



Romancing the Foam No. 121



I had my first sip of beer some time in the early 50's and I was in the last throws of toddlerhood. My dad gave me a sip. I don't remember how I liked it. In grade school my Dad used to have poker parties and my parents had the occasional party in our basement. My brothers and I used to sneak down the next morning and eat up any left-over chips and drink the dregs out of the beer bottles – probably Stroh's, Pfeiffer's or Goebel's – popular brands around the middle of Michigan at that time. The all too common smokers' practice of dousing their butts in the near empty bottles of beer quickly discouraged that practice. I have always found Stroh's drinkable – fresh from the bottle and without cigarette butts – but probably as much for nostalgic reasons as for the quality of the beer.

Not too long after that my Dad and a neighbor took up wine making. He had 4 5-gallon carboys bubbling away, and I learned to siphon, sneaking off the occasional pint or two and replacing the missing beverage with water. The wine was not very good, and my meddling did nothing to help and probably encouraged my Dad and neighbor to take up chess instead of wine making.

In the early 60's stores still sold unpasteurized cider and I learned that if I kept it long enough it would get fizzy and much more interesting. I would hide gallon jugs in my closet with a sock over the top to keep the flies out and let the gases escape. After a while, my Mom found the jugs and convinced me I would get ptomaine poisoning from drinking the fermented cider.

In the fifth grade I lied about my age and got a newspaper route – I was a year or two too young but landed the job because of my size and because of my deception, I did very well. I delivered a handful of Bay City Times, Saginaw News's, and Detroit News's every day to Solosky's Market on Midland's Circle and they sold Blue Ribbon Malt Extract with a notice on the side of the side that it was: "For the preparation of distinctive foods, of an agreeably superior flavor, and at the same time of very high nutritive value." You could also get a cookbook to go with the extract with a



somewhat rotund rosy cheeked 30's era matron with hair pulled into a bun on the cover. The book's foreward announces that "the story of Blue Ribbon Malt Extract is a story of modern business magic—a reminder of the old saying that is a man can make a fine product the world will come to his door for it." The book bursted with recipes for making various breads, cookies, pies, cakes and other depression era dishes out of Blue Ribbon malt Extract (you can down load a copies of the recipe book here:

<https://repository.duke.edu/dc/ea/CK0041>) but everyone knew you bought the extract – especially during prohibition – to make beer and making beer with Blue Ribbon Malt Extract was illegal until 1978 when President Jimmy Carter signed H.R. 1337 into law. So on one bright September afternoon I bought a few cans of this product of modern business magic and put them into my newspaper bag. Doug

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Solosky – owner John Solosky’s entertaining brother who often clerked at the store advised me if I “intended to make bread,” I should buy some yeast. Equipped with the malt extract, 2 packets of Red Star bread yeast, several one-gallon glass bottles that used to hold apple cider and considerable youthful enthusiasm a Junior High friend of mine (I forget his name) and I proceeded to make beer. We each ended up with three jugs of beer of a sort. Learning from my cider experience, I stored my jugs in a knee wall attic off my bedroom with socks covering the tops. My mother never went there. The result contained some alcohol but was cloudy, with chunks of yeast floating about, a little funky, and sweet because I bought the unhopped extract rather than the hopped extract. It was awful.



Shortly following this experience, my brother Kerry decided to make ginger beer for a school project. He intended a soda pop but somehow got the sugar wrong and ended up with something closer to 3.2 beer. It gave you a little buzz and actually was quite drinkable. The British brewer Crabbies makes a 4.8% alcohol by volume ginger beer with much more punch than my brother ever intended. This is a nice alternative for those looking for gluten free beverages. Its light with a richer, more intense ginger flavor than Canada Dry or Vernors and has some pleasant citrus notes. It finishes with a pleasant ginger burn.

I made beer a couple of times from kits in the 70’s and these were actually drinkable. I went to graduate school at the University of Toronto and there ran into **The Good Life** (rerun as **Good Neighbors** on PBS) – a BBC sitcom about 40-year-old Tom Good – a London plastics designer who suffers a

mid-life crisis and talks his wife Barbara into going back to land and becoming totally self-sufficient on their suburban London home and as part of their efforts transformed their garden produce into various pickles and homemade wines – such as pea pod wine. By the early 80’s I had a garden and made pea pod wine, plum wine, carrot whiskey, goldenrod mead, gooseberry, wine, raspberry wine, a variety of meads, melomels, metheglyns, piments, hypocrases, and cysers. I also made beer – probably about 300 batches over the decade. The wine, mead and cider brewing embraced the principles of **The Good Life** provided the satisfaction of making something out of things I grew or foraged. The beer, on the other hand, was what I liked to drink.





.....the joy of.....
brewing
cider, mead,
and herbal wine

HOW TO CRAFT SEASONAL FAST-BREW FAVORITES AT HOME



Nancy Koziol

Very little information existed when I started brewing and most of it was British. Much of my learning came from trial and error and my errors were plentiful. We made most of our equipment from scratch. Today's brewing equipment is far more sophisticated and expensive than anything I ever imagined but also produces much better beer, wine, cider, wine and mead. The books are also much better but many of them can be a little intimidating. I have reviewed many of them in *Romancing the Foam* and I recently reviewed Nancy Koziol's **The Joy of Brewing Cider, Mead, and Herbal Wine** – you can find the review at: (<https://www.romancingthefoam.com/Books/book-Koziol-The-Joy-of-Brewing-Cider-Mead-and-Herbal-Wine.html>). She uses one-gallon batches and most of the equipment you need you already have or can pick up cheap. She liked my review so much, she sent me a free book and one to give away. If you send me an email (pmulloy@romancingthefoam.com) with the date of when I posted the review of

Nancy's book, I will put your name in a hat and my grandkids will draw a winner from the hat and I will send the winner a free copy of the book. I will conduct the drawing on January 25th and announce the winner in the next *Romancing the Foam*.