
BAR AS COMFORTABLE AS A FAVORITE POEM

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I recently met one of my favorite poets, Eleanor Wilner. After her terrific reading at Texas State University-San Marcos, I waited in line for her to sign my books. Much as I wished to chat, she was the woman of the hour, and I didn't want to intrude or impose. Plus, I was a little nervous. She asked my name and told me it meant "fate" in Greek. I replied that it means "man's portion in life" in French, but that my parents had not chosen the name for any of these meanings, sadly. She laughed, we chatted, and she signed my book: "For Moira, man's portion? Why not?"

Being able to set someone at ease, to make her feel comfortable when she fears intruding, is a wonderful gift. The folks at the Rainbow Cattle Company have this gift. The gay country bar struck me as warm and inviting: I was quickly at ease and comfortable despite the fact that I'm neither gay nor country. And the nice, straight, tall Texas boys I was with were, too.

The Friday night dancing — Friday nights are slower than Saturdays I hear — was spectacular. Women expertly guided women in long swirls around the raised, square dance floor. Tall men in hats lead less tall men in hats into graceful two steps. And a patient man attempted to teach an equally patient man how to dance.

The joint is huge. There's the big main dance floor, lots of wandering space, a back bar, a small side bar, the main bar and a pool table. (Obviously, the smaller bars don't open unless crowds are anticipated.) The music was what you'd expect to hear at a mainstream country bar. One of my companions remarked that it felt like every cowboy bar he'd been to; it sure felt to me like the Fort Worth bars we tried to sneak into in high school. As often happens when I enter a non-native culture, I made a few small missteps. Apparently, Manhattans are not gay cowboy bar drinks. The first time I asked for one, the bartender had never heard of it. On a return visit, I tried again, and found myself disinclined to finish the drink.

The beer was awesome. The Jack and Diets and Beam and Cokes were, too. And after I read the Web site, I realized I could've ordered specialty drinks. Next time. Although the bar is comfortable and easy, it's worth noting that Friday nights are officially "Cruise and Booze" nights, according to the Web site, and some tomfoolery might ensue, as might happen in any bar with the word "booze" in an event name. Thursdays are "Girls' Night Out." Wednesdays offer all-night happy hour prices. On Tuesdays, newbies can take beginning dance classes. On Sundays, the bars gets its Latin groove on with salsa music. And Saturdays are all about the dancing. I recommend that folks not go on Mondays — the bar is closed.

I won't be going to the bar this Monday, anyway. I'll be sitting at home, re-reading all of Wilner's books. I got to have dinner with her and few others after the reading, and she

was as engaging and lovely as when she signed my books, books I'll now read with the pleasure of discovering how much I liked the person she is as well as the poet.

And I will be thinking too about how engaging someone in conversation, about how being interested instead of interesting, can set another at ease.

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