

Zak Kostro

HUSTLIN'

Last night, one of my regulars bought me a shot of whiskey, then said to me, “You went to Columbia. What are you doing here?”

“Making money,” I said.

And yet, to me, bartending is so much more than that stack of bills at the end of the night. To be sure, it pays my rent, my hefty student loans, even enables me to afford Acaí smoothie packs from pricey natural food stores (forgive me—I live in LA). And yes, at times, I feel like a workaday cog in the nightlife wheel, cranking out vodka-Red Bulls for the WeHo masses.

So, when the nightly grind wears me down to the point where I doubt whether I can lift the bottle of Jack to pour one more Jack and Coke, I find strength and solace in Paul Newman’s words in *The Hustler*. “Anything can be great,” Newman’s character, pool hustler “Fast Eddie” Felson, says. “Brick-laying can be great if a guy knows . . . what he’s doin’ and why and if he can make it come off . . . he knows; he just feels when to let it go and how much ‘cause he’s got everything workin’ for him—timing, touch. It’s a great feeling, boy, it’s a real great feeling when you’re right and ya know you’re right . . . ya play that game the way nobody’s ever played it before.”

This is what I seek to do night in and night out behind the stick—to know what I’m doing and why, to tend bar in a way no one ever has before, to be great like Newman’s character is in that classic film. As I write these words, somehow, despite my exhaustion from routinely staying up ‘til sunrise, I get excited because it’s 8:30 PM on a Saturday, an hour and a half before my shift starts. Another night. Another chance to do tha damn thang and do it properly. Here we go. Thanks, Fast Eddie.