

JOINTS

By Jerry Tammer "Gus" Denny

A couple of days ago in Birmingham, Al I was talking to any old friend from Tennessee that I had not seen in years. We were in one of the most "plush" lounges in Birmingham enjoying each other and an imported beer. My friend has done quite well in life and the subject came around to our days in Putnam country where thing for me had not changed too much but for him life had made a big leap toward the financial up swing. Being quite modest he told me you know I have enjoyed many luxuries in life but I still miss Putnam county and the life we had there.

As were drinking our five dollar beer he stopped before he had set his beer down and exploded with: You know what I miss the most is the old time "beer joints". We both laughed and agreed they were something. I thought at first he was poking fun at the humble and sometimes rough joints that lined Hi-way 70. Then a serious look came on his face and he said, you know I really mean it. As we talked I told him about my interest in some of the many things I think about in Putnam county and had often told stories about some of the beer joints that I remembered and for many years visited and enjoyed. He replied you know I have been going from "there" for many years and have no family there any more so my visits there are few and far between. His interest seem to deeping with each word that was spoken. He said you know I have not planned for this to be a long session but if you have the time lets talk about some of them. I asked him of some of his memories and the name of any of the places that were in business at the time we were growing up. He told me, as you know the drinking age was 21 or was it 18. As you remember we were about 16 or so going on 21 at that time but always seemed to have 15 or 20 cents for a beer and I guess the money was the gauge for the age limit.

By then we were in our third beer and he replied you know the thirty dollars we have spent so far would have damn near made a down payment on lots of the places at that time. He said since you have been there many times more than I have in the past fifty years tell me about your recollections and some of the places that stick in your mind. We began a session that lasted for more time than he had and he missed his plane to Chicago but showed no remorse as his reply was there is always another plane but there will never be another Peach Orchard. Odd as it may seem the Peach Orchard was one of the first places that had come to my mind. As a young boy I remembered waiting in the car parked in the back as that was where the "respected" people parked as they wanted no one passing by on 70 to see their car at a beer joint. My dad would be in the joint was his buddies having a beer and I always thought of some mysterical place and what was going on inside. (A few years later I was to find out first hand.) As I talked he interrupted me with a question of a memory that had penetrated his brain and had awoken a long lost cell. Do you remember the "Fee Grabbers" No discussion ends it is just a continuous thing of questions. Of course I did, I replied. The enjoyable times at the joints were not without some risk. There was always the "over beered" red neck that thought a knife was make for the human body instead of a cedar whitting stick. But the biggest threat was the LAW and at that time they were paid a fee for each overly enjoyable beer drinker they hauled off to jail or the justice of the peace for a fine. Thus the term "fee grabber". I will

have to admit they were a lot less threat to the ones they knew than they were to the “usual suspects” that they picked up weekly right after pay day.

My mind was banging my skull with memories and the first one on this subject that came out was the episode of the day that the deputies went in to survey the group for a usual suspect and found only one and he was quickly put in the back seat of the patrol car but greed, I assume, made them think it was eight miles in to jail so they might as well wait for another customer. During the wait our suspect got out of the back seat and came back in and order another beer and was quickly pick up again and put in the back seat and another wait started and the same episode took place again. To my knowledge this “suspect: still hold the record of being arrested three times at the same place for the same offense within a span of twenty minutes. This should prove that waiting does pay off as the fee went from two dollars to six.

By this time my friend had paper in hand and was wanting us to list some names and events that we storied in our minds about the joints. It was his time to question. Did Buffalo Valley ever have any beer joint, did Baxter or Silver Point? To my recollection I could not recall one in Buffalo Valley, but there was one just outside Silver Point called the Dollar Cut In. It was an old dwelling house looking structure that sat on a hill and at that time I was still in the back seat waiting for Dad. At one time A Café in Baxter (somewhere in the early forties’) did sell beer and as kids we would chip in our pennies and nickels to get one of the “local” suspects to buy us a beer his fee was the first swallow from the bottle and this usually left very little for our investment. But the thrill was there we had been drinking beer, just like the big boys.

My friend rattled his brain and did remember vaguely a little of the stories but out interest by now was directed to the ‘bright strip’.. Hi-way 70. This was where the action and the joints were located. From Buffalo Valley, Silver Point, Boma, and Baxter the way to Cookeville was hi way 70 so they caught you at the joints coming or going. We recalled at least 13 places in a span of seven miles. So if you frequented each one on the way to Cookeville you came with a “good” load of stories to tell as you sat on the rock wall around the court house. We also noticed that even the thriving city of Cookeville was not blessed with joint. The only one we remembered was Nigger Ed’s just on the outskirts of Cookeville on hi way 70 but at that time no one dared to step foot on a place that was not approved by “our” society. But I did remember in later years that a many of our so called better that you are bunch did drive by the back door of Ed’s for a case of something that was not available in Cookeville.

But back to Hwy 70. From Baxter to 70 is one mile and a joint always sat at the crossroad. Seems back then that the mile difference someway cleansed the stigma of buying beer. Years later the “city” of Gentry was to have its first joint and such an enjoyable placed even tho its name was The Green Fly”. Neither I are the other customers seemed to notice as we went to drink beer and not to swat flies.. As my friend keep pushing me for names the imported beer became a small factor in the memory span but we did come up with the Homestead, Southern Motor Court, and the Royal Club.

These were up beat places and did not seek the business of youths and red necks. (years later they would know me by name and I was welcomed at any time).

There was Johnson's. Judd's, Purgeory, Am Vets, Young's, even a couple of organization clubs, Fred's...Each place had it clientele . Each one had it limits on what could take place. Some a knifing ever so often was over looked , cussing and loudness was expected. Aloud juke box and some females were the order of the day. Dress restriction dress restriction. What was that you said? It was expected that you had on something except possible a tie or white shirt. We were nearing our recall span and then Mitch's' was mentioned even though it was not on 70 it was on 56 coming into Baxter and was quit the place for anytype action or stories you might want to see or hear. It was a great place and even more noticeable was the overseers or as they are know in modern age Bartender. One guys worked there for twenty years which had to be some sort of a record for that type business. He paid the bill as he laughed and brushed away tears at the same time. His last word as we left the place for him to catch his second plane was ninety dollars plus ten for the tip would not only made a down payment it would have probably bought a couple of them.

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