

November 5, 2016



Romancing the Foam No. 101

It's mid-July 1970. I am living at El Patio, 8564 S. Dixie Highway, Erie, Michigan somewhere between Monroe, Michigan and Toledo, Ohio. The area is as much Dixie as it is Michigan with a hot dusty southern feel and attitude. In 1970 El Patio is an ex-restaurant. It has peeling burgundy paint over red brick. We are working with migrant farmworkers. They are working tomatoes that ultimately end up as Heinz Ketchup. The restaurant dining room during the day is our office. It has a phone, a desk and some chairs. Mrs. Villarreal (somehow pronounced Bee-HAR-o) sits at the desk and answers the phone and greets people when they come in. At the back are two beds separated from the rest of the room by



a row of chairs. Guillermo and I sleep there at night. During the day we drive around and visit migrant camps. The kitchen has a walk-in cooler and a giant cast iron stove with four ovens, 9 burners, a broiler and a huge flat top grill. Provided we have food, we can cook for 75 with that stove, no sweat. It is like cooking on a Maserati of stoves. I drive a red "unsafe at any speed" Corvair and the front end goes out. It's like driving on rail road ties. Henry Villarreal knows someone who has a baby blue Corvair convertible with a bad transmission. Manuel knows someone who needs some of the parts off my Corvair and one of the Corvair engines and somehow through his trading I end up with the baby blue Corvair convertible for free and have an entire weekend to make a whole car out of two that don't work. Henry Villarreal has a tow truck we can use. Henry also has a box of tools. We tow the Corvair convertible to El Patio with Henry's truck Friday afternoon.

As Guillermo, Ruben, Gordo and I figure out what to do next a group of Viejos (old men) begin collecting to observe, barbecue chicken, drink beer and place bets. They bring chairs out from the restaurant and position them strategically around our working area. They bet a considerable quantity of beer that the four of us cannot drive a workable car a mile north to the Erie Bar by closing Saturday night, buy a case of beer and drive back. Guillermo is a bit of a hippie, always happy and very mellow and frequently a cause in mellowness in others so he is good to have around but not very mechanical or productive. Ruben is bookish, bright, less mechanical than Guillermo but very earnest and wanting to be helpful. Gordo is 15. He is staying with us because he has nowhere else to stay. He is so happy that we are letting him help and he probably knows more than any of us what we are doing. We are going to take

November 5, 2016



both engines out of the Corvairs, connect the good transmission from my old Corvair with the good engine from the convertible and put the engine and transmission back into the convertible. We use Henry's truck to lift the cars up, put them down on cement blocks and then lift the engines out. The parking lot lights are bright enough to sort of work under at night. By midnight Friday we have the engines out of both cars.



We are up by 7:00 Saturday and after some tortillas and beans we are back under the convertible trying to get the engine and transmission back in. It is not easy positioning an engine and transmission into a Corvair using a tow truck. We can't get the end of the boom directly over where the engine and transmission need to go so it requires a lot of pushing, prying and cursing. This is becoming something of a sporting event as people gather to observe our progress and place bets on the result. No one is allowed to

give us advice but we do get cheers for our occasional successes and laughter for our more egregious mistakes. Manuel periodically checks our progress and with all the exuberance of a Sábado Gigante host, announces it to the crowd in Spanish. By mid-afternoon someone shows up with a guitar and people are busy making food on the restaurant stove for everyone. It's a party. We have all the parts in but things are not working right. By dinner – which we eat under the car – we have the engine running but the car won't move. Around 11:00 at night Gordo shifts something around and Viola! We have reverse. We put the top down, climb into the car and drive backwards down the shoulder of Dixie Highway north to the Erie Bar, load up on beer and make it back. After some heated discussion in Spanish, the crowd decides that we won the bet.

The next morning Leo Arrellano's cousins show up. In a little over an hour and with much laughter at how bad we screwed things up, they fix the car so it has all its gears, tune the engine up, and attend to anything else the car needs. Henry and Manuel come later, collect all the left over parts and distribute them throughout the community.

Now that I have transitioned from kid under the car to Viejo, what kind of beer would I drink while watching 4 kids fix a car over a weekend with a couple of dozen of my close friends?

The first beer that comes to mind is Yoerg's Beer (4.9% alcohol by volume). The beer has a name that appeals to people working on cars and it evokes those failed 70's breweries like Goebel, Pfeiffer and Meister Brau that we may even have been drinking at El Patio all those years ago. I am expecting a fizzy yellow beer with flavor slightly above the norm like some of the old faded classics but I am pleasantly surprised.



This is a "steam beer" and uses a "steam beer" yeast strain from Bavaria. Steam beer is a pre-refrigeration lager. It is fermented at higher temperatures than standard lager which produces more fruity esters. The last steam beer brewery still standing - Anchor - patented the name - Anchor Steam Beer - so everyone else now calls their steam beer California Common.

Anthony Yoerg opened his St. Paul, Minnesota brewery in 1849 and it survived until 1952. In 2016, St. Paul sales and marketing guy Thomas Keim resurrected the brand and released the first batch of Yoerg's beer for sale in 64 years. Yoerg's beer pours slightly hazy copper amber under a persistent, cream colored foam cap sustained by continuous streams of bubbles rapidly rising from the bottom of the glass. The glass gives off rich malt aromas with a hint of caramel and spice. A rich malt backbone with light caramel and biscuit finishes with a moderately high bitter hop accent. The hop bitterness and malt sweetness are nicely

balanced. Yoerg's beer has a relatively clean fermentation character. Any fruity esters in the beer are faint. This is a very well made, well balanced full flavored beer that you can drink every day. I rate Yoerg's Beer 84.

Shiner Wicked Ram IPA (6.0% alcohol by volume, 55 International Bittering Units) is another promising option. Shiner beer is the oldest brand in Texas – it's been around since 1909 - and the name has the working on a car in a white T-Shirt with a pack of Camels rolled up in your sleeve cachet. Spoetzl Brewery is in Shiner Texas, hence the name of the beer. Shiner Wicked Ram exudes hint of pine, citrus and tropical fruit aromas with faint melon and a trace of bread crumb. It pours hazy gold amber with a 2" white foam cap that takes 4 minutes to reduce to a thick film that marks each drink with a medium thick line. Wicked Ram has a nice blend of flavors that highlight biscuit and berry. The malt is medium to medium low, the hop flavors and bitterness are medium. It has a medium to medium light body and soft medium carbonation. It's a beer with a working on a car name without the fizzy yellow beer lack of taste. I rate this very easy to drink beer 82.





Fulton's new production facility sits in Nordeast Minneapolis, an area originally populated by sturdy Eastern European stock drawn to the area by sawmills and grain mills that used the Mississippi for power. Even today, the area maintains a definite working class feel. On bike rides through Nordeast on more than one occasion I have passed people working on cars in the street with neighbors on hand to watch, can of beer in hand. Fulton has recently released a beer – Fulton Standard Lager – ideally suited for such activities. At 4.5% alcohol by volume, nursing a few cans over an afternoon of car repair watching is not going to cause too much damage. It comes in 16 ounce cans so you do not have to get up as often to get a new can and I can fit a can or two in the pockets of my cargo pants. Opening the can releases medium to medium low spicy, floral hop aromas with a hint of pine seasoning light malt. It pours beautiful, brilliant copper amber with streams of bubbles rapidly rushing to the surface to produce a thin,

sudsy white head that rapidly reduces to a film. It is late autumn and I am enjoying comparing the color of the beer with the color of the changing leaves. Standard is an all malt lager and this is apparent upon the first sip as a wide array of malt flavors ranging from doughy bread to light biscuit roll over the tongue. Malt and hop spiciness combine and there is a faint fruit note. It starts with a light sweetness but by mid-palate hop bitterness grows to medium leading to a crisp dry finish and a lingering malty bitter aftertaste. The body is medium to medium light and the carbonation is medium. This is a great beer for raking leaves, watching other people work, or God forbid, mowing lawns. I rate it 87.

Shortly after fixing the Corvair, Guillermo and I found college scholarships for Leo and one of his cousins. By the mid-seventies Leo graduated and was running a social program I think in Kalamazoo. Gordo eventually wandered off but he had resilience so we knew he would do OK. Ruben became an attorney. I don't know whatever happened to Guillermo but I am pretty sure he is mellow and happy. The Corvair threw a rod my last day in Erie and huge billows of black smoke poured out the back as I coasted down Dixie Highway towards El Patio. I made it within 100 yards and then walked back. I called Henry, told him he could have the car. The keys were in the ignition and the title is signed and in the glove box. I threw my gear into a large duffel bag, hitchhiked north and never went back to Erie. El Patio has a new paint job, the windows and doors are smaller and it is now Gene's Repair Service. He fixes trucks.