
A GIRL WALKS OUT OF A BAR. . .

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Here's a thing about going to bars. It hurts when I try to get up for 6:30 a.m. swim practice. I am trying to get up for that evilly early workout at least three days a week. And one drink can affect that (plus I have to drink soooo much water to compensate). Let's not even talk about two or three drinks. I have to admit it: My body is getting older and more demanding. It wants sleep, real sleep that starts before midnight, and to be exercised by former Olympians at obscenely early hours. (And spinach, for some reason. It loves the spinach.)

Here's another thing about going to bars: It's most fun if you have lots of friends to go with. I mean, don't get me wrong \u2013 I love bars, by myself, with big groups, with little groups. Some part of me comes to life the second I smell the hops and my eyes adjust to the dim interiors. Some part of me thinks, "Hurrah! It's bar time!" and "Bring on the bourbon!" But, with the exception of Dan, my favorite freakishly tall, lumberjack Mennonite friend, very few of my friends respond well these days to a random 8 p.m., "Hey you want to go get a drink right now?" They all have lives. Or wives. Or babies. Or have moved to Pennsylvania.

When I started this gig, I was in grad school, the very best time to hang out in bars. You go to class in the afternoon, read and write in the early evening, then go play half the night with grad school buddies. It's pretty sweet. Plus I had recently moved to Austin and every joint was new to me - the column gave me an excuse to wander and explore and get to know my new home. But I like having a local bar, one that I return to frequently, one where people know me, rather than constantly seeking out new places I've never been or that have just opened up. And I've graduated. And I work now. And everything is different.

All of which is to say that it's time to give up this column.

I've loved writing about bars. I've loved going to them, drinking in them, talking to strangers, goofing off with my friends. I loved going to dives and hipster joints and tiny places out of town and fancy places in town. Sure, I sometimes had to go places I didn't want to and sometimes had to have drinks when all I wanted to do was hang out at home, but overall, the gig was pretty great.

People often ask how I got the job and I tell them I got it over a poker game with my editor. (If I'm feeling expansive, I might tell them I won it in a poker game, but that's not true and it doesn't make much sense.) My editor wanted a bar column and he wanted a woman to write it; I didn't want to do anything regular, so I initially turned it down. Later, I came to my senses. Turns out, writing this column has been one of the most fun parts of my life in Austin. I'll miss it. But I don't go out as much as I used to, and I don't

even want to go out as much as I used to. Any good bargirl knows the day she realizes that is the day it's time to hang up her beer stein.

And so, this girl walks out of a bar and says, "Man, was that fun." She smiles, straightens the hem of her dress, looks down at the long street where she's spent so much time, and says, "OK. Next."

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