

OLD FRIENDS, NEW FRIENDS DO THE CONTINENTAL  
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Something is going on. First, it turns out that a current friend of mine is great friends with one of my old high-school boyfriends (he was smart and lovely and dorky then; he's a smart, lovely musician with screaming female fans now). Then one of my best friends from high school (with whom I had a falling out, high-school fashion) got in touch with me to re-establish contact. Then my best friend from junior high (falling out with her, too, junior-high fashion) re-established contact. Now, I'm just waiting for my best friend from elementary school to get in touch with me.

It's a funny thing: The bigger my world gets, the smaller it gets, too. The more people I meet, the more new friends I make, the more the old ones seem to crop up. And, of course, there's room for both.

I was thinking about all this at the Tuesday night Toni Price gig at the Continental Club, where the club's old friends -- the older hippies-- were mingling with new ones -- the young pup hippies. And I was thinking, too, that, had I lived in Austin during my high-school years, the Continental would have been exactly the kind of place all of us -- the dorky boyfriend, the various best friends -- would have tried, and failed, to sneak into. You go to the Continental to see shows: Toni Price, 8 1/2 Souvenirs, the delectable Siberian antics of the Red Elvises. The club is home to an annual Elvis Presley birthday and death party and premiered its first burlesque show back in the '60s, just a few years after its 1957 opening. It's smack in the heart of "SoCo" (and has been since long before South Congress was "SoCo"); it's got a fun '50s neon sign, and it's small. Intimate. Often crowded. Usually smoky. Always loud and full of music. What better place would there have been for us to fail to sneak into?

The club is two rooms, more or less: The front room, with the stage, the full bar (only Guinness on draft; 20 others in bottles; a dollar off all drinks till 7 p.m.), seating for about 10 along one wall and chairs for about 50 more toward the back; and the back room, with a pool table, a very few chairs, and occasionally, space to take a breather. The decor feels like a cross between a '50s supperclub and vampy badgirl spot. The stage is draped with red velvet curtains and a sparkly backdrop and the empty space right in front of it invites dancing (or swaying on big-crowd nights). Mostly black-and-white photos cover the wall behind the bar. The back room is filled with stuff you might pick up in a garage sale in 1961: old beer signs, banners, a tiny "bar" where you can buy beer on busy nights. The lighting is dark, sometimes tinged lipstick red, the smoke curls like a pinup's curves, and there's that waitress -- the imperturbable tall one who lifts heavy trays high above the crowd and looks so unflappable that you know she could kick your behind from here to China if it came to a catfight in heels. (Not that you'd ever be so stupid as to challenge her. Or fight in heels.) Oh yes, the Continental is exactly the kind of place we would have wanted to sneak into.

One of the women who recently got in touch with me might be moving to Austin. And I

just might have my old "novelty item" ID somewhere around -- I think it would make me about 40 to 45 by now. If she makes it to town, maybe I'll find that old thing, pick her up and let the Continental's doorman wonder why a 32-year-old is laughing herself silly and trying to sneak in as a fortysomething.

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