

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012 Key West Bar Boondoggle
"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 33:

Smokin' Tuna Saloon

www.smokintunasaloon.com

4 Charles Street

Saturday 8/17, 10:30 pm

Yuengling Lager (draft)

This was Tour Stop #4 on the night. Bar #5 in all, but the stop-in at Lazy Gecko can't count. There was a sunset, a stupid drunk, and a chill band at the prior three stops, and the lure here was, once again, music. We had crossed paths with Caffeine Carl at the Gecko and he said he'd be playing here. That counts and networking, I reckon.



When we left Grunts, B & J strolled up Duval for a bit, and I strolled down Telegraph Lane and into the back door of the Tuna.

I was never here when this place was the Naked Lunch. Often thought of it, but never actually made it. When El Alamo opened here, they had a serious hook: \$1 drafts. *Serious* hook.

Granted, it was the dead of summer when they opened. I'd be riding by on the bike, or on my way to/from the Gecko, and this kinda shabby dude would be sitting in the hot sun on a bar stool, saying *one dolla draffs, onnnnnne dolllllaaaa draffffs*. Finally, I asked him what was up. He pointed down Charles Street, that little side street by the Red Garter, and said, *Newww place, dolla draffs, chekkit owt*.

I did. And they were indeed a buck. And that was all day, not just at HH! Jack-freaking-pot. And I liked the outdoor-indooriness of it. You walked through the gate into a courtyard, and you never actually went *in* anywhere. You went under a roof to sit at the main bar, under another roof to sit at the side bar, and the stage was under a roof. There was a pool room you could walk into, but that was it. Kinda made for a hot sit on a summer afternoon, but that's why God created fans. Besides, at a buck a beer, you could quench with reckless abandon!



But it started to wear off. Drafts snuck up to \$2 – except for PBR's (Quality since 1869), which was now the sole anchor to the claim *one dolla draffs*. You couldn't bitch, though. I mean, you still had a Yuengling for \$2. Hard to beat that. If you got all huffy and stormed out because they ask for two bucks for a cold beer, you need a slappin'. If it means that much, get the freaking Pabst.

Eventually, it all wore off. El Alamo gained popularity with the younger, edgier (and cheaper) crowd. They brought the prices up closer to the Duval norm, but stayed on the lower edge of it. People still came; it was a hoppin' place.

On weekend nights, at midnight, a barkeep would climb up on top of the bar with a full bottle of tequila, walk around, and pour it into anyone who offered an open mouth. In a twisted way, it was like watching a mama bird with a worm and all the little baby birds facing it with mouths wide open.

El Alamo was underbelly, but a fun underbelly.

Smokin' Tuna Saloon bought the place and re-opened it without changing any obvious features – except the pool room is now a merchandise shop. And they emphasize food over booze. Apparently, El Alamo *had* food, but I never saw anyone eat there. From what I've heard, Smokin' Tuna has pretty darn good eats, too.

The Tuna has made no bones about not wanting El Alamo's clientele. You just can't pay a Key West rent off a \$2 draft kind of crowd. The new drink prices alone should ensure a different demographic.

In my first visit here, during Happy Hour shortly after they opened, I was given a small-looking plastic cup of Yuengling, and was told I was getting the local discount, which worked out the same as HH prices. \$3.25. Heyyy, 50 cents off. That's it?? In a full-size glass, maaaybe. In this little cup,

nah-uh. Not happy enough. Yup, things have changed. Make a note of it. So, that message got through.

Though I initially kind of missed the raucousness of EA (yeah, cheap beers too), the Tuna really is an upgrade. So I don't come here now looking for bargains, but I do come here now looking for good entertainment. Now, if I'm getting some kickin' live music, I can look at a higher beer price as a kind of cover charge, which I pay in installments based on my consumption. Fair deal. Just like at the Parrot.

And that's what tonight was about. Some bars on the Tour, I just walk in almost at random. With others, I want something to be going on. Tonight it was Caffeine Carl with Nick Norman and friends.

Carl and Nick are not a rare sight around town. I've seen both at the Gecko more times than I count. But, in there, Carl's guitar is so freaking LOUD. Those walls don't enhance sound; they just bounce it around and around,



and it can really batter you. Smokin' Tuna, where the ceiling is the sky, treats the music better.

As I was drinking my first beer – a plastic cup of Yuengling, of course – someone made a request to the band. I couldn't hear what they asked for, but I heard the word *Time*. The singer that I don't know replied, *No, but I know 'Time' by Pink Floyd,*

and they jumped right into it. Nick looked a bit lost by what had just happened, but Carl was all over it. They cranked it out and did a great job. Hey, you just don't expect to hear some good Floyd in a bar-band setting like this.

B & J arrived a song or so later and had a seat. What happened in the next half-hour happens all the time with them. I swear, they know *everybody* in Key West. It was like people were lining up to talk with them. They are so **good**, though, at remembering *everyone's* name *and* what's going on in their lives! Bartenders and servers from places far and wide came over to say hi, and B & J knew everything about them all. It is always so

impressive. I'm sure they just think it's normal, but, mannnn, what great memories they have.

I'd like to be that friendly and sociable, but I'm lucky if I can place a face, let alone connect a name, job, spouse, and casual goings-on with it. It's just the way I am and have always been. People often take it the wrong way, I can tell. Kinda sucks, but it is what it is, and I'm waaaay used to it by now. We all have the things we are good and bad at; that is not one of my goods.

We stayed till the band went on break, then I made the move onward. The budget for the night was long since blown, and now I was a good eight bars behind in my blogging.

It sure is a LOT easier to *go* to a bar than it is to write about going there!

ADDENDUM: 2015

I do come here a lot now. The beer cups are among the largest in K-Dub: a 22-ounce, sturdy plastic vessel of cold draft IPA. Niiiiice. And the music is some of the best in K-Dub. Maybe someday I'll even have dinner here!