

I remember my first real taste of beer when I was 5 years old. I often brought my dad's empty glass to the kitchen sink while stealing that last warm, flat drop of malty goodness along the way. It was enough to fuel my dreams of an ice cold quaff of bubbly nirvana.

One day my dream came true. After a hot day on the golf course, my dad and uncle poured themselves a Miller High Life. My dad downed his straightaway and poured another while my uncle smiled in appreciation of his thirst. This was my break and since my uncle was a cool guy, I knew he'd be my ally. "Dad, can I have a sip?" I asked. My dad shook his head but my uncle exclaimed, "Go ahead! Give the kid a sip, for Christ's sake!" My dad handed me the full glass and the rest was history. The second after that first cold, bubbly swallow, I knew what Heaven was. Glub, glub, glub. By the time my dad could react to snatch the glass back, half of it was gone!

I still have that very glass today. After my dad passed way, I asked my mom for it and keep it in a safe place to use only on his birthday, the anniversary of his passing and on very special occasions when his spirit is in attendance.

From that day on, I believe my destiny was sealed. I grew up sneaking as much beer as I could connive as a youngster. Needless to say, I am seriously guilty of underage drinking as a teenager but was practically a beer connoisseur at legal drinking age. I entered the Army at eighteen and was in Germany a year later enjoying the best the world had to offer. My, have times have changed!

After serving seven of my nine years of military service in Germany, my fascination with beer grew to greater heights. After the Carter administration legalized home brewing, I began making my own and teaching myself every aspect of brewing while living here in Key West. It was a virtual necessity since the flavors I loved were not available at land's end. The challenge was totally mine. I became a craft beer advocate preaching the good word in the wildrness and have been manning my post here for decades.

After only two batches of extract brew, I immediately invested in books and equipment to begin all-grain brewing. There were no brew clubs and no guidance available from other more experienced brewers. There was just me, the Internet, and 150 miles to the closest beer civilization. I immediately joined the American Homebrewers Association and registered Key West's first and only brew club, The Conch Republic B.U.B.B.A.s (Brewers United Brewing Better Ales), with the hopes of attracting others of like mind. For years the only members were the ones coming around to drink the fruits of my labor, never brewing anything themselves. Today, however, we have nearly 40 members with over a dozen active brewers.

In 1998, I invented a kit called the Wort Wizard which harnesses the wasted hydropower from the runoff of a counterflow chiller to pump hot beer wort from the brew kettle, through the chiller and into the fermenter. In addition, the kit automatically aerates the cooled wort and

removed headspace foam that develops in the fermenter as it fills. I created Island Brewing Products to market the kit and have sold it all over the globe through my website at www.wortwizard.com. A Google search of Wort Wizard will confirm its popularity and longevity over the years through many homebrew forums. Hundreds of homebrewers swear by it and I use it myself each time I homebrew.

HOW THE WORT WIZARD WORKS: Bernoulli's Principle essentially states that a partial vacuum exists perpendicular to the flow of a fluid or gas. As the exhaust water of a counterflow chiller exits, it is directed through a Venturi tube (bottleneck) included with the kit. A fluid gun is created on the opposite side of the Venturi's bottleneck where an open port exists perpendicular to the flow. Since Bernoulli states there is a vacuum generated at this point, The Wort Wizard kit connects this port to one side of a two-hole stopper that seals the neck of a carboy fermenter. While air is vacuumed out of one stopper hole, the other stopper hole is connected to the chiller "wort out" while the "wort in" is connected to the brewpot (either by kettle spigot or J-shaped "racking cane" inserted into the hot wort). The Venturi action causes a vacuum to develop inside the fermenter through one stopper hole while wort is literally sucked from the brewpot, through the chiller and into the fermenter via the other stopper hole. Cooled wort entering the fermenter is automatically aerated because it travels down an 18 inch tube inserted through the stopper. This length of this tube is drilled with tiny holes. As wort rushes by these tiny holes to fill the fermenter, more Venturi action is formed at each of these holes. The air still inside the carboy gets sucked into this "wort in" tube. Bubbles form inside this tube and effectively aerate the wort as the carboy fills. As it does, dense foam develops and rides the wort surface level to the carboy neck to the stopper. At this point, the vacuum existing through the other stopper hole simply sucks the foam out of the fermenter, passes it through the Venturi vacuum port and into the chiller exhaust water for easy removal under sealed conditions. If additional aeration is desired after the carboy fills, simply remove the "wort in" tube from the stopper. As long as water keeps flowing through the Venturi (and all the tiny holes in the stopper's "wort in" tube are covered), *outside air* instead of wort will be sucked into the full fermenter. An air filter can be used or bubble lock fashioned if aerial contamination of the wort is a concern.

I have only slowed down once over the past 20 years. In 2005 my home was inundated by hurricane Wilma. I lost most of my brewing equipment to the salt water. For nearly 18 months we lived in a small FEMA travel trailer parked on our front lawn while we rebuilt our house. Nevertheless, the new house plans called for a new brewing area! Before long I was "back in business." It's odd how our blessings come to us! Today I've even transformed an enclosed cargo trailer into a mobile brewery/tap house equipped with electrical service, outlets, lighting, plumbed-in sink, beer faucets (on the side), even satellite TV! It's always a hit at public brew events where I preside as the officially appointed Conch Republic (Beer) Ambassador to Ninkasi, possessing full diplomatic credentials as bestowed upon me by the late Secretary General of the Conch Republic, Sir Peter Anderson. I even have a diplomatic passport and ID! In addition to that title, I became a Certified Cicerone (beer sommelier) in

June of 2011 after passing my exam in San Diego (see www.cicerone.org). In June of 2012, I passed my national BJCP (Beer Judge Certification Program) to become a ranked beer judge and as far as I know of, the only one in the Florida Keys.

I wrote a weekly column entitled *The Keg and I* for a local magazine called *Solares Hill* (the highest point in Key West, 18 ft. above sea level!). Unfortunately, the magazine had to face cut-backs and content was reduced. My non-paid, no-profit career as a beer writer is now on hold pending future markets! Notwithstanding, it was my *duty* as Beer Ambassador of the Conch Republic to do so!

As a homebrewer, I have received numerous awards and certificates for outstanding beers. Among those awards, my Licorice Spiced Porter won two 1st place Blue Ribbons and a Best of Show ribbon on back-to-back years at the Best Florida Beer Championships at the Florida State Fair in Tampa. I have established a local reputation as Key West's hometown brewer, a reputation I am relying on to support the success of Bone Island Brewing.

I am largely responsible (with the help of Conch Republic Liquors, a local liquor store) for the distribution of craft beer in the Florida Keys. Over several years of continuously "lobbying" the owner of Fresh Beer Inc. (now Brown Distributing, the only craft beer distributor in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties), I was able to convince them that they were missing out on a huge untapped market. We finally got their attention by sponsoring a tasting at Conch Republic Liquors. The sales rep came with product for a weekend trip. Not only was the liquor store jam packed, the rep left the Keys that weekend with so many commercial accounts that a FL Keys truck route was dispatched the very next week. The strategy I had always proposed to the distributor was not, "If you build, they will come," but "If you *come*, they will BUILD it!" Consequently, bars featuring only craft beer and other serving locations started popping up all over Key West.

In March of 2012, I was awarded the John G. Doble III Memorial Scholarship by the Florida Brewers Guild to attend the Concise Course in Brewing technology at the oldest brewing academy in the nation, the Siebel Institute in Chicago. The scholarship was awarded for my craft beer advocacy in the Florida Keys, advancing its distribution in a remote part of Florida and to better prepare me for a successful new career with the opening of Bone Island Brewing.

This history was obviously intended to be more entertaining than serious but having a lighthearted approach has always been part of my philosophy. To me, striking a balance in life is crucial and my passion for brewing has helped provide that.

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