

Tongue in Cheek: Hooters & Other Oddities

Never say never. Because sometimes you just might be surprised.

I had to go to an out-of-town meeting this week with some co-workers. (Unfortunately, the writing gig doesn't pay the mortgage, and I am a happy corporate slave by day, and a writer by night. Sort of like Superman. If Superman had no superpowers and a keen interest in typing instead of flying, that is.)

My co-workers, all of whom are straight, desperately wanted to see the Monday night football game. Now, I have about as much interest in football as I do in, say, flower arranging. In other words, not much. But I thought it would be fun, and it presented an opportunity to bond with the guys. Besides, watching a football game on TV in a restaurant with a dirty vodka martini couldn't be all bad, right?

That was before I learned that my co-workers had discovered that the only restaurant with decent sized TV's in the suburb in which we were staying was, well, a restaurant known for having other things of decent size.

Specifically, Hooters. (The restaurant's name, that is — and a reference to the restaurant's contents, apparently.)

My co-workers asked if I'd ever been to a Hooters before. I told them no, and that I would probably get a demerit on my gay card for going. But what the heck. It would be a cultural experience. And my dirty martini awaited. I figured that my preferred caramel apple martini would be a bit much to expect at a Hooters.

When we arrived at the restaurant, I quickly learned that Hooters does not serve martinis. Only beer. And the interior looked just like the interior of any gay sports bar I've been in. In fact, it wasn't much different from the local gay sports bar near me, which I go to fairly often because I like the lack of pretense among the gay folks there. (And I can get a good martini when I want to play darts or

pool.) The only difference was that there were no lesbians trying to yell at the TVs more loudly than the men. And that instead of a hot built man serving the drinks, there were tight-tank-top-and-shorts-clad Hooters girls flouncing about.

Or rather, Hooters Cheerleaders, which I learned was the correct term. In fact, our Cheerleader proudly told us that she had recently graduated from Hostess to Cheerleader — when she had turned 18 and was allowed to serve alcohol. When she said this, I felt suddenly old, which, I realized, is not unlike how I feel in a gay bar when I'm served by a 20-year-old twink of a bartender.

My co-workers apparently felt old as well — especially when our Cheerleader, after looking at one co-worker's drivers license, squealed delightedly that her momma was his age. It was, in a twisted way, fun watching their discomfort, as they flirted with the beautiful girl they realized was young enough to be their daughter. I know that gay men, as we age, go through exactly the same discomfort. Well, at least some of us do. The rest just insist on dating the 18-year-olds. Just like some straight men.

Nevertheless, the guys I was with, married men all, couldn't help but flirt with our lovely Cheerleader, whose name was Megan. Which, I realized, was exactly what I would do if she were a studly little guy named Mark in a tight tank top. Me, I was noticing she had nice eyes

and that her skin on her exposed cleavage was really smooth. In fact, as I looked around, I noticed that all of the Cheerleaders were beautiful girls. And I wondered, "Why aren't lesbians all over this place?"

Then our chicken wings arrived. Now, I've had chicken wings before, but these were probably the best I've ever eaten. And one of the options for the wings was to have them "naked." Sort of carb-friendly and titillating, all at once. Likewise, Megan brought me a large draft beer, which was called a Big Daddy. At which point I realized that I was in a bar filled with straight men gripping their Big Daddies, and I wondered if they realized how gay that sounded.

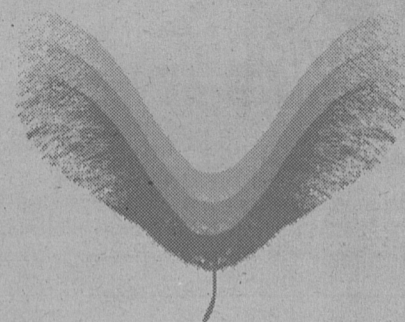
In fact, as the football game began, I was occasionally tickled by how some of the comments just sounded so — well — gay. Sure, we're all aware that football itself is the gayest sounding sport ever — a tight end is somehow connected to a wide receiver, and with the shoulder pads and protective cups, they look like Tom of Finland drawings. But after one tackle, my co-worker yelled, "Look at that! Twelve guys on him and he's still going!" And I thought, "I believe I saw a gay adult film like that once."

I did enjoy the football game. No, I wasn't invested in who won or lost, but the folks I was with were, so that made it fun. Besides, my Hooters foray was an opportunity to see a parallel life, one I would never have seen on my own, and one about which I might have had misconceptions.

And I would definitely go back for the wings. ▼

Columnist Kevin Isom is the author of It Only Hurts When I Polka and Tongue in Cheek and Other Places, available at bookstores and online. He may be reached at isomonline@aol.com or KevinIsom.com.

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