

FUN, FRIENDS: JUST WHAT THE DOC ORDERED  
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"It is 12:20 in New York a Friday/three days after Bastille Day, yes/it is 1959 and I go get a shoeshine," Frank O'Hara begins "The Day Lady Died."

It's his famous poem about Billie Holiday. Something about the big blue neon sign at Doc's Motorworks Bar & Grill with the car that's part Chevrolet, part Studebaker, put me in mind of O'Hara and his rolled up shirtsleeves and his plainspoken, sometimes electric poems -- about James Dean, the '50s and Lady Day. (The reason my students say I like English too much? Sometimes I say these things out loud.)

Doc's used to be a mechanic's shop. "I just had my oil changed there a few week ago," one friend said, startled, when I invited her to the bar. Now, drinking and eating have supplanted oil changes. And on one of the first cool nights last month, a bunch of us pulled tables together, hawk-watched for extra chairs (brightly colored) and drank beer on the patio outside. We weren't watching the game, though most of the folks inside were, and the occasional crowd roar added energy to the ambiance.

We, of course, were busy talking about Halloween, ghosts and gossip. I lost a bet by losing abysmally in a game of Ms. Pac-Man to a friend who freakishly cleared like 10 boards. (Yeah, what did you do on Saturday nights in high school, Dan?)

There was a strange and delightful chaos to the evening. The staff was busy and a little slow, but everything else was in constant motion: some in the group leaving to go to a haunted house then returning, people running into friends from all different areas of their lives, me meeting someone who went to my college, graduated my year, and knew absolutely none of the same people. My friend Susan swearing that the burger she ordered was one of the best she'd had in Austin. (I had a bite; it was good.) Friends walking to the bar from their South Austin houses but wanting rides home.

There are things you should know about Doc's: It's open till midnight; 31 beers (about half are Texas beers) are on tap (and about 17 in bottles), a full bar, and parking is of the South Congress street variety. The food lands squarely in the bar food department (burgers, queso, quesadilla, cold Snickers pie). Doc's hasn't been open long (only since mid-September), and one member of the staff clearly was new to the bartending world. (Several weeks ago, when I ordered a Jameson, the very nice, pixie-ish waitress asked me what that was. More recently, I've encountered no such difficulty.) There are six televisions in four sizes: one 27-inch, four 32-inch and one 42-inch. The outdoor patios seats about 125, and the indoor area seats about 55. One pool table, a shuffleboard and three arcade games provide entertainment.

I love hanging out with a posse, watching people move from one table to the next, the drinks and the night settling in. I love the way a laugh unfurls the body, opens it, and the way heads lean gently into conversation. There's an energy to this, an electricity.

and I am sweating a lot by now and thinking of  
leaning on the john door in the 5 SPOT  
while she whispered a song along the keyboard  
to Mal Waldron and everyone and I stopped breathing  
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