

A little less smoke on the water

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I quit smoking three months ago. (Feel free to applaud now.) I was never what you'd call a "serious" smoker, however, just the sort who'd light up in social situations or times of stress. So quitting wasn't too awful. It was an uncomfortable, rather than tortured, process. At least, that was true until last week. I don't know what happened, but I've been crawling the walls with wanting a cigarette. I've been dreaming at night about smoking. But I'm not going to have a cigarette. Instead, as if it's going to help, I've been hanging out in really smoky bars.

Like Deep Eddy Cabaret. I've only been in there three or four times now, largely because when I'm in the Deep Eddy area I'm usually swimming at Deep Eddy Pool. The last place I want to go after immersing myself in refreshing spring water is a dark, smoky bar. However, said bar is much more appealing now that it's too cold to swim and I'm feeling too old to smoke. But here's the funny thing: Deep Eddy Cabaret wasn't all that smoky. I've had friends refuse to go to Deep Eddy because it was too smoky, known people who only wear their most "smokable" clothes -- the shirts and jeans that really need to be laundered anyway -- into the joint. But the last three times I went, with my nearly unbearable jones for a smoke, there wasn't a whole lot of smoke. Really.

There was Elvis, on the jukebox and in a photo behind the bar; there was pool; there were hot nuts and pretzels; there was Golden Tee; there were beers by the dozen and pitchers on the tables; there were roped green lights and neon signs, cheap wood paneling and a classic neighborhood feel. There were even a handful of smokers. But there wasn't a lot of smoke. Barfly's is worse. Ego's is worse. But Deep Eddy wasn't bad. (Maybe I've just been going there on off-nights.)

What Deep Eddy is, of course, is fabulous. The first time I walked in, I thought "Mmmmmmm, my kinda joint." Because it is a joint, like Ginny's or the Poodle Dog. Because it's got a thousand kinds of stuff and photos and signs tacked up to the wall behind the bar. Because it was a grocery store and bait shack before it was a bar. Because the jukebox has Frank and Merle and Elvis (Costello and Presley) and most every kind of music you can think of. Because the old metal stools are bolted to the floor (or too heavy for me to move) and stuck so close together you might actually have to talk to the guy sitting next to you. Because the handle to the women's bathroom door is a flat coin slot, like you find on washing machines, and the graffiti inside stretches to the ceiling. Because Lone Star is cheap and comes in pitchers and in this place you'll probably feel like drinking Lone Star no matter what brand of scotch you drink in the outside world. Because Deep Eddy does feel like its own world. It is a neighborhood bar. It just didn't help me much with my craving for a cigarette. Then again, that's hardly the bar's job. I have a friend who quit smoking by having a scotch every time she wanted a cigarette. She said she figured the scotch was better for her than the smoke, even if it did mean that she spent six months with a buzz. I myself don't think I'd manage very well with a constant buzz on (the writing might go OK, but the teaching would kill me). But I'm

hoping that these recent mad cravings are on their way out. Then, at least, I won't be the only person on earth complaining that Deep Eddy just isn't smoky enough.

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Deep Eddy Cabaret: 2315 Lake Austin Blvd.,  
472-0961; Hours: noon-2 a.m. daily.

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