



A man is, ultimately, the sum of his accomplishments.

Each culture, of course, has a different idea as to what rates as an accomplishment. Muslims, for example, put a tremendous amount of stock into making a pilgrimage to Mecca, while generations of Frenchmen have taken great pride in not tripping over their discarded rifles while fleeing the Germans.

The subculture of avid drinkers, living as we do by our own set of rules and priorities, has an entirely different idea altogether, to the degree that our notion of a goal worth achieving may well appear bad behavior or even a criminal offense to the parent culture.

I think it a sad sign of the times that, in this age of entrenched nannyism and political correctness, a person is more likely to be judged by what he refrained from doing than what he actually did. It's no longer important that you climbed the mountain, but rather how many boulders you didn't "accidentally" dislodge and let roll down on the less daring hunkered in the valley below.

Fortunately, imbibers have historically been immune to popular opinion, so hence this list. If you manage all forty before you take a barstool at St. Gabriel's Pearly Gate Lounge, you may feel secure in the fact that you've lived a rich and full life, even if only the boys and girls down at happy hour think so. And when you do belly up to that big open bar in the sky and the bartender asks: "What sort of life did you lead?" you can look him right in the eye and say, "Gabe, baby, I'm glad this is eternity, because I've got a helluva lot of stories to tell."

1.) Open and close a bar.

Find one that opens its doors before noon. Stake out a comfortable seat and hunker down. Resist informing the bartender of your tremendous plan, as this will cause him to pour waves of pre-celebratory shots and you won't survive happy hour. Pacing is everything. Watch the crowds come and go, watch bartenders rise, reign and fade while you remain like a cagey Methuselah. From that day forward, within the walls of that bar at least, your name will be legend.

2.) Go on a bender.

I don't mean a weekend binge. I'm talking a full-bore, hooch-bent, screw-work hoolihan. Dangerous, yes, but so is getting out of bed in the morning. True benders have gone the way of the snap brim fedora, which makes them all the greater currency in the world of drunks. It won't be easy. You must start drinking the moment you wake up and carry on until you go under. Then start over again. In your grandfather's day you had to drink two weeks straight before you could officially declare yourself on a proper jag, but that's when a mug of beer cost a nickel. These days four straight days and nights will give you all the bragging rights you need.

3.) Drink a fifth of hard liquor, by yourself, in one day.

For some this is a typical evening, the rest will have to try harder. Unplug the phone, don't answer the door and get down with your bad self. Stock up on ice, gather mixers if you need them, crack the seal and, inch by inch, take that proud bottle down. Take your own sweet time. Near the bottom you will discover a rich inner landscape you thought a barren desert. Explore it.

4.) Dance like a fool in front of a large hooting crowd.

Cast aside your fear of public opinion, march to the center of the room's attention and boogie down. You don't need a partner, you don't even need music, do a happy jig to the beat of your own drum. Of course, it helps to be really really drunk.

5.) Spend a night in the drunk tank.

While getting captured by the Man goes against the most primal of drunkard instincts, if you're putting your time and liquor in, it's going to happen. Make the most of the experience. Pretend you're Cool Hand Luke. And don't refrain from telling your friends: Among drunks, the real ones anyway, a night in the tank is a very large feather in the drinking cap.

6.) Get drunk on the grave of your hero.

Wait until the cemetery closes for the night, then slip over the fence with a bottle of something strong. Prop your back against the gravestone and tell

your hero how much he inspired you, how he changed your life, revel in the fact that your inspiration is only six feet of hard-packed earth away. It'll be the greatest one-sided conversation you'll ever have. Then pass out. Let the groundskeeper be your alarm clock.

7.) Buy a crowded bar a round.

For no reason at all. Jump up on a barstool and shout it loud: "A round for the house! On me!" Make sure you have a good toast ready, because, for once, they'll all be listening.

8.) Embark on an impromptu road trip.

Out of the blue, propose a trip to Las Vegas, New Orleans, Jack Kerouac's grave or, for the love of God, the Two-Headed Cattle Museum. It doesn't really matter where, the joy is in the journey. There's nothing like a sudden burst of irresponsible freedom to shake up your worldview. It will be an adventure you'll never forget or get tired of talking about.

9.) Get 86'd from a bar.

There are generally two types of drunkards in the world: Those that get 86'd a lot and those who never do. If you're the latter, you're missing out on a very special feeling. A man with any character at all must have enemies and places he is not welcome—in the end we are not only defined by our friends, but also those aligned against us. So choose the type of bar you loathe. Get remorselessly smashed on tequila. Let your lizard brain do your talking. Splash the kerosene, drop the match and watch the bridge burn. Few sentences in the English language bespeak a mysterious dark side than: "I'm not allowed in there. And, quite frankly, I don't blame them."

10.) Extravagantly overtip a bartender.

The next time a bartender is especially kind or proficient, lay a massive tip on her. I mean, massive. You must be relatively sober or they'll discount the act as drunken foolishness. Say something smooth like, "You're the best of your kind," drop the bomb, and—this is important—walk out of the bar without another word. With this single act of unexpected generosity, you will restore a bartender's faith in humanity and give your own self-image a healthy boost.

11.) Walk up to an attractive stranger way out of your league and buy him or her a drink.

You always wanted to do it. You've enviously watched your smooth friends do it. Now it's your turn. The fear is nowhere proportionate to the risk to your ego (she's out of your league, remember?), yet it still requires a certain amount of courage. It's akin to sticking your hand down into the garbage disposal. The thing isn't going to turn on by itself, but still...

12.) Conspire an afterhours at your favorite bar.

I'm not talking about them letting you have a quick one in the back while they're cleaning up. I'm talking about drinking until the sun creeps through the shut blinds. It takes a lot of time and tips to earn the privilege, but there's nothing quite like it.

13.) Make your best friend a perfect martini.

I mean perfect. Employ the proper utensils and the highest-end liquor you can afford. Follow an old-school recipe and take your time. You know how a handmade present from a child always warms the heart of a parent more than the most expensive gift? Same deal. Just a little something for all the times your pal bailed you out. And after your friend has enjoyed your sublime creation, make yourself one, you magnificent bastard.

14.) Buy, build or steal a home bar.

Put the well right in your home. Outfit it with many sparkling bottles, accretion and tools. Sit on your barstool with a grossly over-poured cocktail and think: "This is my bar. No one can cut me off, no one can kick me out, none but the floor can announce last call." You've been a sharecropper long enough. Get your own plot of land.

15.) Get carried home by your drinking buddies.

In the company of friends you can trust, get fantastically loaded to the point you cannot stand, nevermind walk. Let them brace you from both sides and carry you homeward. Sing like an Irish uncle. Swear love and fealty to your human crutches. These are the bonds that never break.

16.) Get drunk with your father.

Getting loaded with the man who brought you into this world is one of the most deeply mystical experiences a human being can manage. If you can't get your father to commit, find an elder you respect.

17.) Fight a good fight.

Samuel Johnson said "Every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier, or not having been at sea." Men who go to their graves without ever getting into a fistfight undoubtedly feel the same way. How many times have you gone home thinking, "Damn, I should have clocked that asshole." Next time, do it. Swing first, swing hard, and make sure you're in the right. You may not win, but at least you were in there swinging. Fear of losing a fight never stopped Bukowski and neither should it stop you.

18.) Visit the source of your favorite beer, wine or liquor.

Make a pilgrimage to the headwaters. Follow the river that's fed you joy to its source. Stand amongst the vats and barrels and absorb the knowledge that this is the spring from which the good times flow. Drink as many free samples as they'll give you. It might mean a trip to Dublin or Tennessee, but from that moment on you can gaze into your glass and think, "Lad, I met your mother."

19.) Drunkenly watch the sun come up with your best boozing buddies and a bottle.

You've spent plenty of time railing against the dying of the light, this time welcome its birth. With a shot.

20.) Sit in on an A.A. meeting.

Not all accomplishments are rum and games. File this under the heading of facing your fears. Just as Jonah found enlightenment in the belly of a beast, so will you. You may come to look at it as a sober examination of the safety net (or trampoline, as the case may be). You may view it as a cautionary trip to hell. Either way, you'll never have to wonder again.

21.) Hit a dozen bars in one night.

Make like Marco Polo. Instead of eating one lousy apple, take a bite out of a dozen exotic fruits. Chase the ever elusive good time. A rolling stone gathers no bar tabs.

22.) Try at least one hundred different drinks.

Too often we drunks get trapped in a rut, forgetting there is a wide and golden world of forgotten cocktails, strangely-hued beers, mysterious liquors

and wines from places we cannot pronounce. Explore the world from your barstool. One need only thumb through a bartender's guide to realize how wide that world is. And when you return to your rut, and you probably will, you'll appreciate just how good home can be after months on the road.

23.) Get loaded in the land of your forefathers.

An effortless task for Europeans, a broad leap of faith for we colonials. Return to the land from whence your blood sprang, sit down to drinks with those your bold forefathers left behind. And for godsakes, don't order a Bud.

24.) Juice on the job.

You will never comprehend just how pleasurable the workaday grind can be until you bring your old chum alcohol along. You don't have to get boss-punching drunk, just sneak enough to loosen up that tight harness. It'll make you wish you worked for a drinking magazine.

25.) Split a magnum of expensive champagne with your true love.

Do it up like F. Scott and Zelda before they went crazy. Realize that this is one of the precious few times you can get swizzled in front of your better half and she'll think it's wonderfully romantic.

26.) Give a hobo twenty bucks.

Make him promise he's going to spend it on hooch. It won't be a hard sell. Twenty bucks is the price of a crappy shirt to you, to our alley brethren it's a gift from the gods.

27.) Get loaded and tell your boss exactly how you feel.

It could go down at the company picnic, the Christmas party, or maybe, if you're really going after Accomplishment #24, right at the office. It's tremendously cathartic. Years of stress and bitterness will drop from your shoulders and for the first time, after you're done unloading, you will see your employer as an actual human being. You may very well get fired, but hey, if you're angry enough to go berserk on your boss, you need to get a new job anyway.

28.) Send a friend a bottle of good liquor.

Apropos of nothing and don't tell him it's coming. Attach a card reading: "Tonight the drinks are on me." He will never forget it. There is no better feeling than unexpected free booze.

29.) Eat a pickled egg from the big jar.

A bar must own a certain amount of character to carry the big jar. Maybe you've seen one. A jar large enough to hold Jay Leno's head, populated with slightly off-color eggs floating in a murky fluid. You always wondered what they tasted like and it's time to find out.

30.) Go on a fishing trip with your pals.

Ensure you bring enough beer and liquor to paralyze the nation of Liechtenstein. Fishing tackle is optional. Drink near a body of water (you don't actually have to come in contact or even see the water, but it should be nearby), then, when night falls, build a huge campfire. There is nothing more conducive to male bonding and rampant drinking than a campfire. Trust me, strip clubs come in a distant second.

31.) Eat the worm.

It's a cliché, but so are strippers at a bachelor party. It must be done. The last thing you want to do is mutter a half-hearted lie to your grand kids when they squeal, "Gramps, did you eat the worm?"

32.) Learn at least one traditional drinking song.

Ethnically fractured and mixed as we are, we colonials have lost the art of the booze ballad. Watch a European football match on television and first thing you notice is the fans know one hell of a lot of songs. All we Yanks can manage is the "Na-na-na" song and chants of "De-fense!" Sure, we all know the words of Ring of Fire by rote, but what of The Pub with No Beer, My Lip Is on the Cup, and Drunk Last Night, Drunk the Night Before? Also, there's nothing like a table of drunks bellowing an unidentifiable song in unison to scare the bejesus out of the bar staff.

33.) Steal some booze.

Against the law? Sure. A hell of a rush? Absolutely. Of course, not getting caught is very important. Plan well. Nothing tastes quite so sweet.

34.) Spend half a paycheck on a single bottle of liquor.

So much money for so little booze. We've spent our lives learning the art of getting the most stagger out of the smallest investment. We've heard rumors of those insanely expensive bottles, but they might as well sell them on Mars. Out of spite, you've probably told yourself: "Screw that—booze is booze. What's it gonna do, get me five times drunker?" In a better world, maybe. Depending upon the sensitivity of your palette, however, you may come to understand that the rich really do have it better than us. And when I say better, I mean they can afford better booze.

35.) Start your long-awaited and very personal autobiography: Me and the Booze: A Love Story.

You don't have to finish it. Very few do. The point is, the very act of starting an autobiography means you think you've lived an exciting enough life to deserve one. Strive for that day.

36.) Experience absinthe.

Do the full ritual with the spoon and sugar. Drink enough to feel the full effect. Stroll the path that Hemingway, Van Gogh, Degas, F. Scott, and myriad other geniuses spent their lives pounding flat. Just don't cut your ear off.

37.) Watch the movie Barfly with five of your closest friends.

Without a doubt the finest drinking movie ever put to celluloid. Make sure there's plenty of booze on hand because you'll want to drink along.

38.) Work at least a week as a bartender.

You'll never fully understand the drinking culture as a whole until you've spent some time on the supply side of the wood. The empathy it will lever into your psyche will change your bar behavior forever.

39.) Make your own beer, wine or moonshine.

There are fewer finer feelings in the world than to nurture booze from its humble, evil-tasting origins to something you can get hammered on. Just expect to repeat these words over and over again when you go mad on the blood of your creation: "I made this! Me! And now I'm drinking it! Woo-hoo!"

40.) Go to your place of worship loaded.

Not so loaded they'll finger you as a walking incarnation of Demon Rum, just enough to make the droning sermons lip-bitingly hilarious. It's often said that liquor can bring you closer to God, so just think how close you'll be when you're hammered in his house.

—*Frank Kelly Rich*