

# Enjoy a Cheap Beer Tasting

As a guy who's had to think about mortality, brain cancer blogger Adam Hayden recommends finding meaning in the mundane.

May 21, 2024 By [Adam Hayden](#)

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Content Note: If not clear from the description, this post includes references to alcohol. You may not drink for a number of very good reasons that I very much respect. I want to inform you about this content in case you would rather not read references to drinking. -a.

I reached legal drinking age around 2002. I was a barista scraping together rent and eating leftover Panera sandwiches that my roommate saved from the garbage at the end of his shift, and by roommate, I mean he slept on the couch.

We hopped the fence pretty regularly to swim in the community pool; hopping the fence to indicate the gate was locked, and by the gate being locked, I mean the pool was closed. It was after midnight, after all.

No one seemed much to mind because I'm sure we weren't quiet, and I don't remember any disgruntled screaming from neighbors or citations left on the apartment front door. Slinging coffee, living in an apartment, barely making rent, buddy crashing on the couch, and eating two day old Panera sandwiches; I wouldn't call this winning.

Probably a rite of passage, though.

I ended up there after a year in south Jersey that I'll tell you about in a future post, because that's all good stuff too, but the more salient story for this post is being dismissed from IU after three semesters and screwing up academic probation. My transcript from my first year is LOL: Seriously flunked all the basic classes, but I took home an A in an upper level undergrad Existentialism lecture course. (Regular readers remember my [ode](#) to Mr. Potter.)

I'm sure you can guess the beer we were drinking in 2002 (or slightly before that). At least, you can probably narrow it down. Even if we had the money to buy "craft beer," which we definitely did not, the category didn't yet exist in Indiana. Sierra Nevada Pale Ale, the classic, with the green label, was the best suds I could get my hands on. There was/is a German Restaurant on the Southside that has earned itself one of only a hundred or so designated distribution sites in the country for an exclusive German beer, at least that's what a truck driver told me at Oktoberfest who has kegged beer on tap sticking out the side of the trailer, so I choose to believe him. Big

steins of beer, but this is a regular spot for the old timers with German roots whose parents or grandparents immigrated to that side of town in the mid-1800s, located adjacent to my folks' neighborhood, and I didn't want to get spotted throwing one back and somebody call up my old man. Prost.

I suppose Fat Tire showed up around 2010 or so, and Sun King Brewing, based in my hometown, opened around that same time. Oh, and you Midwesterners will remember when friends and family would travel East and bring home a case of Yuengling.

Man, I can hardly drink that stuff. No shade, but I couldn't get into that beer.

Anyway, a decade before the genesis of the craft beer movement, back to the stale sandwiches and possible breaking and entering, B&E, with the community pool (innocent until proven guilty), the fridge was stocked with PBR or High Life. And sometimes a stale bread bowl.

Whitney likes to say that she's the one that got me into drinking good beer.

While she is only a couple generations removed from those German immigrants, making the claim that she introduced me to good beer plausible, I'll refute this. I knew good beer in 2010, I just couldn't part with the nostalgia of the cheap shit. Even today, the beer fridge is rarely without at least a couple PBRs; tall boys, for sure.

I'm fueled by nostalgia.

This is why all this matters.

Who cares that I was a barista; that my dude slept on the couch; that we ate old Panera; that we went swimming. It could have been working retail; eating expired bagels; dude on a futon; putt putt golfing at midnight.

Plug and play.

The details are unimportant.

I don't mean to say that this was an especially good time in my life. The nostalgia makes it so, but that's infatuation with nostalgia, not with barely making rent. I guess there was a feeling that there was freedom in the limitations. Like we were broke. But knowing that you're broke, sets the bar for what matters pretty low.

And I think low bars for meaning are good. We should find meaning in the mundane. Don't wait for the big moments to celebrate your life, recognize the sublime joy of hopping a fence at one in the morning and diving into a cold pool.

In an apartment after that, I lived across the hall from a large Burmese family. They would have me and my roommate and whoever else over for dinner. No one spoke each other's language, but

those are some of the best memories I have. We'd sing songs that each other didn't know, clap along, and crack up trying to get ideas across. They ended each meal with a liquor bottle of something I didn't know and a shot glass that we'd just pass around the table. Our generous hosts would exclaim "Sip! Sip!" in English.

Just an apartment full of broke ass people feeding each other and singing. Beautiful humanity. I'll always appreciate those memories. Nostalgia. I couldn't tell you the food or the taste of that booze, but I know those meals mattered.

The thing about nostalgia is that it creates an opportunity to construct a narrative about your life. It may not have happened, but it's a true story. Know what I mean? When we construct narratives we combine our memories with our values and shape a story that is at least partially faithful to both.

My buddy next door, and now we're caught up to today, suggested a blind cheap beer tasting for last weekend. Get a bunch of cheap beer, have someone pour so that you don't know which is what, then taste them for preference. Which cheap beer will reign supreme?

His spouse, also my buddy, project managed the whole thing. Tasting notes, numbered cups, this was serious. Sadly, by my own scoring, PBR did not take the top spot. I awarded places first and second for personal preference, recall, based on a blind tasting, to Budweiser ("Bud heavy") and Coors Banquet. Next round's on you.

Last weekend was another meaning-making-in-the-mundane opportunity. I already have the memories that will serve as the basis for the narrative I will construct about the night.

I don't know if I'm qualified to speak on anything bigger than my own dumb memories, but I'll tell ya this: As a guy who's had to think about mortality: do cheap beer tasting night. Hop the fence and dive in the pool. Eat an old sandwich and laugh in another language.

At the end of it all, this is what matters. If you're just figuring this out now, stop by, I have a cold one in the fridge with your name on it.

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