



Romancing the Foam No. 102



Wild Bill Schiller. He was built like a beer keg with arms and legs topped by a basketball sporting a permanent peevish grin, a pinkish hue and a thinning mane of wavy strawberry blond hair. He lived with a John Belushi throttle jammed to the floor intensity. I don't believe I ever saw him sober. We worked at the Bay City Michigan Coca-Cola Bottling Plant. He drove a truck. I loaded them. His route included the roughest areas of Saginaw Michigan. More than once he returned to the plant beaten and robbed. As compensation, management gave him first dibs on the church picnics and local festivals. He picked me to help him on these ventures because I was big and could easily handle the Cornelius kegs, CO₂ canisters and other paraphernalia needed to serve Coke to the masses. We became friends.

I worked the 3 to midnight shift. Anyone with any authority left the plant by 7:00. We would often finish up the trucks by 8:00 or so and then wander down to the Saginaw River, about 6 blocks away, drink beer and swim in our underwear off an old wooden pier that once served Great Lakes cargo ships. The pier was a hundred feet or so long, wide enough to drive a truck on and at the end stood about 10 or 15 feet above the water. Someone had nailed 2' long chunks of 2 x 4 to a post near the end of the pier to serve as a ladder to get us back up on the pier after diving in. As I look back, I am amazed I don't glow in the dark. At the point where we swam, the Saginaw River carried the effluent of a dozen or so industrial cities, several foundries, a couple of GM plants, at least two or three chemical plants and a large watershed dominated by intensive agriculture. The Saginaw River at the pier was about half again as wide as the Mississippi running through downtown Minneapolis and had a shipping channel running

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through the middle. Wild Bill joined us frequently and did things like swim across the river in his underwear, buy a case of beer (cans if I remember correctly) from the tavern on the opposite bank and then swim back. With his body, we never believed he could do that.

One night our group consisted of Wild Bill, myself, Pepsi Joe (drove a Pepsi truck), George Besaw (coke driver), JP (fellow warehouse guy), Coastguard Joe and Dave (in case someone drowned), and foreman Russ's brother also named Bill. Foreman Russ's brother Bill was slow and would often get confused but we all covered for him so no one in management noticed. Russ's brother Bill was also somewhat fragrant from lack of hygiene. About 11 or so Wild Bill hit upon an idea that we would get a bar of soap and all bathe in the river – including Russ's brother Bill – and that would solve the fragrance issue. We had no soap. But Bill reasoned that Blind Bob – who lived across the street from the pier, might have a bar of soap to spare. It's late at night. Wouldn't we wake him up? No. He's blind. He doesn't know when its day or night. If he's awake he will answer the door and if he's not, he won't. So Wild Bill runs down the dock in his underwear to get soap and returns with Blind Bob and a bar of soap.

Blind Bob is maybe 5'4" or 5'5" and somewhat wiry. Blind Bob has never gone swimming off the pier in front of his house. Actually he hasn't gone swimming much anywhere. Our challenge moves from washing Russ's brother Bill to figuring out how to get Blind Bob into the water. He's game but nervous. He doesn't swim. George Besaw, whose parents are deaf mutes, helps us think through this. George walks Blind Bob through what is going to happen and what he should do – like hold his breath when he jumps, when he hits the water, relax and rise up. Coast Guard Joe and Dave, invited by Wild Bill due to their nautical abilities, aren't much help – they can't swim. I've had lifeguard training and JP can swim pretty well so George positions both of us under the dock. Blind Bob jumps. He nearly does a belly



smacker but that keeps him from sinking very far. He is a little freaked out and coughing but we calm him down and he is quite happy. Blind Bob is done jumping off the pier but he wants to spend some time in the water so we find him a cross beam he can hang onto while we all jump off the pier and thrash around in the water. We all soap up and wash off and then plunge into the river to rinse off. When it's time to go George gets on the dock and talks Blind Bob up the 2" x 4" ladder. JP follows Blind Bob up and gives him advice on where to put his feet, while Wild Bill and I stay in the water in case Blind Bob falls off. He makes it to the top, George helps him back up on the pier and we all sit and have a last beer as the sun slowly rises in the east behind us and the song birds awake.

What beer would I drink now while teaching blind Bob how to jump off a pier? LTD Brewing Company REM Real English Monster. I would choose this one for Blind Bob. This is a whiskey barrel aged English style Barleywine packed with

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enough alcohol - 12 % alcohol by volume – to give one the courage or at least to strip off enough inhibition to leap into the abyss. It decants a hazy translucent tea color with a half inch cream to light tan lacy, sticky foam collar that disintegrates moderately fast.

Continual streams of slow moving bubbles rise from the bottom of the glass. The glass exudes malty, alcoholic, bourbon aromas laced with vanilla and caramel. REM has very robust bourbon, malt, caramel, vanilla flavors with a dash of balancing hop bitterness in the background and a lingering fruit and alcohol aftertaste. The beer has a very creamy texture with a chewy body and soft, gentle carbonation. This big boozy beer drinks like a very pleasant bourbon mixed drink. I rate it 85.



Clown Shoes Evil Crawfish has a name appropriate for sitting on a dock, swimming in a river incapable of sustaining life, talking someone who can't see into jumping in. Crawfish, if they were capable of living in the Saginaw River in the late 60's would certainly be evil. Evil Crawfish is an American Amber ale on steroids. It has an inhibition dulling 9.0% alcohol by volume. Clown Shoes calls it an Imperial Red Ale. The beer pours brilliant ruby brown under a 2" cream to tan foam collar that lasts 2 minutes. Streams of slowly rising bubbles refresh the foam. Rich malty dark bread and dark dried fruit aromas rise from the glass. There are some faint floral and spicy grain notes. Evil Crawfish attacks the tongue with rich malty caramel

to toffee and dark dried fruit. The malt flavors are medium high and are balanced by a medium to medium high bitterness. The hop tropical fruit flavors are medium and support the malt. The alcohol is high and contributes nice flavors to balance the malt. The malt, alcohol and hop bitterness give it a bourbon quality. The beer is creamy, smooth, full bodied, medium to medium low carbonation, with moderate warming. While you know the alcohol is there, there is nothing harsh or hot. I would drink this and perhaps jump off a pier. I rate it 90.

A beer that comes to mind for polishing off the evening is Kleinbrouwerij De Glazen Toren's Jan De Lichte (7.0%



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abv), named after a famous 18th century robber. He terrorized rural parts of what is now Belgium during the 1740's and over time gained a reputation as a Robin Hood type character. Most accounts indicate that he was not – but he was a rogue and his roguishness fits Wild Bill. Jan De Lichte means John Light. He was executed in the Grote Markt (Grand Square) in Alast, 11 November, 1748. De Glazen Toren is a small brewery started by a couple of home brewers. The brewery opened veteran's day, 2004 in the Belgian region of Alast. The beer uses four grains and they brew it with coriander and Curaçao peels. The brewers describe their beer as a double white. For my tastes, it has everything you would want in a Belgian Witbier. Jan De Lichte pours hazy yellow gold with a 3" mousse like foam cap that persists and etches the sides of the glass with Belgian lace. The beer has moderate to moderately low aromas of citrus, orange, coriander, wheat and a hint of grapefruit. It has a very creamy, full flavored palate with the coriander and Curaçao peels standing out supported by wheat and definite honey notes. The malt stays in the background and is medium to medium low. The honey is medium low. The coriander and Curaçao peels are individually medium but combined are medium high. The beer achieves a good balance between the malts, the Belgian yeast flavors, the added spices and the malty honey notes. Hop flavors and bitterness are medium to medium low. There is a very faint banana note in the background. It has a zesty, dry finish. The honey, coriander and Curaçao peels come out more in the aftertaste. The body is medium light to medium. The beer's smooth, creamy texture with a hint of tartness gives it a bigger feel in the mouth than it actually has. This is a perfect beer to drink while watching the sun crawl up over the treetops on a warm summer morning. I rate it 90.

The beers I have selected for teaching Blind bob to jump off a pier have nothing in common with the Drewrys, Goebels or Pfeiffers we most likely drank at the time. My Mom is blind and I know blind people like a good clean floor with all the furniture in the same place. Jumping off a pier abandons all that. LTD's REM and Clown Shoes' Evil Crawfish have the alcohol to build the courage to do that. They are also fine beers for sitting back, sipping and forgetting all that ails you. Jan De Licht comes with a nice folk tale and is a fine beer for sipping while watching either a sunrise or a sunset.