

Outbound for drinks and the *krawl* home

By Kevin Cowan
Staff Reporter

There you are sitting with a couple cronies in your usual bar: O'Rourke's, The Zoo, Chesterfields. You know, the *krawl* of the brown-bottle circuit. It's not the weekend, fortunately, so there's no weekend warriors to compete with for a good table. Al, the smilin' bartender, is standing behind the bar polisher's glasses quietly to himself.

"This is boring," you belch. "We see the same people on the same day, drinking the same old shoe polish. Christ, the same guy is playing 'I Robot.'"

That boredom is the opportunity — the mistress of tavern innovation.

Beyond the domain of the haggard bar-vultures that nest in the downtown bars of Lincoln, lies a different breed of bar — the small town bar. And if approached in a pseudo-mature fashion, a small town bar *krawl* might be considered one of the benefits of hedonistic pursuit in the midwest.

I know, I know, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers might deem me worthy

of hanging for saying this, but there are ways to leave the city, safely, and have an "intoxicating" bar *krawl*.

First, find a car. Sometimes that's the majority of the problem — all ambition and no means.

With cushy '74 Bonneville en route, choose a direction. Make it simple on the first *krawl*: north, south, west or east. Decent bars lie on all points of the map.

Let's say tonight the compass needle or map or the wind pulls you north. It's about 15 or 20 minutes to the Dingaling bar in Raymond. A highly ruralized "hotspot," though the decorum is that of a mid-seventies Holiday Inn lounge.

Rivalous all-you-can-eat, fish fry competition with another town pump down the street on Thursday, might be deserving of bar *krawlers* attendance.

A drink, a pitcher or a shot. On to another town.

That's one of the tricks of small town bar *krawl*. Only stay for one, or at the most, two drinks. The nice thing about alcohol is the taste is damn near univer-

sal from town to town. Whether you develop a fondness for a particular bar or bartender or not, the idea is to break away from inertia and move.

Right. On to Valparaiso. Harry's Tavern. A corker of a rural pub. An elongated, always well-lit, semi-conservative, tavern. The bartender, Harry, of course, when talked to in a rational conversational tone, minus the college public relations babble, is full of all sorts of bar chatter.

The most unique feature of Harry's tavern is the handy-crafts kept on display. Duane Pecka, a retired resident in Valparaiso builds exquisitely detailed tractors, trains and trucks from used beer and pop cans. Now, I don't immediately go topsy-turvy over every Ronco knit-o-matic or any other such craft, but this guy really does a good job. Maybe you should go see for yourself.

Skuttle on up northeast to the happiest town near Lincoln (aside from Denton); WA-HOO.

Down the empty Tuesday streets to the Last Chance Saloon. A type of pub that combines the old death-riddled west with a sense of humor. Iron-rod jail

bars gate the front of the bar, a pay phone coffin rests in peace at the end. The young bar executives who run the tavern macabre tend to initiate conversation immediately: "Where ya from?" and that sort of thing. Best to order a large, completely frosty mug o' beer and banter about tavern jargon.

But let's say, instead of North, all omens and rhetorical debate lends the *krawl* to a southerly direction.

The Roca bar is seedy on the outside, clean on the inside, down to the soil and grain, pub. Nothin' much normally goes on, says the early-elderly bartender. It's a nice quiet place to begin a small town bar binge.

Up around the road about 11 miles is the Princeton Tavern. No "foo-foo" drinks here. Vodka or whiskey. Of course, Ray the bartender/owner also stocks a reasonable line of mainstream domestic beers as well. The really intriguing factor in the Princeton Tavern is the archaic, semi-circular bar. Not many of those to be found. And Ray? Ray's one of those Depression kids with a working-class ethic. You have to be mildy plying before he'll talk (ask

about horse races). His small town humor will please your overly-urban ears.

Well, there's two of the four points of the compass. My binge cohorts and I have traversed all four. I could go through and spoon-feed the experience to you, but I think this best be left up to *krawling* initiative.

P.S. A couple of hints for small town *krawls*:

1) The driver should not, as a mere guidelines, drink more than four or five beers and a couple of shots in the four and a half hours that bar *krawls* endure.

2) Only take three or four cronies on the binge. A large mob of young college transients will put any small town bartender on the immediate defensive. They'll probably serve you, but it doesn't please them an immense amount and it kind of destroys the purpose of wanting to get away from the same old faces.

So drink in the bottomless dregs, move forth on to different horizons or... stay in O'Rourke's and purge a few more beers for the walk home.

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