

BEER BUZZ:

GOOD OL' BEERS

by Joey Williams



There is this misunderstanding about the beer, wine and liquor industry that the people that work within these industries must drink the best, most impressive stuff on a daily basis. People always seem to think that because we're around the drink all day every day that we have somehow moved beyond enjoying a simple beverage. Well, I'm here to tell you that at closing time on any given night at the Smith Street Spec's, you can find people from the wine department, the deli, the liquor department, the cashiers and the beer department crowding around the three door cooler in our beer department where we keep the 16 ounce cans of budget brand domestic beer.

As sales people, my department in particular, we are around beer all the time. Between stocking shelves, rolling kegs and answering questions it gets to be overload and we just want to relax with a beer we don't have to think about and enjoy. I've talked in the past about "background beers", beers that play a backseat role to whatever else you are doing at the time, background beers don't need to be the latest and greatest, the most flavorful or the highest quality. Background beers just need to be satisfying and enjoyable.

Everyone is always surprised to hear that one of my favorite beers to enjoy as a background beer is Lone Star. I haven't always drunk Lone Star, there's no nostalgia there and my dad never touched the stuff as far as I know. I didn't come to discover the National Beer of Texas until I started work at the downtown Spec's and people kept asking me about our budget domestic brands. I had no experience with any of them; I'd started drinking beer with Guinness. So, I decided to start taking home a six pack of a budget brand every week to try it out and find out how I felt about them, and why everyone else felt the way they did. I found none of them as openly offensive as many people lead me to believe, but many of them were lacking considerably in any real flavor.



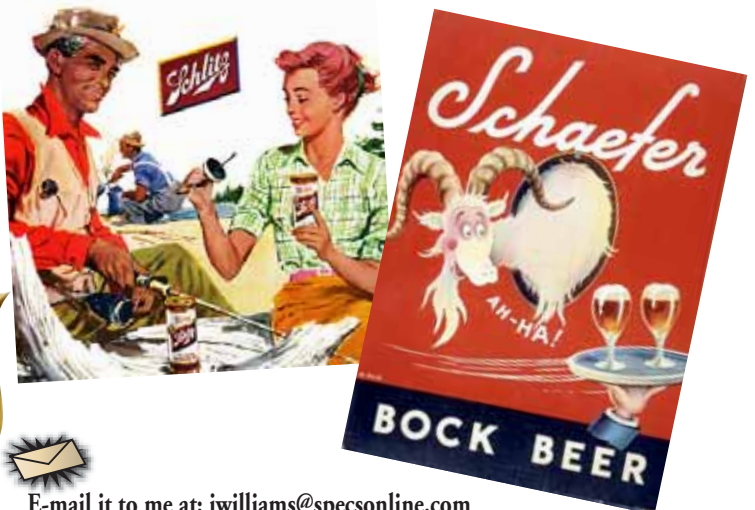
Even after my little experiment, I didn't have the liking for Lone Star that I have now. It wasn't until after a long day at work and then a long night in a culinary lab at school that I decided I really wanted a beer or two before I turned in. I went to one of the only stores that was open at that time of night (don't tell anyone) and went home with a twelve pack of Lone Star bottles. I got home and had two beers and they just really hit the spot. They hit the spot in a way that no other beer at the time could. It was then that I developed my craving for the occasional Lone Star.

I'm relaying all of this information to convey a message, there is no beer better than any other beer. Each beer has its place. Coming home from that long day, the last thing I would have wanted was a big, hoppy Double IPA or Imperial Stout, despite the fact that I love those beers beyond belief in their place. With the well grilled steak my older brother prepared tonight, the last thing I would have wanted was anything besides the Alaskan Amber that my dad offered me out of his personal stash. Something I'm discovering with my new journey into homebrewing is that even a bad beer can be incredibly enjoyable because you made it. Each beer, whether for flavor, sentimental value or enjoyment has its time and place.

One of my favorite things about our selection is all of the "nostalgia" beers, like Pearl, Schaefer or Schlitz. I'm not sure how many times a man has come in and seen one of these beers and told us about how he used to drink this when he was younger with his buddies and all of the trouble they used to get into. My favorite is the story that a son tells us about remembering his dad drinking the beer and all of the fond memories. Beer has a way of bringing back thoughts of times in our life we may want to relive one sip at a time, even if the beer isn't considered as cool now as it was then.

Too often people come into the store and start out their question with an apology, because they feel the beer they are looking for is below me or the store. I hate to think that these people have interactions with other beer guys or sales staff that have given them the impression that their tastes and choices in beer are somehow inferior or not as valued. Beer is beer. Some are more suited to quiet contemplation and long luxurious sips (like the Belgian Sours I have been craving lately) and others are intended for friends, family, food and a good time. Any beer geek that cannot relate to the entire scope of his or her selection isn't worth what they're being paid. I felt that way when I couldn't answer people's questions on budget brands and I feel that way now. The same goes for the reverse.

What seems to be forgotten in the elevation of beer, the craft beer movement and the developing beer culture is that beer is a beverage for the people, all people, and to be enjoyed with good company during good times and bad. The perceived quality, brand name or stigma surrounding a brew shouldn't prevent you from seeking it out and enjoying it. Don't apologize for your beer. Beer started as a way for workers in fields and farms to hydrate when water quality was questionable and they drank whatever beer was offered. Beer continues to be a way to relax after a long hard day; it will truly be a shame if we lose that. ©



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