



Romancing the Foam No. 103



Ira Scott. Ira owned the Trading Post. The sign said “We Buy, Sell or Trade Anything of Value” and he did. I began working for Ira soon after I got my driver’s license. I worked weekday evenings and all day Saturday. He paid me \$20 per week. He hired me because I was big, could wrestle a refrigerator, stove or couch out of a house damage free with minimal help from him and could fit behind the steering wheel of his truck. Ira couldn’t fit. He weighed 675 pounds or more. I could tell it bothered him – in his garage he had 4 or 5 industrial scales capable of handling

progressively heavier weights none of them in use anymore. When I knew him, to weigh himself Ira would drive to his friend Abe Surrath’s. Abe owned a junkyard and had a truck scale. Abe would figure out Ira’s weight by weighing Ira’s car with Ira in it and then weigh the car without Ira.

Ira had been an oil rigger during the Central Michigan post war oil boom and weighed about 275 at the time which sat well on his 6’6” frame. But then the oil boom went bust. Ira bought a trailer that sold popcorn, cotton candy and candy apples like the kind you see at county fairs and opened a fruit stand. And he ate. In a few years, he made enough money that he sold the fruit stand (he kept the popcorn trailer) and opened Shorty’s Pool hall in a basement in the back of downtown Midland Michigan. He sat in the pool hall, ate popcorn, peanuts and sausages and played cards. The pool hall went along well for a few years until the town fathers suddenly got up-tight and had Sheriff Maxwell shut it down for gambling. Everyone in town knew all along that people played pool and cards for money at Shorty’s – I knew it when I was 12 - but I guess the town fathers got tired of it.

Ira took the money he made from Shorty’s and started the Trading Post. His years of playing cards and running a pool hall ingrained in Ira the ability to read people which made him good at buying and selling just about anything. Most nights Ira and I would sit in his office and fix TVs, Hi-Fis and radios, watch the original Star Trek, sell the occasional used chest of drawers or refrigerator and talk. Ira was like the dad everyone enduring mid-adolescence would want – nonjudgmental, good sense of humor, never angry and much wiser than I. Over our roughly 3 years working together Ira guided me through several adolescent emotional traumas, lost girlfriends and more than once talked me out of doing something stupid. He’d do it by asking good questions and laughing.

I think about Ira this time of year because of his humanity. As I worked there I started noticing that around Christmas tradesmen would come in and sell Ira their tools and he gave them a good deal on them – often what they asked for. Then after Christmas these guys would come in and buy their tools back for not much more than what Ira paid for them. Another time Ira had me deliver a gas stove to a young mother with 4 stair-step children – from about 1 to 4. As I hooked the stove up, lit the pilot light,

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tested the burners, the 4-year-old said “Oh boy mommy now we can have cookies for Christmas.” I got back to the store, and although he wouldn’t admit it, I figured out that Ira never charged that mother for the stove. He did that more than once while I worked for him. He made his money off people who had it and helped out where he could, those who didn’t.

When I was living in Ann Arbor without a phone around 1974 I got a card from Mom saying that Ira died – 47, heart attack. I don’t know if it was true but she said they buried him in a piano box. I still think of him even after half a century. This time of year, I always have a beer or two for Ira and sit back and watch American Pickers on TV.



This year I decide to honor Ira I will drink some American Barleywine. This is an American take on the classic English Barleywine. American brewers use American hops that have more assertive flavors than their English counterparts and they tend to use more of them. The result is a rich, strong beer (8.0 to 12.0% alcohol by volume) packed with flavor (50 - 100 International Bittering Units). The color ranges from amber to copper tinted garnet and may occasionally be light brown. American Barleywines stand up to aging developing smoother flavors but the hops generally mask oxidative flavors typical of aged British Barleywines. I sorted through my notes and reviewed 59 barleywines I have had over the past few years and picked out 3 of the best (for my American Barleywine reviews check out <http://www.romancingthefoam.com/Beer%20Styles/beer-style-American-Barelywine.html>).

Great Divide Brewing Company's Old Ruffian Barley Wine packs 10.2% alcohol by volume. Old Ruffian is a bargain. You can pick up a 4 pack of 12 ounce bottles for \$14 or a 750-ml bottle (about 25 ounces) for \$8. The 4 pack costs less per ounce and a 12-ounce bottle is a better serving size for a 10.2% alcohol by volume beer.

Old Ruffian pours medium brown with ruby highlights with streams of bubbles slowly rising to the surface and produces a 1/2" cream colored foam cap that reduces to a thin, lacy film. After the head drops, swirling the glass reveals some thin legs. My bottle is exactly one year old and the beer smells like dark fruit, plum, dried fruit, dark sugars, molasses, malt, grain, spice, cake and a hint of coke. Hop aromas are light, malt aromas are medium high, sugar aromas are medium and fruit aromas are medium high. Starting very creamy and moderately sweet, the beer quickly leads to a big, bold bitterness laced with alcohol, malt, dark fruit, and dried fruit flavors. The bitterness is big but is well matched by the malt, alcohol and yeast flavors. Fruit flavors are medium. The alcohol is soft, mildly warming but not harsh or hot. Old Ruffian is full-bodied to chewy with medium low carbonation. While very big, this beer has outstanding balance and complexity. I rate it 95.



Lakefront Beer Line is a USDA certified organic barley wine. They have aged the latest version for 14 months in Catocin Creek organic rye whiskey barrels and it packs 14% alcohol by volume. My notes are from 2014 for a certified organic version of Beer Line that has not been aged in oak. The 2014 Lakefront Brewery Beer Line clocks in at 12.5% alcohol by volume. It smells like alcohol, sweet, fruit, dark caramel malts, and nuts. It pours brilliant chestnut tinted amber with a thin head and it produces light legs with a swirl of the glass. It starts with an initial sweetness, dark dried fruit, plums, alcohol, a touch of caramel with a lightly spiced, a hint of anise and possibly coriander, ending with a dry aftertaste. A touch of malty grain adds character to the hops, alcohol and malt sweetness in the aftertaste. It has a medium to medium full body, oily and warming. Beer Line is very well balanced with a warmth that grows as you drink it. It has a moderate touch of heat. I rate Beer Line 95.

Sierra Nevada Brewing Company Sierra Nevada Bigfoot Barleywine Style Ale (9.6% alcohol by volume) has become a cult classic since its introduction in 1983. It is also a bargain at \$14.99 per six pack. The big, burly beer pours brilliant reddish amber with a finely bubbled light tan foam cap with moderate retention. The foam produces good lace. Sierra Nevada stuffs Bigfoot with whole cone Pacific Northwest hops and rich pale and caramel malt and you can confirm this with the first sniff as the aromas reek rich malt over alcohol and hops. Big malt leads the flavor with a hint of sweetness backed by alcohol that quickly leads to a bold, hoppy finish. Bigfoot has an extraordinarily creamy chewy body. The alcohol is pleasantly warming and not hot or harsh. The malt, hops and alcohol are all big but surprisingly well balanced. Bigfoot ages well. I try to buy a six pack every year and then drink a bottle from the six pack each year. Every year the beer tastes a little different as the flavors mature. This beer is a delight to drink next to a fire with a chunk of blue cheese and slices of a fresh baguette. It also works with a rich bread pudding. I rate it 99.

So this year I am remembering Ira with a few glasses of Barelywine, a few shows of American Pickers, and some rich blue cheese. I remember his laugh, the numerous times he asked: "are you sure you want to do that?", the people he helped and all the A. J. Liebling-esque characters who hung around him.

