

The first memory I have of beer is wrapped up in my aunt's ex-husband and a barbecue.

He drank Moosehead, a Canadian beer of almost no import. (Except that we were having it in Texas. Those marketers must have been giddy.) Later he got a German shepherd and named him Moose. That's how my family works. We're really into lateral connections. I remember tasting his beer and finding it fairly unexceptional as a category. But, like with most unexceptional things (viz. air, shelter, females), I developed a fondness for it over time.



At my upstate New York college, I had my beer delivered by the various drivers working out of this pizza shack some miles away from my dorm. The owners were from Texas too. They were happy that when I spoke with them the words "pan," "pen," and "pin" all sounded alike. I was happy that I was getting beer delivery three years before my drinking papers came in. I was downing Genny Cream Ale then. And throwing chocolate donuts and wieners into a crowd of people "listening" to my band make "music."

In my life, beer has helped me write stories, meet girls, get into trouble, and learn a lesson once I got out of it.

Eventually, I decided my favorite beer is Brooklyn IPA, a hoppy northeastern specialty that tastes best when poured by my friend Louise at the Blind Tiger. Especially, if it were drunk on one of those workdays where lunch was a couple of brown water sandwiches. When I'm in Texas, I switch over to Shiner Bock, a dark frothy pour that goes great as a beef brisket spritzer in 100°+F summers. (If I have a heart attack, I want to skip the emergency room and line up for seconds.)

Now, I'm in LJ, where the acquaintances I have drink Union and Laško and try to convert me to one or the other with Jehovah's Witness zeal. I imagine these two beers being like massive political parties that are playing off their own duality. That the drinking decision I make will voice some great social statement like being pro-choice or pro-life, communist or capitalist, blue or gray.

But, I can't say that I like really the "two beer" system. I'm not advocating that Slovenia should invest in brewing a peach-hinted framboise, but a little variety never hurt any market. Maybe, I'll start telling people I only drink Mercator.

Because, beer's beer. It's the social lubricant bar none. Around the world, it appears to grow on trees. It makes friends out of strangers and enemies out of friends. Fussy girls turn it down, and bums worship it. It's the artist's fuel (John Keats) and the artist's downfall (Dylan Thomas).

And seemingly because of beer's popularity, it doesn't lend itself to good music. Classic jazz has the martini. Roadhouse rock'n'roll has the whisky on the rocks. Techno has the vodka Red Bull. Beer, alas, goes with polka.

Ultimately there is one thing I have to respect beer for: it's the only alcoholic beverage that made the leap into the non-alcoholic category. All those soft drinks fiercely want to go the other way. Orange juice is all "Gimme some vodka; I'm sick of getting ignored after 10 AM." Colas are jumping into anything with a whiff of ethanol. But, beer totally goes both ways. That's so strange, and still so glorious. Like, even old blown-out rockers are drinking non-alcoholic brews. The suds are that tight!

In New York, we cycled pretty hard on the expression, "Beer's a rental," and as far as I can tell so is life. So, dudes, I'll see you lined up at the urinals. And, ladies, if I've had too many, I'll see you too.