An admission........

Gary Black

To all friends, family, colleagues and fans of Western Province, I say, "Mia culpa, mia culpa, mia culpa"! As difficult as it is for one who has been firmly rooted down here in the Deep South for half a lifetime, I must admit to having at least two friends from Pretoria! Now, now, before you judge me too harshly, please read on...

Acquiring these friends was not something I did wilfully or purely of my own accord. Rather, they were presented to me at a national conference of the Pharmaceutical Society, hosted by the Pretoria Branch. I ventured out of the Deep South to attend this conference as a proud member of the Western Cape Branch of the PSSA, determined to do my bit for the profession, even in the face of the traditional rivalry between North and South. We were warmly welcomed by our Pretoria Branch colleagues and generously hosted by them throughout a well run conference. Each delegate was presented with an engraved beer mug commemorating the event. How I ended up with two of these is anyone's guess....possibly to ensure that I maintain good balance with one in each hand??

Carefully and securely boxed, my two new friends accompanied me back down to the Deep South where, initially at least, they were displayed amongst similar memorabilia in the lounge. Then one day, out of pure necessity, I had to resort to using one of them for the very purpose for which it was intended, that is, drinking a good cold beer! Being a dyed-in-the-wool WP man, one can imagine that I certainly had reservations about indulging in my favourite tipple from a mug whose labelling included the word, "Pretoria".

Any true beer lover will know that to really enjoy your beer, one does not just snap off the cap and gulp it down. No, the beer needs to be poured carefully into a good, solid, glass mug held at just the right angle so as to release just enough gas, freeing up the flavour and yet still maintaining a good head of foam. It is important too that the mug should be just the right size, large enough to comfortably hold the whole beer without having to be constantly topped up. I must acknowledge that one often finds rather elegant, thin, fluted beer glasses which can be easily chilled before serving a beer. However, I was blessed with large, ugly, hands purpose-built for holding a rugby ball, so a good solid beer mug is far more my style. My two friends from Pretoria fulfil all the necessary criteria....made of strong, thick glass with a heavy bottom, a large handle and big enough to take a full beer. (Reminiscent of Mof Myburgh??)

In our home, other less robust beer glasses have come and gone, but my two friends from Pretoria have withstood the rigours of regular use in a busy, bustling household. We have been together for nearly two decades now. Regular use and washing saw my two friends lose their "Pretoria" label many years ago. Relieved of carrying that burden, they could be fully appreciated for what they really are....two jolly, good, solid, hard working, true friends.

Our friendship has certainly stood the test of time. My friends have been there for me at the end of a busy, frustrating, hot day to cool and calm me down with the cold amber liquid they carry. I have lost count of the number of braais we have enjoyed together and, of course, family gatherings celebrating weddings, christenings, birthdays, anniversaries etc. In turn, I have cherished these friends, kept them clean and safe and out of the clutches of little children. While I am not averse to sharing my friends with others, regular visitors to my home know not to presume that they can simply just grab and use one of them without my consent. Certainly my sons (and grandsons too now!) know only too well that my beer must be poured into one of MY mugs. I certainly feel a tinge of jealousy if, by chance, someone else gets to use my friends instead of me.

And so my friends and I have grown old together. We both look a little worse for wear nowadays. But, while we both may be a little scratched or scarred, opaque or grey, and generally a bit worn and torn, our friendship still endures. When I sit alone quietly on my little "bankie" at my braai fire cradling one of my friends in my hands, nurturing a good, cold beer, I am reminded of the Paul Simon song, “Old friends, old friends, sat on a bench like book ends... Can you imagine us years from today, Sharing a park bench quietly, How terribly strange to be seventy Old friends Memory brushes the same years Silently sharing the same fear”

But, then again, they do say that old friends are the best friends, ......really, even if they are originally from Pretoria!

Ek sê maar net!

Gary Black