

For a Case of Beer

Rogers had a well-known dance hall years ago. It was an old building in my youth.

The dance hall had a café and a bar that was open every day.

My buddies and I were 15 and 16. In those days we got our driving licenses at 15 without any restrictions.

About six of us hung out together. That might have been related to the fact that six guys could fit into a car. None of us owned a car but it was almost a sure thing that one of us could borrow his dad's wheels on any given night.

We came up with a case of beer pretty often, but we never got into any trouble drinking.

After a couple of years, we each went different ways.

Steady girlfriends, different buddies, jobs, different ways like that.

We had a lot of fun, and we never got into any serious trouble.

We had a designated driver rule that we never violated.

The driver never ever drank.

The Rogers Dancehall café served regular stuff like hamburgers, french fries, cheeseburgers, fish sandwiches, maybe even a pizza.

It had a couple of pinball machines. Real pin ball machines, with rolling balls and pins and levers.

This café was pretty much like every other small-town café.

There were no chain eating places in those days, except for drive-ins like A&W or Dairy Queen.



Even those were only in bigger towns like Anoka or St. Cloud.

The dance hall café had a policy of giving a case of Hamm's beer to the person who racked up the highest Pinball score each week.

We knew that and sometimes our guys played hoping to win, but the winning scores were always astronomically high.

One Friday night we stopped in for burgers and cokes, probably after bowling.

Really, bowling.

We had fun but it was a different world.

We hung around after our burgers.

One of our guys was playing Pinball.

A couple of others were roughhousing; somebody got shoved into the Pinball machine. The machine was tilted but it didn't flash "tilt" and end the game, it should have.

Instead, a lever was stuck, and it started feeding balls through for 100 points each time.

It was just hung up and slowly racking up points. The machine was totally mechanical, no electronics at all.

The beer-case winning scores were running nearly 30,000 points each week.

At 100 points a time it was going to take a long time to run the score up high enough to win.

But the possibilities immediately stuck the more quick witted of us.

It took at least fifteen minutes for the machine to rack up enough points to win.

That entire time we were crowded around the machine pretending to cheer our hero on.

Of course, the whole time the kid at the controls was trying to look like he was actually playing.

We purposefully tilted the pinball machine for keeps at something north of 35,000.

Our player, I think that was Jerry Hoffmeister, reported to the bartender. The bartender was impressed.

We had to wait until Sunday night for the week to end, but we won.

Denny Dehmer's brother Joe picked the case of beer for us. Joe was over 21.

We drank a few bottles on our next night out.

We never were heavy drinkers, so most of the case was left.

I offered to store the beer, based on the general knowledge that my Pa wouldn't mind too much if came across it.

I stored the case in the haymow, a place I visited every day, to feed the cows.

It was January.

I had the general idea that beer does not freeze.

It does freeze, and the bottles break at 30 below. Tom. 2/10/2010

Postscript. In the more than 60 years since then, the dance hall, bar, and café burned to the ground, Jerry died relatively young of a familiar heart condition, Denny moved to Montana as a jewelry maker, he was an artist and killed himself around 50, Joe founded "No Name Steaks".