

A copy of this story is on file at the Neon Museum in Las Vegas. It was told to Benson Parker by his father Paul Parker.

Sahara Hotel Memories

by Paul B. Parker

During the twenty years I worked in Las Vegas I was employed at the Sahara Hotel twice, from 1966 to 1969 I was the bartender at Don the Beachcomber lounge, and from 1975 to 1981 I was the bartender at the House of Lords steakhouse.

None of the original 21 Don the Beachcombers are still in existence but back in the day there were Don the Beachcomber's all across the United States. They gave rise to Polynesian restaurants, tiki bars, Trader Vic's, and Mai Tai's (Tahitian for "good").

The Sahara was open under the name *Sahara* for 59 years, in Las Vegas Time that's a millennium. Las Vegas Time is like dog years, every year you spend in Vegas is like 7 years crammed into one. At one time the Sahara was the tallest building in Las Vegas, when its convention hall opened it was the biggest in the nation, scenes from the movie *Oceans 11* (1960) were filmed there, and during it's almost 6 decades it hosted the most famous entertainers and movie stars, Presidents, the Beatles, and...

One night a tourist was playing the big slot machine that had eight reels, and you had to put in five silver dollars before you pulled the giant handle, when low and behold the cherries lined up and he won \$125,000. A Pit Boss came over and

congratulated him, comped him a room, gave him tickets to the show, and meal vouchers for the House of Lords.

When someone won big the Las Vegas Review Journal newspaper would sometimes send a reporter to take their picture and write a little something about them in the paper. The morning after his big win the tourist got a call asking him to come downstairs so the reporter could take his picture. On the casino floor the tourist walked up, coffee in hand, half asleep, and someone was playing the machine he had won on. The reporter said it didn't matter just pull the handle on any machine so he could get a picture. The tourist put a dollar in a machine, pulled the handle, looked at the camera, smiled, and the machine hit for \$20,000.

The House of Lords was the most elegant restaurant in town, the décor was Regal Red with black accents, dark wood paneling, and an inlaid wood ceiling. When I worked there it was the only place in town that required reservations for dinner, and it had a dress code; men had to wear a coat and tie, and women had to wear a dress. When you arrived at your table there would be a book of matches in the ashtray and printed on the match book in gold letters would be the inscription, "These matches were made exclusively for ..." and then your name.

The Strip was more formal back then, people dressed up to go to a show, and you never saw anyone in shorts and sneakers.

Members of the Rat Pack used to come in the House of Lords late at night after their show at the Sands. I especially remember Dean Martin, he was very easy to like. He always had not one but two beautiful young ladies on his arm when he came in. Many times he walked up to the bar where I was working, cocked his

head to one side, wrinkled his brow, and said over and again, “Do I know you? Do I know you?” Night after night he would do that, it was always funny and I could never tell if he was really drunk or just pretending.

I could go on and on about the good old days at the Sahara but you get the idea... they were good old days.