



## Brewhaha #10: Bray's Brew Pub & Eatery, Naples ME

A strange thing happened on the way northeast to Belfast (no, Maine); I ended up going northwest to Naples (no, Maine). I guess having a GPS and mapping app only works if you LOOK at the damn thing.

To be fair, though, I *did* look at it as I was pulling away from TGLB. I saw my route, estimated the scale, and took off north on US-302. The GPS' purple line had me pointing back south into downtown Portland towards I-295, but I saw I-95 much closer, so I pfffft'ed the line went for the more direct route.

Things distract me when I'm driving sometimes – I think in this case I was searching for just the right tunes – but I'm usually alert enough to pick out the signs and such that I need. I do remember driving under an overpass and thinking that it seemed like quite a large road for these parts, but it was not till a good seven or eight miles later that I realized that the overpass had indeed been I-95, and that there had been no access to it from 302. OK, map app, I freaking *apologize*, so you can wipe that smirk off your screen.

But, maybe it was destiny at work or something. I was on the road to Naples, and already almost halfway there. Turning back would be adding stupider to stupid.

Naples – more particularly, Bray's – was one of the only Must Stops on the tour. There were plenty of places I was eager to go to, but Bray's was a Must.

The MacBarleys have a history at Bray's. Malt (the patriarch) lived in this part of Maine, just up th' road a piece, in Raymond, on the shores of Sebago Lake (almost). Whenever I would come to visit in the summer, we'd bop on down 302 to Naples Golf Club for a few hours of torture, then we would adjourn across the weird swinging drawbridge to Bray's for a couple of bottles of chilled yum to soothe our shattered psyches. In winter, we'd skip the torture, and come straight here.

Well, it just so happens that Malt's wife Marilyn was doing the real estate thing in those halcyon days, and she sold a tall old house that overlooks Brandy Pond to a couple from Portland, Oregon. (Interestingly enough, they had a daughter named Mackenzie. Hmmm.) Those folks opened a restaurant and small pub in that house. That became Bray's, and it was thither that Malt and Hops would go for our suds. A few years after they opened, word in the street was that they were about to start making their own beer.



So, one fine August day in 1995, Malt and I were camped out at our usual seats at the bar, playing yet more games of cribbage, when the owner opened the kitchen door right in front of us. He held up a pint glass of a cloudy, copper-colored liquid, and announced, "Who wants to try the very first beer off the very first keg?"

"That would be me!" I volunteered, hand up before the "-eg" even fell from his lips. With a hearty hereyago, he handed me the glass. I gave it a solid swig. It needed work, but it definitely had potential. He waited patiently for my review. "'Tis a fine brew," I praised, "but still a tad young. Needs more bubbles." He chuckled and agreed on all counts.

I don't know how many games of crib that Malt and I played there, but it was many. One three-game set was "memorable" – in the same sense that stepping on a broken bottle at the beach would be memorable. Malt won Game 1, pegging in from about six holes out while I sat in the deadhole (final hole before the finish) waiting to count my cards first. Dammmn. I pulled Game 2 outta my behind with a good first-count while he sat in the deadhole. Back at ya, big daddy.

Game 3 was even closer. As he dealt the cards for the final hand, I sat in the deadhole, and he sat just one hole back. I kept good pegging cards in my hand, hoping that I could double him up or 15 him if I could just avoid the same fate on my first throw. The deck was cut: Jack of Hearts. Shit! The cagey ol' dude beat me without even playing a card.

Such are the crib genes in these loins.



So, anyway, there was a damn good bit of Comin' Home involved as I pulled into Bray's. It had changed a good bit, but, then again, so had I. In their case, though, the changes seemed to be for the better. They had doubled the size of the bar, and added a lower-level pub room. Annnnd, they had added several brews!

The Brandy Pond Blonde Ale was my selection this day. Yummmm. Light, flavorful, and perfect for a summer day.

As I chatted with the tie-dye-wearing barkeep, I learned that Bray's had celebrated their 15-year anniversary as a brew pub just a week ago. I lamented missing the festa. I shared my history with him, and he was appropriately impressed.

I also bought a souvenir T-shirt for Malt, who left his ice fishing and firewood chopping days for the less bone-chilling climes of central Florida a decade ago. I knew he would cherish it.

I *really* could have hunkered down here and toured the taps all afternoon. It was cozy, it was familiar, it had memories. Happy Vibes abounded.

But I was getting lulled into the Sunday afternoon slumber of this quaint Maine town, and I had a tour to attend to.



I had Three Tides to catch. I bid Brays' bye-bye – I suspect it was for the final time. Life gets like that, you know. I've realized that all those Next Times that I penciled in for Zion, or Arches, or Yosemite, or Yellowstone, or – oooooh – Crater Lake, all of which were *whens* and not *ifs* at the time, will probably never happen.

Time to look at it for what it is and be damn glad I got there when I did, and enjoyed it as I did. Same for Bray's. Damn glad I made it back. Closed chapter.

Off to Belfast.

No, Maine.