

Jack and Ruby's Tobacco Barn

'Singular atmosphere of the old-time country bar'

Newspaper staffs are generally made up of two kinds of workers: reporters and frustrated writers.

Frustrated writers tend to be garrulous and over-dramatic. They also get columns because, while most of their articles deserve printing, they have a tendency of using the first person "I" and to be subjective rather than objective.

I am a frustrated writer I got a column. Now I get to vent my frustrations on you. Bit, never fear, you will have your chance to throw them back in my face. More on the latter later.

State has been a series of experiences I will never forget. Having previously attended a strictly liberal arts university and then an all-technical college, State struck a happy medium as far as academics go. Being from Raleigh, anyway, I tend to get into the social situations that some students never see — most might not want to. Last spring, though, being at State cased me to be thrust into one of the more unique social gathering-type places I have had the fortune to experience.

Located on Garner Road, Jack and Ruby's Tobacco Barn had the singular atmosphere of the old-time country bar. Back when a bar was a bar, (was a bar ... — sorry;

ON WITH THE SHOW LIZ BLUM

Shakespeare), and drinking to a wailing jukebox and shooting a couple games of pool was a Saturday night on the town.

The casts of the directing-class projects presented at and by Thompson Theatre (State's student theater), were personally invited to hold their cast party at this bar by the owners, Jack and Ruby. As it turned out, Jack and Ruby were friends of Burton Russell, instructor and artistic director of Thompson Theatre. Burt Russell is now in Japan for the fall on an exchange type program learning about Kabuki theatre.

Excuse me, I'm straying. Spank my wrist. Onward. Given explicit directions, four of us piled into my trusty Pinto and ventured into the night to find "the wild side of life" supposedly followed by the rest of the cast.

Our first indication that it was an unusual location for a cast party was the presence of trucks and motorcycles in the gravel parking lot. There was also the cinder-block

structure with a Coca-Cola sign declaring that this was "Jack and Ruby's Tobacco Barn."

'Hound Dawg Man'

In the window was a magic-marked sign announcing the presence of the "Hound Dawg Man." Looking at each other, we quickly piled back into my car, locked the doors, rolled up the windows and decided to wait for Burt and the gang. After 10 minutes of breathing carbon monoxide and being eyed by overly large, truck-driving men, Burt, his wife and four of the cast finally arrived.

Jumping out of the car as quickly as we got in, we scurried to Burt's back and chorused, "You go in first." Quietly assuring us of our safety, Burt led us in. Something along the lines of sheep to the slaughter.

Once inside, we were boisterously greeted by a blond woman with a beer in her hand. With hugs for everyone and a hearty North Carolina welcome as only a true Tarheel can do, she stood back and sized us up.

"I'm Ruby and I'm real glad to have y'all. I told Burt that if those kids wanted some place to party, just to bring 'em on." Scanning our faces, she looked straight at me, winked at Burt and his wife, and said, "I don't know about the rest but I see why you brought her. Y'all go on and get a beer. Anything you wanta hear, just tell ol' Hound Dawg. He's got ever'thing."

The bar itself looked like a final resting place. It was lined with about seven good ol' boys planted on stools, shoulders slumped, heads only moving slightly to the right or left every so often to grunt at its neighbor. Their beers must have been absorbed through osmosis because, while they were eventually emptied and replaced, I never saw one bottle-clenched hand raised to a mouth.

We edged between, ordered our beers and sat back in a booth to wait for whatever the evening might hold. Ruby was bouncing around, speaking to everyone, smiling, grabbing guys and taking them out on the pocket-sized dance floor.

Strains of Barbara Mandrell, the Oak Ridge Boys and The Statler Brothers came from the disc jockey's booth, which happened to be an eight-foot table piled with records, speakers, a turntable and an amplifier.

Typical city slickers

After a few beers and six more cast members arrived, we all started racking our brains for names of country-music songs we would like to hear. Typical city slickers, we ended



up with "Mamas, Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys." Fortunately, it was a popular tune with the regulars as well. They had by now accepted our presence and were speaking to various members of our party; telling us to "get up and dance, c'mon it's fun!" (On a 6 feet by 8 feet floor?); "Ya'll act? Show us some acting. C'mon, don't be shy."

Foot stompin'

We, too, were warming up, our roots beginning to surface. Only the most hardened Yankee could not feel the tug of the heart strings at the sweet melodies and true-to-life lyrics of good country music. Not to mention foot stompin'. Our Southern accents became just a little more drawled and pronounced, a little less grammatically correct. Even a Spanish woman who was among our party began to throw a few "y'all's" around.

Then the fast beat of a Charlie Daniels Band tune began and every single one of us crowded onto the floor to clog. Clogging was the current rage at Thompson during the spring semester; while only four or five actually knew the correct steps, the rest of us did an excellent imitation. Our frenetic attempts settled our fate with the regulars. We were "OK" even if we were "them student types."

Southernness

No one lacked for a partner the rest of the night. Beer flowed like water, the one pinball machine pinged its way above the music and everyone was talking as only old Southern friends do who just met an hour ago; but have


already discovered six people they know in common as well as having "people" (that's relatives in Southernese) from the same town born anytime between the Civil War and the present.

Unfortunately, I had a major test the next morning and had to depart the scene fairly early. Choruses of "you come back, hear?" and "Bring a friend, show 'em what partying's supposed to be" followed me to the door.

While you leave most of the bars in Raleigh feeling as anonymous as when you arrived, leaving Jack and Ruby's was like leaving a party at a good friend's home. Feeling slightly ridiculous for my suspicious thoughts upon arrival, I hugged everyone in reach goodbye and spoke the famous Southern farewell, "Thanks so much for such a good time. I'll be back just as soon as I can. Ya'll come see me, you hear?" and drove my trusty Pinto home just like it was a Chevy pick-up.



One last item. About you giving me back what I put out. If you've got anything you want to comment on that isn't exactly editorial material — an item you'd feel would be of interest, a question or a problem you'd like an outside party to ponder — if I can't come up with an answer, someone on the staff is bound to think they can — or just want to see your name in print, drop me a line at "On With the Show," care of the Technician, through campus mail or drop it by the office on the third floor of the Student Center. Ya'll let me hear from you, you hear?



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