

100 Bars in 100 Days

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

BAR 51:

Willie T's

www.williets.com

525 Duval Street

Friday 9/7, 10:30 pm

Key West Sunset Ale (draft) \$4.00



This was farrrrr from a first-time visit. I have much history at 525 Duval. The most memorable of it goes back to the Winter of '93-'94, when it was mostly enclosed and went by the name Barefoot Bob's.

It was renowned as a Grateful Dead bar, and the most common of the house bands was a cranking ensemble called Crisspy Critters. That band took Dead tunes and ran with them, picking up the tempo, or jamming deep and long, or infusing some wailing sax to get the whole room jumping like cats on fire. Many nights, the sidewalk outside would also be three-deep with dancing Deadheads. [Pete, of Pete and Wayne fame, was one of the cooking guitarists in the band.]



I was on a tight budget that winter. Living in the van, I had no rent to pay, but having a \$5/hour t-shirt shop job didn't exactly give me a lot of disposable income. I'd come here on weekend nights, have two or three Rolling Rocks and dig the Critters for a few hours. Every now and then, I'd treat myself right and splurge for a six-dollar bottle of Samuel Smith's Nut Brown Ale. Sean, the barkeep with the lonng dark ponytail always gave me an appreciative nod when I scored a Smitty.

It's gotta be very tempting to a lot of tight-budgeted people to just pluck a buck or two from the walls, beams, or ceiling.

Signed dollar bills commemorating the visits of people from the last two decades or so are stapled to the wood on just about every available spot.

The entire south wall of the dining room, which had ordinary decorations not that long ago is now totally covered.

Another cool decoration is the hand-carved, wooden coordinates sign that is mounted on the big tree (which is also covered with dollar bills). I don't know why, but I just like the numbers. I can't remember them worth a crap, though. Ask me in a paragraph and I'll forget.

Willy T's is doing a fine biznizz these days, but they had some leaner times when the stage was different, and, well, the whole dining thing was different.

When I came to my senses and abandoned the northeast and made the Lower Keys my home sweet home just after the turn of the century, 525 Duval was a little bit of a head scratcher. Half of it was still enclosed, and large red neon letters beamed out the word **B A R** through the front window. There didn't seem to be any other name on it anywhere, though. After a while, a sign came along that said *Soul Of All People*, but it didn't seem like it was intended as a name.



Then a big sign showed up high on the west wall: *S.O.L. Lounge*, with a very curious graphic of a person in a straw hat, open shirt, and a big quilted dress, riding a huge hammer – or maybe s/he wasn't riding it, maybe it was growing out of her/his, umm, loins. Odd.

Somewhere along the line, it became Willy T's. The front wall was knocked out and the whole bar was now open and breezy. 'Twas a good move.



I used to come here pretty regularly late at night when the band would be playing. The stage was way in the back, and even though you could hear the music from the sidewalk, you really couldn't see the band well from there. Plus, there was that empty room syndrome; there may have been 30 of us up front digging the reggae or Deadhead tunes, but the 50 empty



seats between us and the street just made WT's look like a not-so-happenin' place.

There was fine music going on back there, though. George Victory teamed up with a variety of KW musicians and they cranked out some killer tunes. George's versions of *Purple Rain* and *Papa Was A Rolling Stone* were outstanding.

So, in the last year or so, they moved the stage up front – almost back where it was in the Crisspy Critters era, but facing down Duval, instead of back into the barroom. Now, the band booms its music into the concrete canyon of the 500 block, and you can hear it from the La Concha. The front bar space is small, what with the trees growing up through it and all, and it fills up fast. Place looks busy as hell, so more people stream into it to check it out. Pedestrians routinely linger in the street to dig the groovy vibes, baby.

The headliner for most of 2012 has been a large white woman with straight blonde hair. She has some deep pipes, as well, and can bellow out country and rock with the best of them. She packs the people in, too. I have no



idea what her name is, and she is probably a *wonderful person* from a fine upbringing, but she just has this trailer park look about her, and I can't help

calling her White Trash Woman. You look like you look, right? I just can't help it.

Fencil thinks she has the best vocals in K-Dub. Can't say that I agree, based on purity of tone and all that snobby shit, but I can't think of anyone with a more powerful voice. She'd knock the hair off a bullfrog.

This particular night, though, she was singing a mellow tune. Maybe the first time I heard her at less than shout level. Fleetwood Mac's *Dreams* (Thunder Only Happens When It's Raining) was the tune, and she did a fine job on it. Bravo, WTW!

I was doing a just a quick zip-sip-trip: zip in, grab a sip of brew, and trip on down Duval. My KWSA was cold and the cup seemed bigger than most. Maybe it's just sturdier. They have the more rigid, clear plastic cups with their logo on them. Most bars have given up on that expense and just use the cheap, translucent, easily crushed cups. So, another thumbs-up from Hops for the high quality cup.

I haven't eaten here much. Like at most KW bars, I come for the beer. But I had a \$25 GC that I used when the SSDC came stampeding through here on our pub crawl in March, and we got Conch Fritters and a BBQ Chicken pizza. OUTSTANDING on both counts! It didn't hurt that I was on about my eighth beer already and the spot-to-hit was bigger than I was, but all who gobbled gave the food a *yay-hey!*

