

Paul E. Anna: High Points

Aspen After Dark – the tour

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Ghosts abound. Screams fill the air. Blood flows across bar room floors.

Amazingly, those images come to life each Wednesday and Friday night right here in Aspen on the “Aspen’s DarkSide” walking tour, hosted by the gregarious and historically enamored Dean Weiler.

I took the tour this past Wednesday evening and spent a great hour touring the town on foot and looking at streets, alleyways and buildings through new eyes. The stories, from Nathan Meeker’s demise in the land called “Ute,” to Ted Bundy’s reign of terror, and tales of the town’s Red Light district, are all things that I have heard before having lived here for many years, but Dean’s telling of them offered both location and context. It was great history.

A little background. Dean is an actor, which means he is a storyteller and that is exactly what a good tour guide should be. For the last five years he has been leading groups on walking tours of our fine town, giving them a glimpse into the storied history of Aspen. On Monday and Thursday mornings at 10:30 a.m. he leads a traditional historical walking tour of downtown Aspen called “Aspen’s Past and Present.” And then, during July and August, when the evenings are at their most beautiful, he leads the aforementioned DarkSide tours. His repertoire also includes a graveyard tour that I would love to take one day before I die. That one can be reserved for groups of five or more by calling Dean.

My tour convened just in front of the Wheeler Opera House, a few minutes before 9 p.m., on one of the most gorgeous summer nights of the season. There were perhaps 10 of us, some from Utah, a couple from Boston and some locals. After paying \$20 each (a steal for a night out in this town), Dean gave everyone florescent light sticks that we put around our wrists so he knew who was and who was not on the tour.

We crossed over into the park and Dean asked us to imagine we were standing in that very spot 100 or so years before. Once we took the bait we were hooked. For the next hour we toured Aspen’s past as Dean, decked out in his stove-pipe hat and lit from below by his miner’s lamp, regaled us with stories that were big news when they happened.

As Dean told each tale he began with a little historical perspective and then injected some opinions to personalize the moments and the people who were both perpetrators and victims of the gruesome events. He also enlisted one female member of the audience to let out a scream at just the appropriate moment.

I won’t divulge the content of the tour – you need to go and find out for yourself. But I will say that standing across the street from the Hotel Jerome and staring at its beautiful façade on a gorgeous evening and placing myself into the context of the story Dean was weaving, I was taken to another time. It was great fun.

You can make reservations for any of Dean’s tours by calling 970-948-4349. There is more info, including a video, at www.aspenwalkingtours.com. And they also sell tickets in the Wheeler box office.

The “Aspen’s DarkSide” tour is an easy walk, great for all ages and a must-do this summer.

<http://www.aspentimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100716/COLUMN/100719900&parentprofile=search&template=printart>