



# THE BUCKHORN INN

-AN ELEGY-  
by David Omer Bearden

**T H E   B U C K H O R N   I N N**

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**Rosace Thanks Mr. Julian Brandt**

*That-which-regions  
is an abiding expanse  
which, gathering all,  
opens itself, so that  
in its openness is  
halted and held,  
letting everything  
merge in its own resting.*

— **Martin Heidegger**

*Mourning Polka.*

— **John Ashbery**

# THE BUCKHORN INN

The Buckhorn Inn is quiet now  
in that stand of dark spruce  
beside potholed old highway 435  
& it's still for sale like it always was,  
but no ghost tendril of blue  
wood smoke reaches for the sky  
from the bent cone-capped chimney  
like it did when Wes Boika  
could be found inside  
behind remnants of swagged lace curtain  
in a window whose neon sign  
read "GIBBONS BEER"  
busy tending his stove & bar,  
serving Chesterfield Ales,  
shots of jeżynówka  
with a Rolling Rock back,  
local gossip of interest  
to tribal people, & Gennys  
to a posse of steady customers,  
rustic sawyers, night watchmen,  
retired coal miners from the patch,  
fisherman, gyppos, freebooters  
of one kind or another,  
& me, who frequented his place  
for awhile when he was alive.  
I ran into Wes over at Eagle Lake  
where we worked as security guards  
from 4 P.M. to midnight.  
He was a wizened little Czech  
somewhere at the far end of his 60's

with a flat brush of black wire,  
glittering feral eyes,  
a devilish grin around a reeking  
cigar stump clamped always  
in short black stems of teeth,  
& very little time to go.  
Wes lived right here & now though,  
in a present full of cronies  
schemes & good times.  
He sold me a plastic jug of sky blue  
windshield wiper fluid once  
brought out from under the bar, cheap.  
He played hard-core slovak polkas  
on the radio, & watched a silent T.V.  
drinking one beer after another.  
He kept beer near at all times,  
bringing a big paper sackful  
to the job secreted in his station wagon.  
Out back of the guard shack  
he would bolt to the parking lot  
& fetch us back each a bottle,  
giggling & chuckling wickedly  
in the delicious knowledge  
that once again  
he was slickering The Man.  
"Nobody on that midnight shift  
has an elevator that goes all the way  
to the top floor", he snickered,  
& headed back to the Buckhorn  
for a few hours of serious drinking.  
Sometimes I'd follow him on in  
through an unused room  
that had once housed a pool table  
into a haven warm & close  
from the banked iron stove  
smelling of kerosene-base  
floor swabbing solution,

the blonde skunk stink of beer,  
pine & cigar smoke.  
First he'd flip on the T.V.'s  
blurred silent picture  
then the radio, & start cracking  
beers for the regulars  
drifting in.

Andy Witko was his favorite  
customer & best friend,  
a rangy old retired highway  
patrol trooper with one eye;  
the only real career cop  
on the security force  
at Eagle Lake,  
& the best man in the neighborhood.

Wes & Andy conversed  
in shouted violent curses  
& insults entirely,  
Andy with disgusted air  
of offended dignity  
& Wes tittering slyly,  
happy in their shared alcoholism  
& years of maldisant buddyhood.

The other regulars laughed,  
an appreciative audience  
of old Pennsylvania homeboys  
escaped from the wife.

Often these guys brought in stashes  
of food to the Buckhorn Inn,  
a tradition of long standing.  
Hoagies, a coffee can  
full of crab legs, roadkill,  
a jar of pickled eggs  
with beet slices, saganaki  
of half a white pizza.

I once lifted some kosher mustard  
from home & contributed it

toward the deck of olive-pimento  
lunch meat spread out on butcher paper  
at our midnight picnic stand  
strewn with tabasco & beer  
bottles, heaped ash trays, & tacky  
with spilled liquor  
& dripped sauces.

Multiples of enough  
cheap poison cigars  
took Wes out. He had a lung  
removed at the V.A. hospital,  
came home, continued to tend  
his bar for a month or two  
in a faded plaid bathrobe  
& stocking feet,  
swearing & laughing weakly,  
& then he died.

The Buckhorn Inn  
looks much the same  
when I sail by on my way  
back & forth to work at my present  
job over in Stroudsburg;  
the dead neon sign reading "GIBBONS BEER",  
the For Sale poster in the black window,  
the ancient flat-bed truck out back  
under the towering spruce trees.  
But no ghost tendril of blue  
smoke reaches for the sky.

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