

Practice your 'beeeeeer!' cheer

Moira Muldoon

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Monday night, exterior Cain & Abel's, 10 p.m.:

A guy who's been driving down 24th so close behind me that he's practically on my bumper pulls into Cain & Abel's tent parking right after me. He impatiently cuts into the nearest parking space and hops from his SUV with an orange UT cap and a cigarette between his lips.

At the door, I am carded. I do not, even on my best days, look like I'm 21, much less younger. Today I particularly look my age, having taught that morning and not yet gotten home to change out of my "teacher clothes." I see a sign with big, chalked-in letters: "BEER GOOD." Underneath, in small letters, is someone's addendum: "School bad." I think: Verb needed.

Interior, 10:05 p.m.:

On the windowsill are copies of the Daily Texan, XL and some other things. I wonder who reads in this bar. I pick up XL. Me. The old bidy. I read in this bar.

Interior, 10:20 p.m.:

A touchdown is scored. A howl rises: BEEEEEEER! A guy strides up to the bar and asks for a free pitcher. On Monday nights, patrons pick their team and get five drink tickets with each pitcher of beer they buy. If their team scores a touchdown, they get to buy a pitcher with eight tickets. A field goal: 15 tickets. The result? The cheers rocketing through the bar have less to do with the skill of the players, the finesse of the play, the sheer joy of watching a favorite do well. The football game is about BEEEEEEER!, and BEEEEEEER! is the cheer of choice.

Interior, 10:30 p.m.:

The strains of young women ordering drinks float by: Miller Lite, Bud Light, a rum and Diet Coke. Memories of college surge forward; I can practically smell the Bacardi we used to keep in our dorm room. (No, wait, that scent's actually the powerful aftershave of the nice-pants-wearing young man sitting three stools down from me.) Shots are ordered on both sides of me and again I remember college. I wonder if the bar that took my fake ID still has it hanging on the wall? Did I ever wear that much makeup? Did I look that young and confident/insecure? Of course I did.

Interior, 10:45 p.m.

People keep scoring; field goals, touchdowns all lead to cries of BEEEEEEER!. There are maybe 20 people inside the bar. It's loud. (People yelling BEEEEEEER! will do that.) Perhaps I should have sat outside; it looks quieter out there -- but then I would have missed the Monday night spectacular. New customers keep walking in; I bail, dream that night about tailgaters.

Interior, 1 p.m., the previous Tuesday:

Cain & Abel's just began serving lunch. I ate burgers there one evening a long time ago with my friend Mitch, a man who believes in beer, the Green Bay Packers and Gerard Manley Hopkins. (I really like Mitch. And he really liked watching the Packers at Cain & Abel's.) But this menu is different. Cain & Abel's changed ownership about a year ago and the new guys have spruced up the offerings. I ordered a burger again -- this time it was a huge patty, covered in cheese, served on a sweet bun. It was great. But I could have had a salad, enchiladas, any number of sandwiches. The choices were many, a definite departure. I heard that lunch has been slow getting started, but on my visit, the place is reasonably full. I'd eat there again. It's too bad the owners don't do food like pitchers: Imagine, customers could choose a Saturday game, a team, and then decide if they wanted to play for burgers or beer. After a touchdown, part of the room would yell "MEEEAAT!" while the other side would chant "BEEEEER!"

[bargirl@covad.net](mailto:bargirl@covad.net)

Cain & Abel's. 2313 Rio Grande St., 476-3201. Hours: 11 a.m.-2 a.m. Sunday-Monday; 11 a.m.-4 a.m. Tuesday-Saturday.