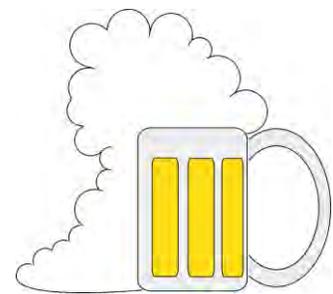


Romancing the Foam No. 109



Its March 1972. I had hitchhiked up to Newberry Michigan from down state to meet up with my then girlfriend Jane. Her father Ralph is driving us the next morning to Sault Ste Marie Canada where we will pick up a bus to Sudbury Ontario and catch a train to Montreal and from there a bus to Burlington Vermont. We are on our way to visit our dear friend, Murray Bookchin, philosopher, author of 20 books, writer, teacher, anarchist, libertarian socialist and creator of social ecology. I had talked the university out of a grant to study anarchism and philosophy with Murray for a couple of weeks.

Murray is fifty at the time and he is living in an apartment on Main Street above a storefront on the south side of City Hall Park in downtown Burlington with his wife Bea, her boyfriend Tommy, Murray and Bea's teenage daughter Debbie, and a couple of hangers on. Our study consists of hour or two sessions in the morning and afternoon discussing the preface to Hegel's Phenomenology and assorted discussions throughout the rest of the day on various social and political issues and hanging out with various intellectuals and oddballs in the taverns and coffee houses of Burlington.

Bea is about 10 years younger than Murray and her boyfriend Tommy is about my age. Tommy is Irish as hell and from the Bronx. Tommy has a pinkish complexion and bright red hair – the same color as Ronald McDonald's – curly and non-hippie medium length. He is slightly larger than mid-sized, muscular and drives truck. Tommy always has a look on his face like he has just seen or thought of something funny or is about to do something crazy. We hit it off with Tommy and when we are not with Murray we spend a lot of time with Tommy.

On the evening March 17, the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Burlington catches the fire and illuminates the entire horizon to the north. It is three blocks north of Murray's apartment and he is

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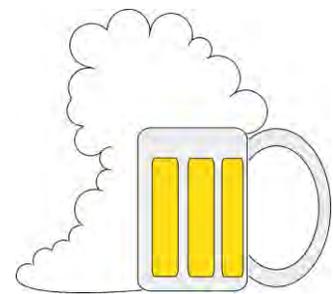


convinced that the whole downtown will burn down because from even three blocks away chunks of smoldering ash fall from the sky. His life's work is in the apartment and we spend some time helping Murray carry boxes of notes down the stairs to the entry way so we can get them out of there in a hurry if our building catches fire. Tommy is electric. He is crawling out of his skin with excitement and must see the fire. We finally grab some lawn chairs, a couple six packs and get as close to the fire as the Burlington Police and Fire Department will allow us. The police and fire people are friendly, polite and many appear to know Tommy so they let us get as close as safety will allow and direct us to a spot that is out of the way of their work. Tommy's excitement and comradery with everyone around him makes it a fun fire and we hang out there most of the night. Around dawn we share our remaining beer with a couple of firemen on their way home and head back to the apartment.

So, some 45 years later what beers would I drink with Tommy while basking in the heat of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception fire?



Baltika Breweries Baltika #9 Extra Lager is pretty much a no-brainer for drinking while watching a fire with Tommy. The Russians brewed this as a socially responsible lower alcohol alternative to vodka but at 8.0% alcohol by volume it is in the range of Malt Liquor beers of no socially redeeming value such as Colt 45, Olde English 800, and Mickey's. These beers earned a hip-hop rep as a 40 due to their 40-ounce glass or plastic bottles. Baltika # 9 does them better, coming in a 1.41 liter or 48-ounce plastic bottle. The single bottle packs a little more alcohol than 5 12-ounce bottles of 5.0% alcohol by volume lagers. Two or three Baltika # 9s would have kept Tommy and I going for the evening. Baltika # 9's reviews suffer somewhat from its association with malt liquor, perhaps from its origin in Russia and because it does not travel well. Drink this beer fresh and it is a fine beer. As soon as I unscrew the cap, I heave a sigh of relief - this beer smells fresh with aromas dominated by rich grainy malt, bread crumb with a light hop note. It's beautiful in the glass, sitting brilliant gold with streams of rising bubbles blanketed by 1" off-white layer of foam with moderate retention. The palate is malty with a trace of caramel and some green apple in the background that grows in the aftertaste. The malt and green apple are medium and the bitterness is medium high. There is mild warming but the alcohol is not hot or harsh. It has a medium body and medium to medium low carbonation. The carbonation in the glass bottled version is higher and taste a little better and slightly less alcoholic. Despite the green apple flavors - they balance well with the malt and hops - the beer works. Baltika # 9 is the perfect beer for sitting in the backyard and smoking a brisket. I rate it 80.



California firefighters founded and owned Fireman's Brew, Inc. They strive to deliver top quality beer while giving the beer drinking public an opportunity to salute America's firefighters. The brewery pledges a percentage of their profits every year to aid families of fallen firefighters and they donate product and staff time to organizations that support first responders. Fireman's Brew Redhead Ale (5.5% alcohol by volume) would have been a worthy beer to drink at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception fire and share with some firefighters as they packed up. The beer is an American Amber Ale. It smells malty with some light toast and caramel over light fruit aromas in the background. It pours brilliant amber to medium brown. Streams of bubbles scurry to the join a 1" tan cap with good retention. The flavors start with rich malt, light toast, caramel, fruit and raisin. Hop bitterness is medium low. Fireman's Redhead Ale dries on the finish. The bitterness is not aggressive but provides balance to the hops and helps pull the beer together. It is very creamy with a medium body and

carbonation. While nothing stands out, the beer is flavorful and easy to drink. I rate it 75.

Insight Brewing Chapter LXXIV: Taming The Devil's Companion somehow seems an appropriate beer for two guys sitting in lawn chairs all night watching a church burn down. It is an English Porter with 5.3% alcohol by volume. Malt rules the aroma with smells of nuts, spicy malt and faint chocolate. It pours deep dark brown under a two-inch lacy tan cap with good retention. The palate is nutty with faint chocolate. A medium high bitterness balances the medium malty sweetness producing a high-priced gourmet chocolate note that lingers into the finish. There are no harsh or burnt roast flavors. The very creamy and smooth beer has a medium body and medium carbonation. I have had this both on tap and from the can and I like the canned version much better. I rate the tap version 80 and the canned version



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87. The canned version is creamier and smoother. This is a very pleasant and satisfying beer to drink as the moon sets over Lake Champlain.



As the sun crawled up over the eastern horizon, Tommy and I dragged our lawn chairs and spent carcasses back to the apartment, and stumbled up the too long flight of stairs. I got in a few hours' sleep before morning Hegel class but even after a pot of coffee it was far from my best effort. After those weeks in Burlington, I never saw Tommy again, but I imagine he has had a good time with his life and has made mine richer because of it. I saw Murray a couple more times and talked to him a several more. He died July 30, 2006. I miss him.



As a follow up to *Romancing the Foam 108*, a longtime friend, Dick Cronk, related his own Shakey Jake story. In the early 70's Dick and Linda eloped, got married and on their wedding day passed through Saginaw Michigan, picked Jake up hitchhiking and took him to Ann Arbor. As they dropped him off in Ann Arbor, Jake sold Dick a Shakey Jake T-shirt at full price. A couple decades later while visiting his mother at the U of M hospital, Dick bumped into Jake at a local coffee shop, related the story of how Jake sold him a Shakey Jake T-Shirt on his wedding day for full price. Jake reached into his bag, pulled out a T-shirt and proclaimed, "and I'm going to do it again!" and sold Dick the shirt in the photo.

My sister in law, and it turns out several friends either have celiac disease or for some other reason require a gluten-free diet. To give them some options, I hunted down and reviewed 27 gluten free or gluten reduced beers. I have posted a page with links to these reviews at: <http://www.romancingthefoam.com/Gluten-Free-and-Gluten-Reduced-Beer.html>.