

News From Town:

Well, you'll never guess who we ran into last week down at Rudy's Oyster Bar over on Ellsworth. It was a Friday evening. Veronica and I were on our way to our regular booth in the corner when we spied Verl and Arlene Torgerson, just one table away. They were enjoying a pre-dinner cocktail and one of Rudy's signature appetizers. Bacon wrapped clam strips, beer battered and deep-fried, as only Chef Rudy can do it. I tell you, those clam strips and a glass of Blue Nun, the world is right again.

You may remember Arlene and Verl. They were the brave folks who ran across, and reported, the sad remains of Ralph Haggerdahl's '67 Dart down by the Root River a few months ago. It was in the Banner. The case was nasty, involving the unfortunate automobile, a couple of shady little people and some uncanny detective work by the resourceful Arlene.

Well, Veronica and I were glad to see the Torgersons. We hadn't talked since the incident, what with all the notoriety and all. Verl and Arlene have been pretty busy with media demands, appearances, book signings and the like. Actually what they wrote was more of a booklet than a book. It seems that their ghostwriter, hired by the publisher, quit at the last minute and Verl had to author the whole thing by his lonesome. As you know, Verl is not much with words, so the tiny tome came out looking like one of those 4x4 pamphlets that your boss hands out on payday, the kind that warns you about gamblers, office pools, sports betting and etcetera.

It turns out that Arlene was absolutely right in her deductions about the crime. It was indeed circus midgets who stole and dumped the car. They were arrested, tried and convicted. Their trial didn't take long at all. In fact it was a bench trial because, in Minnesota, it was tough to find a jury of twelve tiny peers to hear their case. Not many people know this but our fair State has the lowest per capita percentage of people of small stature in the 48 contiguous states. Mini-sota we are not.

Anyway, the judge went easy on them, first offense and all. She ordered restitution to be paid and put the diminutive duo on probation for a year. End of story, one would think. Not so! You and I don't take the Houston Banner just to read some neat little tale that ends in a whimper. We read the Banner because we know we'll get it all, the good, the bad and the stuff you won't find anywhere else.

Who do you think was sitting at Rudy's cozy five stool bar, waiting for a table to open up? Yup. It was the convicted, sentenced, uncontrite and liquored-up duet from the circus that thrust Arlene and Verl into the spotlight in the first place. There they were. Well aware of who was sitting at table 3, and feeling just loose enough and just tough enough to have a go at the folks who brought them down.

Now, when you're tiny, you have to be careful getting down off a barstool. It's not like you're six feet something and slide, ever so gracefully, onto the dance floor. It's a long way down. You have to feel your way with one foot and then hope the other doesn't look too foolish just dangling there. Sure enough the smaller of the pair catches her foot on one of the stool legs, spills her drink (her fourth) and starts swearing, one eye closed and stinging, about the fresh banana daiquiri stains on her best leotard.

The taller one, fighting for two now, goes right at Arlene with one of those little liquor bottles. You know, the miniature kind you get on airplanes. The trouble is that they're plastic and no good at all in a bar fight. You can't smash them and use the jagged end as a shiv, like in the old westerns. Heck, the best you can do is crumple them up a bit. So here she is whacking the bottle on Arlene's table trying to snap it off, into a deadly weapon, but all she's getting is a thump, thump, thump. The little Jack Daniels bottle is holding its shape, nicely.

That's when she made her big mistake. She swung mightily with the bottle and whacked Arlene directly on her left ankle, the bad one. Anyone who has had gout knows what I'm talking about. If you whisper near a gout-stricken ankle it hurts. If you bang it, the pain is nothing short of exquisite torture. Arlene's shriek was blood curdling and her response, awesome.

She reached for her ankle and sat down simultaneously. This brought her eye-to-eye with her vertically challenged assailant. Arlene could not help herself. She feels bad now but at the time, gout being what it is, she could not help herself. Mrs. Torgerson grabbed the midget by her spaghetti straps (the little lady was wearing a simple black cocktail dress) and head butted her just like they do on TV Wrestling.

The tiny brawler went down like a pot of cooked pasta into a colander, like a bowling bowl off a barstool. Game, set and match. Over. Done. So with one circus type blinking at the bar and the other out cold on the floor, our Friday night at the fights screeched to a halt.

Rudy hung out the closed sign in the front door, bought the house a round of Blue Nun and called the Sheriff. Those little hellions are in irons again and the Torgerson's have another book to write. Things are back to normal at Rudy's Oyster Bar and Veronica and I are looking forward to our usual, quiet Friday supper, in town.

Stay tuned though. There's another bench trial scheduled for December with the same judge presiding. Watch the Banner for all the latest. We'll make sure that you don't miss any of the news from town.