



GOOD BEER

By Parker Steven Griggs

I remember the first time I invited a girl to join my friends and me at the brewery. She didn't live far away, so we had little time to converse on the way. I spent most of that precious time apologizing for whatever my friends could possibly say throughout the evening. "These are military people." I said, "They can get a little carried away with their war stories." "It's fine, my dad was a Marine."

Inviting someone to our Thursday night brewery gathering was like inviting a friend to church: everyone attending was very accepting, warm, open, and friendly, but you still couldn't shake the fear that your guest might not like it. They might think you are in a weird cult, or be so bored they keel over in front of you. This was beer though, tangible, flavorful—this was art.

I opened the door to allow my canonesse to proceed me. I couldn't see how she reacted, but my hope was that it was something like a Texan's first experience with snow. My hope was that she would be as excited as I was. The building was very basic: jet-black metal ceiling, painted concrete floor, orderly alignment of chairs behind the giant, solid oak tables that stretched from

one side of the building to the other. The interior of the building was surrounded by massive wooden barrels stacked three high. The podium stretched from the left wall, twenty-five feet to my right. Behind it were ten tap handles standing at immediate attention prepared for duty and service. When someone was in need, the tap would bow forward, ceremoniously relinquishing the prized beer that was being guarded so vigilantly by these ten soldiers. Not just anyone had a relationship with these soldiers though; it took training, trust, commitment, and extraordinary knowledge to become a brewer.

Taylor was in charge of ordering food since he had established an ever growing friendship with the waitress at the wing place. The brewery didn't have a kitchen of their own so we would have the wings delivered. "Just look for the four good looking dudes in the barrel room," he would always say—but this time he added, "oh, and the pretty girl with us." Taylor was my best friend and usually I would carpool with him to our event, although, given the circumstances, he had shuttled himself that night. He didn't like beer. He said it was too bitter, but he enjoyed our company and was in attendance every week, which was great for me because he could be my designated driver—though that was rarely necessary.

Jeff, an ex airman tended to favor the amber beers, and it wasn't unusual for him to perform a particular "happy dance" when he noticed the red was on hand-pull—an homage to the traditions of craft brewing. He and his wife had just come back from a three year displacement in Europe, bringing back stories of pubs, cities, and general chaos from his time overseas—his job was to start our tab.

Jason was a wild card, he had a tendency to pledge his allegiance to the pale ale. Bitter and sweet, typically with a higher alcohol percentage, pale ales have a unique characteristic of getting rowdy. His job was to get two boats of the free popcorn they offered to patrons. I had only met Jason the month prior. During our introduction he tried to convince me that he was once a helicopter, from then on I just referred to him as "The Helicopter." He too, was an ex airman. He had recently returned from a two year stint in Korea and Afghanistan.

Neil told me a story of his first time in Las Vegas, where he would order his drinks by the color, not the technical name. Neil favored the Apricot Blonde. It was a dark orange color and

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sculpted with great care. The apricot was imbued with sweet notes from the special apricot purée. It was light and easy to drink. Savoring the robust flavor was the best part of this beer. It was consumed with reverence and honor. Slowly swishing the beer to either side of the glass, little bubbles would form, but the carbonation wasn't overbearing. When you took a sip, the beer would rest on the palate and soak into each taste bud.

Walt was the brewmaster who worked with Neil. They were both in the military. He would come over and talk with us, bringing us new beers and explaining the science behind brewing. "Lagers like Corona are awful to keep on tap; they skunk out within 20 seconds of being exposed to light. That's why they're always in cans or green bottles. Some brown bottles also offer protection from the light—for example Bud Light and Coors light which are American Lagers." He always had some interesting beer fact to share with us.

The girl I had brought sat very quietly, her eyes drilling away at the screen of her phone. She would only look up to acknowledge the questions we asked her, but never really took the initiative to join the conversation. That didn't spoil it for us though—we were a community.

The glass would always make a small noise when being delivered to the table. It never sounded angry or harsh—it was as if it were just announcing "I'm here." The light would sparkle off its crystalline sides and draw your attention to the brew within and the little Dry Dock Brewery logo. Inside the glass was a caramel colored liquid, bubbling with anticipation to be consumed. The aroma it let off was so sweet you would think it was candy—the taste, now that was the real joy. It was slightly bitter—not in a sour or spoiled way, though. It was just a little bite on your taste buds in order to wake them up, that then apologizes by getting sweet. It was an ale.

Sometimes, when it was available, I would get the stout: pitch black with a milk chocolate colored head. It was not a drink for the faint-hearted. It was a workout to drink, but afterwards you would realize just how special it truly was.

I was amazed at how many variants there were for something so generically called "beer." The canvas of the glass was always painted a different shade with each handpicked color. This gallery of handcrafted beer was what brought all of us together. It was the artful community of beer that united us. ☘