

100 Bars in 100 Days

Hops MacBarley's 2012

Key West Bar Boondoggle

"The Peace, Love, and I.P.A. Tour"

BAR 99:

The Southernmost Beach Cafe

1405 Duval Street

www.southernmostbeachcafe.com

Saturday 10/28, 3:30

Yuengling (bottle) \$4.50

The Southernmost Beach Cafe *is*, in fact, the southernmost bar in the continental United States of America, sitting just a frisbee toss closer to the ocean than The Shores Bar next door. So, it seemed fitting that it be saved for the final – the **100th** -- day. Was the northernmost bar on the *Peace, Love & IPA Tour* on Day 1? No.

Course not. I'm not that freaking logical. How anal would it have been to do this in latitudinal order?

Northernmost, as determined by a Google Earth study, was Splash Pool Bar (#52) (just a shade closer to the Arctic than Conch Town, (#18). Westernmost would've been Skipper's Bar (#77), which eked out Sunset Pier (#30) for the distinction. Easternmost had to be Town-N-Tavern (#35). Surprisingly, the bar at Doubletree is farther east, but, just as surprisingly, I never made it there on the Tour.

The SoMo Beach Cafe was approached with caution this day. Not due to any perceived threat, mind you; the caution was my own, born of the instability that has traditionally characterized the Saturday of Fantasy Fest, and brought on by the reckless frivolity that that just as traditionally characterized the Friday night of Fantasy Fest: the Masquerade March.

Lordy, Lordy, what a party. Also known as "the locals parade," this event dwarfs all others in every way. To me, it is THE climax of the week; Saturday's promenade and parade are just the cooldown.

Many hundreds, maybe a few thousand (I forgot to count), people gather in full costume at the cemetery and proceed to stroll along two designated routes. The costumes are amazing! The thought, planning, and expense that go into some of these individual and group get-ups is staggering. And this seems to be the preferred time to



show off your best stuff. A lot will reappear on Saturday afternoon, but most people pick the March as the time to really strut their stuff.

But if it was just about costumes, do you think I'd be all that enthused? Nay, nay, overday, there is much more to this gathering.

When I first did the Masquerade March, in 2004, it was my fourth year in the Keys. George couldn't believe I had not been attending this, and he insisted that I join him for it. We dressed up in some lameass silly crap and met at the start. The size and mirth of the crowd wowed me. We walked about three blocks, from the cemetery to Fleming, and George asked brightly, "Want a drink?" I didn't see any bars, and he certainly wasn't toting any hidden containers. I looked around, puzzled, "George, I didn't bring



any money." He laughed, and pointed at the guest house across the street, "You don't need any. It's all free."

"What?"

"The drinks are free."

"*What?!? Where?*"

"Everywhere, you dumbass, all along the route."

"**What?!?!?** This is amazing!!"

"Duhhhh, why do you think so many people do this??"

Sure enough, rum punch, beer, mixed drinks, Jell-O shots and God-knows-what-else were offered all along the route. We

never went more than a couple of blocks before another booze stop appeared. And at the end of all that walkin' and drinkin'? Uh-huh: Duval Street. In full street festival mode, too. Mannn, did I get sloshed. It was greaaaaaat.

Where else can a group of *so many people* just wander through residential neighborhoods and be offered their fill of *free booze*? This was a transcendent moment in my life. I was truly a changed man, no longer uncertain of my destiny. Any town that would host such an event was where I would stay.

And 2012's staggering blowout was last night. Oh my. As splendid a good time as ever, this year's edition was dominated by Jell-O shots. They were the giveaway of

choice at several drink stops, and there was one barrel of them -- a new, clean, trash barrel, FULL, and just sitting in the middle of Fleming -- that I remember being impressively potent. A good choice, really: simple to transport and serve, hard to spill, and easy to stash in a pouch or bag. A tad tricky to eat sometimes, though, but WTF. Gotta earn the buzz somehow.

Now, the trouble with rum punch, gelatinis and all that hard liquor stuff is that they hang around in you for a little while and then lower the boom. You think, *hey, that was tasty, couldn't hardly taste the booze in that, think I'll have me another*, and an hour later, you're walking like a one-year-old. Which is, yeah, pretty much what happened. You don't need to know the rest. Another night in the van. Thanks, Moby.



As much fun as that all is, it is also an annual reminder to just Stick With Beer. And that's exactly what I'd be doing today.

But with caution. A rally was imminent, I knew that, but this week was taking its usual toll and this particular moment was the Big Inhale Before The Plunge.

The SoMo Beach Cafe was a good place to launch from. It's a feel-good kinda place, with its cool shade, ocean view, and lounge-chaired beach, but it's also a lively place, with good tunes, a volleyball court, and Gator football on TV.

This place was full and buzzing when I got here. Much of the crowd was also in Inhale Mode, though maybe not to my extreme. A good number of Bloody Mary's could be seen around the bar and tables. Mmmhm.

There were no stools open at any sections of the bar, and nothing available on the beach side, so I cozied up to a stool at the back sideboard and prepped my psyche for the stretch run. I was in a pretty invisible spot, and the servers were all scurrying about as it was, so rather than pester a scurrer -- no scurrer likes to be pestered -- I left my bag at my seat and sought out a worm hole at the bar.

You know the worm hole. They have to exist, by the laws of physics, but everyone hates actually sitting at one. If it's crowded at the bar, and you have enough elbow

room to not be bumping into your bar neighbor, some standee can worm into that little hole to order a drink. Yeah, that's a worm hole.

Or if you are sitting kinda sideways facing your buddy, and the dude or dudess at your back is doing the same thing, so that you're back-to-back, that's a worm hole too, no matter how small it is. Most people -- most, mind you -- are savvy enough to respect your face-to-face space, but if you have the temerity to sit more than a few feet apart, some blowhard, Bud-drinking, Yankee fan will surely lean right between your sentences and wait for a bartender to come by.



It sucks to sit on the edge of the worm hole. You're always getting bumped into, and elbowed, and yelled across, and getting splashed with the slosh-off from some douche trying to carry away four mojitos at once. And once one person worms you, it's like some neon arrow drops from the ceiling, blinking ORDER DRINKS HERE, because you just get a stream of 'em. If you get sick of it, you just have to be a prick and slam the door. Slide your seat over and box out, baby, box the bastards out and close up that hole. Make 'em find another one. If this one closed, another one probably opened somewhere else. Of course, now you're all scrunched in, cramped up, and pissed off, so it's kind of a trade-off.

Sooooo, I was the worm looking for the hole. No obvious gaps nearby, so I did the next politest thing I could think of; I found two small women I could stand behind and talk right over. They gave me the expected half-turn of the head, enough to manifest annoyance, but screw 'em: *I didn't lean in and bellow next to your ears, so save your half-head-turn for someone who cares.* I gave them a head-tilt and a mocking smirk in reply.

The youngish, dark-haired woman barkeep had acknowledged me with the expressionless upward flick of the chin that we all are supposed to interpret as *Greetings, sir, and what may I get for you today?* But we know it just means, *Whaddayawant?*

Hence, I was not expecting cheers and gravy when she brought my Gling. I also wasn't really expecting to hear her say "Four-fifty", though I should have been by now. I had a fiver in my hand -- optimistic bastard that I am -- and I reached around one of the

small women and dropped it on the bar. I reached into my wallet and pulled out a single, and waited for Cheerless Chick's return; I'd leave the bill and pocket the coins to be used as meter food later on.

But CC threw me a curve. She never came back. She assumed the four bits change was hers to keep. Huh. Well, it was, I guess, but she would've had double that if she had brought my change back. Oh well, her loss.

I had never made any conscious *We're all set, toots* gesture or anything, but I guess it would've made sense on her side of the bar. Perhaps my finger language as I released the five implied *That's all there is, sweetheart*.



That price is a bad number for the staff, though. The keeps must hate it. One bar I worked at years ago pissed us all off when they raised the Bud drafts to \$2.75: *Do you know how many 25-cent tips we're gonna get now??*

Off a \$4.50 beer, five bucks leaves an 11% tip. Bah. Six bucks makes for a very generous 33% gratuity, but I'm not going 33 for a chin-flicker. You gotta give up at least an insincere smile to get that much.

I was very willing to go a buck (22%) just on principle, and it might have brightened her demeanor just a trifle if I made the effort to do so, but, screw that. What do I care if the next customer gets friendlier service?

The chin-flick thing didn't really bother me, honestly; I came for a beer, not a date. If I was gonna be sitting at the bar on a slow night, then a pissy barkeep would bug me. Nobody likes a grumpy bartender. That across-the-bar therapy/venting thing is very much a one-way street.

She may have just had a bad time with a customer, or maybe the last two food orders got mucked up, or her shoes were digging into her toes, or her underwear just wasn't fitting right today, or she did a few too many Jello shots from that barrel last night, who knows. Ya can't be happy all the time. Maybe she was just irked by too many 11% tips.

At any rate, I returned to my seat to relax, gather my wits (yeah, like you have to be mentally sharp to go drinking), and just dig the cool vibe of the Cafe.

Whoever did the design here, my hat is off to you. This place just says *Ahhhhh* to me whenever I walk in. It has that cool-cave effect as you step inside to get out of the hot tropical sunshine. But it's a really nice cave, so there is almost a double *Ahhhhh-ah!* effect.

I'm sure the owners wish there is something that could be done to make the ocean water clear and pure, but their little cove, like so much of KW's south shore, just lends itself to seaweed. So it goes. If you're down here in January to escape shoveling your upstate New York driveway **again**, you better not be grouching about a little bit of seaweed in the 75-degree water.

Truth to tell, this was not my first visit to the SoMoBC during these 100 days. About halfway through, they hosted this little event here called Brew Fest. Maybe you heard



about it. Check your notes for bar #43. But, even though that Fest was held on these grounds, I couldn't count it as an official *PLIPAT* visit unless I *bought* a beer at *this bar*. So, all the various beers that I *did* consume for my admission fee that day were irrelevant to the 100/100. It's not a beer tour, it's a bar tour.

Excellent event, though!

So, back to Day 100 and the penultimate bar.

I sat here for a little while, slowly reacquiring the taste for alcohol, and getting ready to step it up one more time. It's kinda like running. Kinda. If you go do a slammin' jammin' run on a given day, your legs might feel a bit banged up and sore and tired the next day. You're still gonna go for your run, and maybe even a long one, but you're gonna eeeeease into it, letting your muscles slowwwwwly shake off that stiffness, before you get back into your good full, graceful, powerful, flowing stride. Same applies here. Kinda. Especially the "graceful" part.

By the final swig, that familiar beast within was beginning to open his eyes and cat-stretch, and the call of Duval was rising over the pleasant buzz of activity here. I put my empty on the bar, gave the keeper a *see-ya-later* chin flick, and headed out to complete the quest.

