate take-out order coming out of the kitchen, another one coming in over the phone, and a clusterpuck of drink orders among the “friends of the band” that needed to be sorted out with the server.

The last thing Robert needed was a finger-drumming, *ahem-ahem*-ing customer. No worries. I had my tablet to amuse me. I took a few minutes



to snap a few pickiwicks of the place – and a familiar-looking and extremely well-made trophy in the corner -- and set up the Hopter’s title page header. He’d get to me when he could.

Of course, the outgoing to-go people wanted all kinds of this sauce (not that one) and that garnish (not this one). And, *of course*, the in-coming to-go had not studied the menu before calling, so he had to tell them

stuff they should have already known. And, ***of course***, they wanted the two things that were on the 86 list, so Robert had to go through the painful process of helping them to select a Plan B. It was taking a toll.

If you’ve never worked in F&B, you might not know what “86” means in those circles. It’s not sexual, so get you mind out of the gutter, you pervs. It means the kitchen no longer has that item available (“86 the Pork Tenderloin, okay, Robert”), because, they would have you believe, it was so damn good that it sold out. In some circumstances, it also means to kick someone out (i.e., “86 that drunk, will ya, Moose?”)

Anyhoo, finally, TG1 was gone, TG2 was in the cook’s capable hands, CC prob was fixed, drink confusion was sorting out, and Robert could finally say, “Whew, thanks for waiting. What can I getcha?”

I opted for my usual Jai Alai draft, and chose the Smoked Turkey, partly because of the “golden brown on the surface, but delicate and juicy on the inside with a pretty pink smoke ring” description on the menu, with sides of Mac-n-Cheese and French Fries. Then I sat back to dig the tunes.

Annnnd, the band took a break. Sigh.

But then I heard Lori's voice. Ha, hi, Lori. She was seated at the table behind me with her husband and their two friends. We chitted some chat that lasted until my food was being placed before me.

As I turned my attention my repast, one detail stood out. It wasn't the Mac-n-Cheese, waiting liquidly in its ceramic cup. Nor was it the fries, that sat hot and golden and ready in their cardboard tray-box. It wasn't even the blue plastic cafeteria tray that it all arrived on, or the forest green liner paper that



protected the tray. No, it was the plate that the turkey came on. There *wasn't* one. It seemed like a pretty odd thing for the kitchen staff to forget, so I have to assume that it was deliberate.

But, WTF, I didn't really *need* one, now, did I? There was plenty o' turkey – six big thick slices, all with their pretty pink ring -- there for the chowing, so in I dug. The M&C was excellent, the fries were salllllity (but like salty fries, *and* I had beer, so that was OK by me), and the turkey was very tasty, though I couldn't find the word "juicy" anywhere in there. I didn't really expect a lot of juiciness in a smoked meat, though, so that was OK by me, too. Good feed!

While I ate, the band came back on. Music is good for the digestion, I hear; at least that's what Tuco said in *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* (right before he and the desk he was clamped to got thrown around the room).

The scally-capped, mid-20's server came behind the bar to finish resolving the whose-drink-is-whose controversy with Robert, and I thought, hmmm, I have seen this dude in another Hop. I studied him discreetly, then consulted



my tablet for confirmation. Sure enough, there was Danny D, crooning away on the front porch of Krafty Kraken in Hop #271.

When he had a break and was standing nearby, I had to show him the photo and say, "Excuse me, is this you?" He got a laugh out of it. His real name is Cooper and he still plays at

Mallory Square fairly regularly. He says he enjoys it a lot when he can get a bit of an audience going, but it's less fulfilling when they walk right by him to watch a guy on a unicycle.

So, if you see him there, drop a few bucks in his cup/jar/hat/mouth or whatever, and tell him Hops sent you.

My beer was drained and my belly full, and there were still three slices of pink-ring left. I wrapped them in a paper napkin, placed them in my trusty delivery bag, paid Robert, threw a nod Danny D Cooper's way, and sauntered off into the night.

My turkey salad sandwich the next day was dang tasty.