

Emily's, Straight Up

Written by Mark Shaffer
Monday, 13 June 2016 08:35

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Coach: What's the story, Norm?
Norm: A thirsty guy walks into a bar. You finish it.

Cheers,
1982-93

Now you've probably got that silly song stuck in your head. Sometimes you wanna go where everybody knows your name, blah, blah, blah. Sorry. When we launched this column back in the dark ages before social media made everyone happier and more productive, we concluded each piece with a simple question: Cheers or Rick's?

The premise was based on what sort of vibe the bar gave off. Was it more like Norm's haunt from the classic NBC sitcom or Rick's Caf American in Casablanca where Humphrey Bogart went to drink away the memory of Ingrid Bergman and Paris. (I remember every detail. The Germans wore gray, you wore blue.) As it turns out, Emily's is a bit of both. The original bar now serves as overflow in the dining room. Back in the day, regulars used to jostle for the highly coveted and extremely limited seating. The new bar (as some still refer to it) moved next door about a decade ago.

Not too long after that, freshly relocated from the Pacific Northwest and bedazzled by a strange glowing orb in the sky, I wondered off the street in search of a locals joint and wound up being part of it. This is a place full of stories and characters. Back in those days you might stumble upon Pat Conroy, John Warley and Bernie Schein sipping mid afternoon cocktails and swapping stories at the bar. I could admit to eavesdropping, but there was no need. Not when Bernie was doing the talking. Which was a lot (joke, Bernie, joke). And the first place Tom Berenger stopped by to celebrate his 2012 Emmy Award for *Hatfields & McCoys* was Emily's.

When Hollywood came to town on a regular basis to make movies like *The Prince of Tides* and *Forrest Gump*, the stars ate and drank here. In the 1995 film *Something to Talk About* Julia Roberts wanders by the window to catch cheating husband Dennis Quaid with a date. Bestselling author and sometime Beaufort resident Carl T. Smith writes about it in his Sam Larkin mystery novels. When he's in town you'll likely find him on a bar stool enjoying his favorite meal, Steak au Poivre. And every February during the Beaufort International Film Festival the next generation of filmmakers swarms the place to forge new alliances, network and get reacquainted over cocktails and tapas.

A black baby grand piano sits by the door sporting an armada of tiny trawlers trophies won at Beaufort's annual Shrimp Festival. The floor in front of the massive bar is tiled like a giant set of piano keys. Meanwhile a huge fixture that recalls the mother ship in *Close Encounters* hovers overhead, pulsing with colored lights. Owner Tommy Winburn bought the bar on eBay and flew to Wisconsin only to find it in a barn in about a hundred pieces and not in very good shape. A photo of the original location in Little Chute, Wisconsin hangs on the wall. Not long ago the folks who sold the bar to Tommy wandered in on a slow afternoon, had a few beers and left some pretty decent bar lore in their wake. The story goes that before he became the infamous target of Elliott Ness Untouchables, Al Capone would stop by and hang out on his route conducting mob business between Milwaukee and Chicago.

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And during the glory days of Lombardi's Packers, the bar in Little Chute was a favorite spot for the players to blow off steam far from the coach's curfews and restrictions. So the next time you belly up to that sprawling piece of well-worn antique American oak, imagine sharing the bar with the original Scarface and NFL Hall of Famer, Paul Hornung. My guess is that Hornung would be more fun.

Cheers or Rick's?

Cheers, but on any given night, of all the gin joints, in all the towns, in all the world, she could walk into this one.

THE RUNDOWN

There's no happy hour but the price of cocktails plummets once you set foot on Port Republic Street. The wines are fabulous values, either by the glass or by the bottle. Emily doesn't do draft, but a good selection of bottles including seasonal beers and ales makes up for it. If you're in the mood for a nosh, the tapas menu is huge and you can't go wrong with Emily's award winning fried oysters. The giant flat screens make Emily's a great spot to catch a game. The local Gamecock faithful gather here in the fall and on the first Saturday in May hats are worn and whiskey is spilled on Derby day. Beat the summer heat with Bar Manager Edward Walter's signature summer cocktail, The Rising Sun, a fresh take on the classic Manhattan with an exotic spin. Watch him make one at LowcountryWeekly.com.

Emily's Restaurant and Tapas Bar

906 Port Republic St.

(843) 522-1866

4:00pm until last call daily