

100 Bars in 100 Days

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

BAR 42:

Stick & Stein

2922 North Roosevelt Boulevard
Thursday 8/30, 9:30 pm

Rolling Rock (bottle) \$4.00

I like Stick & Stein. Really. I don't go here a lot any more, but I have some real honest-to-God history at the Stick. It was one of the first bars I ever came to when I migrated to Key West for that live-in-the-van winter of 1993-94. It may have even been *the* first.

I recall sitting down at the bar, looking up at the TVs as I drank my beer, and watching the Bruins game. It took several minutes before it occurred to me: *Wait a tick! I ain't in Boston no more. WTF am I doing watching the Bruins? W(hy)TF is hockey even on TV here?!*

I came here surprisingly often in that winter. I was working in a T-shirt shop on the 100 block of Duval for a remarkable \$5 per hour – yes, that is right, zero-five – so money, clearly, was an issue. Granted, I was living in my van for that five-month period, so that helped the economics a lot. In many ways, given the escape from the grind and stresses that had preceded it up north, and the fact that I had just one lonely key on my key chain, that was the best winter of my life. The only reason I even had a keychain was so I wouldn't lose the van key.

Stick & Stein served food back then. It was good too! With good prices. Ha, I remember overhearing a conversation on Duval Street between a couple of tourists and a classic KW scruffy. The tourists must have just asked where they could get a good deal at Happy Hour, and Scruffo was singing the praises of S&S.

Yahh, mannnn, at Stick & Stein they got alllll kinnnnds of food and drinnnks.

We were hoping to find some wings, or –



Yeah, mannn, at Stick & Stein they got all that stuff. They got so much stuff.

Everything they tried to bring up, Scruffo's response began the same way, word-for-word: *At Stick & Stein they got ... At Stick & Stein they got ... At Stick & Stein they got ... At Stick & Stein they got ...*

The tourists realized that they had asked the wrong guy, and that, in this case, finding *Where The Locals Go* might not have been a good idea. Finally, to appease him, the tourists asked how to get there. As Scruffo started to wave them a couple of miles east, they way-too-politely said, *Oh no, that won't do. Thank you, though*, and walked off.

That winter, I also won a \$10 Gift Certificate to the Stick in one really weird-ass race. It was a 5K run, so that's not weird; Key West has a dozen or more of those every year. What was weird was that you couldn't wear a watch, and there were no clocks or split times along the course, as well as no clock at the finish line. Having signed up at the last minute, I hadn't caught the theme of the event: you had to predict your finish time on your entry blank, and prizes were determined by how well you predicted. Pretty fuktup, hm? Yeah, I thought so too.

Anyway, the 10:00 AM event started and finished at Key Plaza. I finished second in the race – some tall Speedo-ed triathlete dude kicked my ass – but I missed my prediction by :07, and got third place in the competition that mattered. I won a \$100 savings account or something from Keys Federal Credit Union, but it had to sit in their custody for a year before I could cash it in. Bah.

But in the accompanying raffle, held in front of what is now Office Max, I won two gift certificates: one for a goldfish at a local pet store, and \$10 from Stick & Stein. Jackpot, baby! I immediately walked that little card down to the back corner of the lot and bellied up to the bar. The female barkeep was just opening up. I brandished the card and began to redeem it forthwith. Nineteen years ago, S&S beers were about \$1.50 each, maybe even less, so \$10 went a long way.

The Speedo-ed race winner, by the way, won nothing. Bupkis. Egg. He apparently didn't understand the theme either and had left that blank blank, so he had no prediction at all, netting him *last* place. Then he got shut out in the raffle. What a hosing.

I never did cash in the goldfish card. Keeping an aquarium in my van just seemed a bit whacked-out, even for me.

By mid-April, it was just too stinking hot to sleep in Max anymore, so my wing-it winter came to an end, and, with a lump in my throat, I returned to New England. But Stick & Stein followed me!

After a few years of blah blah and a couple more of yada yada, I ended up in Rochester NY, working as a Personal Fitness Trainer in the city's swankiest gym, called Mid-Town Athletic Club. In a stroke of luck, my income practically doubled one winter evening when a wealthy woman walked in one night and hired me on sight for *daily* training sessions. What a boon! Barb turned out to be a cool lady too. I even ended up working part-time for her in her art gallery. One day, I was telling her about my KW days, and she said she that a good friend of hers, named Steve, owned a bar down there: *Did you ever hear of a place called Stick & Stein?*

By 2001, Rochester winters had taken me to the breaking point. The Flour City gets 95 days of sun per year, according to the newspaper shortly before I decided to GTF out of there. Only 95 days. That's like one in four, not even two per week! It's gray, it's cold, it snows that dumbass lake effect snow every freaking night for five months.

One day, my friend Paul emailed me a classified ad from the online *Key West Citizen*, teasing me about a job opening in the fitness field, and tagged it *Wouldn't you rather work in Paradise?* I was about to delete it with a snarl, but paused, attached a resume and emailed it off. Long story short (ha), I got the job, packed everything I could fit in my van, and moved back down. I left a vapor trail out of Rachacha. [Thanks again, Paul!!]

But in saying my goodbyes, Barb wished me luck, and told me to find Steve and say hi: *You might even get a free beer out of it!* So, Steve, if you read this, Barb says hi. Or, at least, she did in April of 2001.

Several years ago, S&S tried Dollar Burger Night. The premise was good, and I jumped on it immediately. Two burgers and two beers for less than six bucks was such a deal that I'd leave \$10 on the bar with a *keep-da-change* in appreciation. The promo ended after just a few weeks, though. According to one of the barkeeps, it just turned into Homeless Night. The unfortunates would scrounge up a buck or two, purchase a burger or two, and sit on the bar stool watching TV and pool all night, buying nothing else and blocking out other customers. You can't blame the hungry people for taking advantage of the offer, but you can see Stick & Stein's point too.

Anyway, back to the present. Day 41, Bar 42. S&S does not serve IPA, so it would be Peace and Love only tonight.

Meghan was my barkeep – despite the posted sign saying that Marcy was. She's a cute young thing. Her blonde hair was in pig tails, but I suspect that was a new look for her. A guy she knew commented about how it looked. It must have been kinda radical if a *guy* noticed it.

I settled in with my bottle of Rock, and steered my eyes up to the bank of TVs. There are about a dozen up there, and I swear they have not changed since my first stop here in 1993. Most are the old cathode ray tube style – the big boxes with the curved glassy screen – and very low-def picture. They still work, and the color was not completely terrible (is that a compliment?), but, wow, I haven't seen TVs like that in a while. Even *I* have ditched mine for a couple of flat screens.



The bar area was pretty full, and the pool room had a good crowd, but the game room half of S&S was almost deserted. It had been a while since I



had passed through these doors – pretty much since they made the decision to abandon their food menu in favor of letting people smoke – and the game room was completely redone. There used to be skee-ball devices and games of skill. It looks like freakin' Miccosukee now. Lonngng rows of those video screens that just subliminally hypnotize you into repeatedly pushing the button and feeding them more and more cash.

And, cleverly, they have much newer and sharper TVs to draw you back there. I sure as hell was not going to succumb to Video Lock; I stayed safe and sound where my money would be well spent, at the bar.

Speaking of sound, the sound system at the Stick is excellent. The tunes were loud and clear, but not booming. *Sympathy For The Devil* by the Stones was on when I arrived. The Stones at Stick & Stein, Stan. Stunning. The next tune, though, seemed a tad on the mellow side for this place:

CSNY's *Suite Judy Blue Eyes*. Classic song, but I doubt it was on the request list of most of the pool players.

The pool crowd had the usual ration of underbelly, tough-guy, *don't cross me* dudes. Not everybody, of course, but smiles seemed outnumbered by sour pusses and scowls. All it takes sometimes is for a couple of guys to exude the *Grrr* vibe, and it can tone down the happy-happy. If a guy gives you a *Grrr*, you usually don't smile in his face. Just bad tactics.

There were a couple of 30-year-old guys seated against the wall at the junction of the two rooms who took it to the edge: taking long hauls off their cigarettes, sloshing the beers back with attitude, and eying the room with disdain. They were in dirty jeans and dark badass t-shirts, with short-to-medium hair that had not been washed or combed. The two of them just radiated ill will to all who ventured through the portal, like they couldn't wait to crack their pool cues over somebody's head.



The tunes then shifted to *Landslide* by Fleetwood Mac. WTF! *Definitely* not your stereotypical poolroom playlist. I had to laugh. I resisted the urge to go over to the Growly Guys and say, *Heyyy, lighten up, baby, Fleetwood Mac is on!*

Like Shimp Daddy's, Stick & Stein openly welcomes smokers. The lettering on the plate glass windows announces it: *SMOKING ALLOWED*. They have targeted their clientele and have made that a prominent feature. Lots of people still smoke, and lots of people love the smoking and drinking combination buzz. I'm told it's a great mix. With more and more places excluding and ostracizing smokers, bars that have open arms for them are going to get the biz.

Stick & Stein has been here a long time, and as long as people like to smoke and shoot pool – and dig Fleetwood Mac – they will continue to thrive.

...or not. ADDENDUM: 2014

Closed. After 27 years, S&S shut down. Part of it was the state's reversed interpretation of the various machines as illegal gambling rather than legal gambling. With no way to recoup the cost of all those apparati, the owner(s) just said some variation of "Fukkit" and packed it in.

Farewell to ye Steins and Sticks, farewell...