

Time Out

Chicago

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Down 'n' dirty

DIVE BARS

Belly up for bargain booze & questionable company at these colorful corner taps

Inside
Drunks do the darndest things!
Where to get blotto for five bucks
The Regulars (and how they got that way)

Dive in

It happened about the same time PBR became “cool.” New bars, gutted and rehabbed, were studiously reworked to resemble your shoddy corner tap.

Yet no matter how hard these wanna-bes tried to emulate the sticky floors, creepy regulars and boiled-egg aromas of a real dive, they always came up short. Turns out there’s something about a dive that’s impossible to copy. Maybe it’s the way eeriness coexists with homeyness or the fact that you can go into one looking your grungiest and no one will judge. Maybe it’s the way that \$5 at a dive bar seems to stretch infinitely, garnering a couple songs on the jukebox, a bag of chips and several beers to boot. Maybe it’s simply the quality of the bartenders. But we suspect that it all comes down to the people who hang out there. Leaving no cardboard coaster unturned, we tracked down some of the city’s most loyal regulars and found out how they got that way. So, pull up a wobbly stool and take notes—after reading this package, you’ll probably want to become a regular yourself.

47
TOTAL DIVES
IN THIS WEEK'S
DRINK UP, P.50

Photograph By **Brian Willette**

Booze clues

Searching for an authentic dive? Look for the beef jerky, dollar shots and these other essential elements. By **Heather Shouse** and **David Tamarkin**
Photograph By **Brian Willette**

Pall Mall and Newports are your options for smokes.

Behind the bar, there's vodka in a machine gun-shaped bottle.

Your food options are jerky sausages and bags of Zapp's shoestring potatoes.

Scratch-offs are sold behind the bar.

The name of the person behind the bar matches the name of the bar.

Behind the bar you'll find Jeppson's Malört, (see "Bitter brew, page 20).

Dollar shots is not a one-night-a-week gimmick to bring in the young crowd—it's an all-day, everyday way of life.

Old dudes, chillin'.

Promotional beer crap hangs from the glamorous drop ceiling.

There's a sign for the Polish beer Zywiec somewhere inside, and a "Zimne Piwo" (cold beer) sign over the door.

There's an ATM—because the bar takes cash only.

You can grab a sixer to go, to continue the party after-hours.

Ola's Liquor, at 947 N Damen Ave

Other subtle signs of a real dive bar (in case you're not sure)...

- 1** There's a cigarette machine that also dispenses candy bars. (Ollie's, 1064 W Berwyn Ave, 773-784-5712)
- 2** There's no 411 listing, no phone—and no intention of getting either. (Tina's Place, 5708 S Western Ave)
- 3** The bar opens at 6am so the graveyard shift can booze up before hitting the sack. (Sky-Ride Cocktail Lounge, 105 W Van Buren St, 312-939-3340)
- 4** The mop closet is more spacious than the men's bathroom. (Lilly's, 2513 N Lincoln Ave, 773-525-2422)
- 5** None of the pool cues have tips. (My Place on Milwaukee, 3394 N Milwaukee Ave, 773-286-4482)
- 6** You'll see photos of the owner's fishing trip—from 1982. (J&M Tap, 957 N Leavitt St, no phone)
- 7** There are no cocktails, because there is no ice. (Ed and Jean's, 2032 W Armitage Ave, no phone)
- 8** There's a condom dispenser in the bathroom. (June's Inn, 4333 N Western Ave, 773-463-3122)
- 9** The entrance is locked until the 'tender feels like getting out of bed. (Johnny's, 3425 N Lincoln Ave, 773-248-3000)
- 10** You're not drinking from the same type or size cup as your friend, even though you ordered the same cocktail. (Rose's, 2656 N Lincoln Ave, 773-327-4000)
- 11** Holiday lights are up, but Christmas was months ago. (Celina's Place, 900 N Western Ave, 773-486-8737)
- 12** There are no windows, making it possible to drink from day into night with little concern for time's passing. (Sheridan "L" Lounge and Delicatessen, 3944 N Sheridan Rd, no phone)

Is your favorite bar a dive? Find out by taking our quiz at timeoutchicago.com/dives.



The great pretenders

How to tell when a hipster bar is masquerading as a dive bar.

By **Jake Malooley, Heather Shouse** and **David Tamarkin**

There are at least a handful of flavored vodkas.

A Tamale Guy shows up at any point in the night.

Wilco is on the jukebox.

It doesn't start getting crowded until 10pm.



There's a cocktail list, a wine list and/or a beer list.

There's somebody in sunglasses (the blind don't count).



Everybody in the room is under 40, bartenders included.

There's a photo booth.

The bartender doesn't drink on the job.

There are sliders on the menu.

There's a menu at all.

It's "Soul" night.

Red Bull is a mixer option.

There's free Wi-Fi; or any Wi-Fi, for that matter.

The bartender is in a band he describes as "post-rock."

The guy to your right goes on and on about how a new Pitchfork Media review is "trenchant."

Bitter brew

Only a brave few can stomach Chicago's infamous wormwood liqueur, Jeppson's Malört. By **Heather Shouse**

Are you the one person in 49 who will drink Jeppson's Malört? Maybe. But you're not likely to go back for seconds. On the back of this potent potable bottle, opposite a crest emblazoned with the Chicago flag, you'll find the words of Carl Jeppson, a Swedish immigrant who started producing this liqueur at the South Side's Red Horse Distillery in the '30s. "Most first-time drinkers of Jeppson's Malört reject our liquor," the label reads. "Its strong, sharp taste is not for everyone. Our liquor is rugged and unrelenting (even brutal) to the palate. During almost 60 years of American distribution, we found only 1 out of 49 men will drink Jeppson's Malört... It is not possible to forget our two-fisted liquor... the first shot is hard to swallow! PERSERVERE [sic]. Make it past two 'shock-glasses' and with the third you could be ours... forever." We're proud to say that this special concoction is sold only in Chicago.

Found in any Chicago dive bar worth its overflowing ashtrays, including damn near every biker bar in Illinois, this 70-proof, Swedish-style schnapps only has two ingredients: alcohol and wormwood (*malört* in Swedish). There are a couple hundred species of *artemisia*, the family of plants that includes wormwood, and a couple of them are known for inducing batshit-crazy highs. Vincent van Gogh, for instance, graduated from gulping wormwood-based absinthe to munching paint chips and drinking turpentine. The latter is precisely what the bitter-as-hell Jeppson's Malört resembles going down the hatch. That, or a delicate combination of cat piss and ear wax.

These days, decades after the concoction's namesake passed away, the tiny company is managed by one woman, Pat Gabelick, who runs the business out of her Lincoln Park apartment. The Malört's label may sport the words "Chicago, U.S.A." but a closer look reveals the fine print: "Produced and bottled for Carl Jeppson Company." The stuff is now made in Florida, by a company that skirts the absinthe ban by using a variety of wormwood that doesn't contain thujone, the chemical said to be responsible for the absinthe hysteria that led to bans across the world in the early 1900s. The debate over the validity of absinthe-induced craziness rages on, and many countries have lifted their bans just during the last decade, but for now, it's still illegal in the States. Luckily for us Chicagoans, we have Jeppson's Malört to tide us over, and while we're no wormwood experts, we feel insane after just a shot of the stuff.



Try it yourself at:

- Cuneen's Tavern** (1438 W Devon Ave, 773-274-9317)
- Loop Tavern** (1610 W Chicago Ave, 312-226-6740)
- Friar Tuck** (3010 N Broadway, 773-327-5101)
- The Sovereign** (6202 N Broadway, 773-274-0057)
- L & L Tavern** (3207 N Clark St, 773-528-1303)
- Max's Place** (4621 N Clark St 773-784-3864)
- Tap Room/Foremost Liquors** (3210 N Cicero Ave, 773-282-6064)

Tales from the taps

Spend a few years working behind a bar and you'll see your share of brawls, barflys and brewhaha. We asked our favorite 'tenders to share their most amazing stories. Illustrations by **Mitch O'Connell**



Al Moran Bartender at Mitchell's Tap (3356 S Halsted St, 773-927-6073)

"There used to be an upright piano in the back of the bar with a warped soundboard. One night, [former owner] Chuck Puffer decided he didn't want it in the bar anymore. So we dragged it through the front door, rolled it to the curb, walked inside, turned off the lights, had a beer and waited. About a half hour later, this car passes by, and then backs up. There are two guys in the car, and they're staring at this piano. Finally, the driver stops and gets a rope from the trunk. All of a sudden he and his buddy are tying the piano to the back bumper. They drive off, and those little wheels on the piano are spinning like crazy. Finally, the wheels fall off the piano around 34th Street, and then the bumper falls off the car with the piano still tied to it! I guess those guys in the car didn't want to deal with it anymore, because they drove off and left the piano and the bumper in the middle of Halsted. The cops eventually cleared the street, but they never asked us where the piano came from." —As told to Chuck Sudo



Teresa Wilson

Bartender at Wrigleyville North (3900 N Sheridan Rd, 773-929-9543)

“It was getting close to closing time when these two little guys came in and ordered a pitcher of beer and sat down. It was like 1:25am and we serve until 1:40am. One of the guys got up and went to the bathroom and never came out. No one really noticed him missing until one of the members of the country band that played that night went to the bathroom and noticed one of the ceiling tiles had fallen down and was lying on the bathroom floor. So the band member got a ladder, poked his head up through the hole in the ceiling and saw the guy up there. He was standing on the rafters waiting for us to close so he could rob the place. The band member got down off the ladder, yelled to us that we should call the cops and held the bathroom door closed so the guy couldn’t get away. Well, as the guy was trying to find a way out of the rafters, he slipped and fell through the ceiling onto the ladies’ side of the bathroom. The police came and locked him up, but they couldn’t charge him with anything other than criminal damage to private property, because we hadn’t officially closed.” —As told to Jake Malooley

Lee Martin

Bartender at Richard’s Bar (491 N Milwaukee Ave, 312-421-4597)

“I had two big women come in—this was when I was working nights—and they go in the ladies’ washroom. Well, you know, I don’t think nothing about it. Well, a little while later [a different] lady goes to the washroom and comes back out and says, “Do you know your washbowl is out of the wall?” I go, “What?” and I go in there. It wasn’t sitting on the floor or nothing, but evidently one of them had gone up and sat in the washbowl to take a leak and had tore it right out of the wall.” —As told to David Tamarkin

John “Sarge” Kolodziej

Bartender-owner of Jarheads (6973 N Clark St, 773-973-1907)

“I bought the bar in June of 1990, and when I took over I had this big party—a sorta party to celebrate the leaving of one owner and the starting of a new one. I told everyone in the neighborhood that everything in the bar was one dollar. Everything. I said I wanted to get rid of all the old stock. But, really, I knew it was going to bring all the riffraff and gangbangers who hang out on Clark Street. And it did. The place was packed with all this trash. They didn’t know that I had some guys across the street waiting. Big guys. And when the place was packed, I locked the back door and the guys came, they locked the front door, and we frisked all these gangbangers and took their knives and guns and dope off of them and piled it on the bar, and then I told all of them that they were banned forever. In 17 years, we haven’t had any problems because all the riffraff knows that they can’t go into Jarheads and cause any problems ‘cuz if they do, they’re gonna get a beat down.” —As told to Ryan Bartelmay

Take five

Think your fiver can't even buy you a cocktail at most bars? You're right. But at these joints, that bill goes a long way.



Ted's Firewater Saloon (5834 S Kedzie Ave, 773-436-8444) This Southwest Side tavern, decorated to look like a cross between a general store and a Wisconsin hunting lodge, gets you some serious value for your fin. Go on Wednesdays or Saturdays, when \$5 buys you two Miller Lite drafts in frosted mugs (75 cents), two Jell-O shots (\$1 apiece), three songs off Mexican *ranchero* singer Vicente Fernández's latest on the jukebox (\$1), a noncommittal answer when you ask owner Ted Lachowicz if the vintage firearms decorating his back bar are loaded, and shouted warnings that only one person is allowed in the bathroom at a time (to discourage illicit drug use). —Chuck Sudo

Redwood Lounge (3200 S Wallace St, no phone) Off-duty cops and Bridgeport locals old enough to remember both the Sox's 1917 and 2005 World Series titles commingle at this famed local corner tavern—when the owners feel like opening it, that is. Such flexibility in business hours keeps the prices down: Five bucks here will get you two bottles of Old Style (\$2 each) and five plays on the jukebox (\$1). Eric Clapton's *MTV Unplugged* CD holds down two slots in the jukebox, so feel free to play "Tears in Heaven" more than once, as the Redwood Lounge regulars aren't the sort of people who open up to strangers. —CS

Falcon Inn (1601 E 53rd St, no phone) What's beyond the interior pass-through window in this Hyde Park dive? Cholie's Pizza, a semiseparate establishment that shares the west wall of the building. Start by grabbing a huge slice (\$1.75) to complement that pint of AmberBock (\$1.50). After wolfing down dinner, get pumped up for a fierce game of video bowling (50 cents) to a custom soundtrack courtesy of the joint's new digital jukebox, which has a ton of selections from South Side favorite Kanye West (two plays for \$1). Once your fiver is gone, enjoy unlimited color commentary about the state of the world from the old-timers sitting at the bar, at least one of whom is usually drinking his Miller Lite on the rocks. —Laura Oppenheimer

Snickers (448 N State St, 312-527-0437) The beauty of hanging out at a bar with a grill behind it is that when the craving for fried food hits—and we know that it hits hard—gratification is just a few steps away. But the cheap perks of this seedy corner bar don't stop there: Any night of the week you can start things off with the Kamikaze shot (\$2). Sop up some of that booze with a grilled cheese sandwich (\$2.25) and a few tracks off *The Best of Deep Purple* (\$1 for two songs). Okay, you might be a quarter over your limit, but somebody will definitely lend you some silver to hear "Smoke on the Water." Or skip the music altogether and drink to the soothing (albeit profanity-laced) sounds of *The Maury Povich Show* (or whatever other trashy TV show is playing). —David Tamarkin

The Mutiny (2428 N Western Ave, 773-486-7774) Even though this crusty joint features live music Tuesdays through Saturdays, there's never a cover. That means you can spend your dough on a pint of Bud, Miller Lite or PBR (\$3.50) and watch such up-and-coming bands as Donkey Punch, Human Aftertaste, or Johnny Mohawk and the Assassins. The fun doesn't stop there—pool and *Golden Tee* are always free, so it's like being in some rich kid's basement. Except it's, shall we say, grittier. —Heather Shouse

WHAT YOU GET	
Two Miller Lite drafts	\$1.50
Two Jell-O shots	\$2.00
Three songs on the jukebox	\$1.00
Total tab	\$4.50

WHAT YOU GET	
Two bottles of Old Style	\$4.00
Five plays on the jukebox	\$1.00
Total tab	\$5.00

WHAT YOU GET	
Pizza slice	\$1.75
Pint of AmberBock	\$1.50
Game of video bowling	50 cents
Two plays on the jukebox	\$1.00
Total tab	\$4.75

WHAT YOU GET	
Kamikaze shot	\$2.00
Grilled cheese sandwich	\$2.25
Two tracks off <i>The Best of Deep Purple</i>	\$1.00
Total tab	\$5.25

WHAT YOU GET	
Pint of Bud, Miller Lite or PBR	\$3.50
Live music	free
Pool	free
<i>Golden Tee</i>	free
Total tab	\$3.50

PHOTOS: TOP RIGHT, NICOLE RADJA; REDWOOD LOUNGE, SARAH MCKENIE; ALL OTHERS, NOAN WELLS

Meet the regulars

Ever wanted to have a home away from home, where the bartender starts fixing your drink when you walk in the door? These local barflies are living the dream. By **Jake Malooley, Chuck Sudo and David Tamarkin** Photographs by **Calbee Booth**



Cindy Garner

Where you'll find her Savemore Liquors (4060 N Lincoln Ave, 773-281-1444)

A regular for Two years

Why is this your spot?

I know the owners and they drink with me.

What's the craziest thing you've seen here?

The wet T-shirt contest. That's how Tim over there met his wife—she won.

What's your drink?

Cranberry and vodka. No matter how many different kinds of messed up I am, I can always drink it.

Cubs or Sox?

Cubs, but my boyfriend's a Sox fan. He says the sex is better because it's like always having that angry kind of makeup sex.

Hillary Clinton or Barack Obama?

There's no politics in this bar. We're here to drink and have a good time.

Who's the best bartender here?

Whoever gave me my last drink.

What's your favorite thing in this place?

The statue of the guy fucking the sheep. Doesn't get much better than that.

Don [Last name withheld upon request]

Where you'll find him Rose's Lounge (2656 N Lincoln Ave, 773-327-4000)

A regular for Four years

Shift From open until close

What's your drink?

\$1 mug of beer. I have no idea what she gives me. I don't.

Is that a drawing of you hanging up behind the bar?

Yes, that's me. A local artist did it in 20 minutes. That's me and my wife, Barbara.

Are you from Chicago?

I grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, and then spent 18 years traveling the country. I had to go see it. And, oh, I did. But this will always be my town.

So was it like a Jack Kerouac *On the Road* experience?

Oh God, I would hitchhike, go on buses—I did everything. All across the country, I took every job I could get. I would wake up in the morning and go. I felt like I had to go somewhere. In the '60s, you could always get a job in Chicago.

Why do you keep coming back to this bar?

I live across the street. Anytime I walk in here, I know everyone here. And tell me where else you have seen a bar full of stuff like this—chickens, elephants, beads, dolls? My wife and I gave some of these things to Rose because we thought people would come in here and enjoy life. Most bars these days are too neat and tidy.



BACKGROUND PHOTO BY YOCAN BIRNIE. LOCATION: BURTON PLACE, 1447 N WELLS ST. 312.664.4699



George Byrne and Jim Themelis

Where you'll find them Dram Shop (3040 N Broadway, 773-549-4401)

Regulars for A little over a year

What's your drink?

Jim Themelis: I don't drink alcohol but I like Coke, lemonade or club soda. George is a Guinness man.

Isn't Guinness kind of heavy for summer?

George Byrne: Not for me—I like it, I like how it goes with the cigars I smoke.

People kind of look down on cigar smokers, don't they?

JT: Yeah, you can't win. There could be 50 people smoking cigarettes in here, you couldn't even breathe with all the cigarette smoke, but before you even light up, the woman over there's gonna be complaining about the smell. The women either love it or hate it. Either their grandfather and their father smoked and they want to sit next to ya, or they want to sit on the other side of the bar.

Besides the fact that you're allowed to smoke cigars here, what else keeps you coming back?

JT: It's a nice, comfortable neighborhood bar.

GB: It's more like a corner bar. It gets crowded sometimes, but it's really laid-back.

JT: And all the bartenders are pretty good.

What makes a good bartender?

JT: Well, \$3.50 Guinness helps. [Cackles]

GB: They'll talk to you about whatever...

JT:...and they know some good jokes usually. Standard human interaction while you're drinking, or whatever.

Cubs or Sox?

JT: He's a Sox fan, I'm a Cubs fan.

That could get ugly.

JT: Well, they're both ugly this year, so...

Hillary or Obama?

JT: [Cackles again] I kind of like Richardson from New Mexico, but nobody's ever heard of him or gonna vote for him.

Mark Jozefczyk

Where you'll find him Bridgeport Inn (2901 S Archer Ave, 773-523-5468)

A regular for 20 years

What's your drink? A pitcher of MGD and a shot of Canadian Club

Is this your usual seat?

I sit at the top of "the hook," just where it starts to curve. Everyone I know sits here. If the hook gets full, people pull up chairs and sit around us.

Did you grow up in the neighborhood?

I'm Bridgeport-born and -raised; grew up at 32nd and Racine. Matter of fact, friends I've known since I was five come here, too.

Do the bartenders have your drink ready for you when they see you come in?

Absolutely. It's usually waiting for me by the time I sit down.

What's something people wouldn't know about the Bridgeport Inn?

There used to be a bowling alley upstairs. It was called Johnny Wall's Bowling Alley. The lanes are actually still up there. There were eight lanes and the pins were set by hand. Sometimes it would get so packed upstairs that we'd have to walk up the stairs sideways.

That sounds like a find. Why is it closed?

Well, 20 years ago Johnny Wall went to Club Fed.

What did he do?

Eh. He was a Republican in a Democratic town. Sometimes that's enough.

Editor's note: Jozefczyk's story made us curious, so we did a little digging. Turns out that in 1975, state Rep. John F. Wall, a Chicago Republican, was one of seven members of the Illinois legislature convicted of conspiracy and mail fraud for taking bribes from the cement industry.



Battle of the B-list brews

Cheap swill is synonymous with dive bars, but all shitty beer is not the same. Here's how to pick the best of the worst the next time you dive in. By **Chuck Sudo**



Old Style

Fizzy facts Old Style became a sponsor of the Cubs in 1950, and the beer is still sold at Wrigley. Pabst owns the Old Style name, but not the famous Old Style “krausened” brewing recipe.
Flavor The beer that’s “pure brewed in God’s country” is so sweet it makes our jaws seize.
Belch barometer Intermittent and staccato, like sending a distress signal via Morse code.
Hangover factor The headaches, dry mouth and nausea start *while* you’re drinking it.
Cheapest we’ve found \$1 a mug at Rose’s Lounge (2656 N Lincoln Ave, 773-327-4000)

Pabst Blue Ribbon

Fizzy facts PBR might have made Milwaukee famous, but its corporate headquarters are now in suburban Woodridge. Pabst closed its last brewery—in Allentown, Pennsylvania—in 2001. It’s now brewed on contract by SABMiller.
Flavor There’s a reason this brew still wins medals at beer festivals (in 2005 at the Great American Beer Festival in Denver, for instance). It’s still a classic lager, with a kiss of hops, but none of the bitterness.
Belch barometer Long, vociferous and urgent. With some control, you can burp your vital information to the police when you’re picked up for public drunkenness.
Hangover factor Medium. After a 12-pack of PBR, your head feels like it’s been packed with acid-soaked cotton balls.
Cheapest we’ve found \$2 a bottle at Cindy’s Our Place (3534 W Belmont Ave, 773-588-4390)

Coors Light

Fizzy facts Where do we start? The federal lawsuit over discriminatory hiring practices? The money the company gives to conservative causes? The hiring of Dick Cheney’s angry lesbian daughter as a “community liaison” to gays and lesbians? The underreported fact that Coors is the mastermind behind so-called craft beer Blue Moon?
Flavor How this beer can be simultaneously overly sweet and mouth-puckeringly bitter is beyond us. But it is.
Belch barometer Eating while slamming a can is not advised.
Hangover factor Only masochists drink a 12-pack of this. The hangover from this beer makes us long for the sweet care of death.
Cheapest we’ve found \$2.50 a bottle at Tradir Post (4225 W Fullerton Ave, 773-489-2826)

Hamm’s

Fizzy facts The Hamm’s Beer Bear, the brewery’s longtime mascot, was named Sascha, after the wife of Hamm’s cofounder A.F. Kellar. Once the pride of Minnesota, today Hamm’s is part of the SABMiller portfolio, with limited distribution outside of the Midwest.
Flavor Overly sweet and malty, like tupelo honey.
Belch barometer Loud and wet-sounding, like a cow chewing cud.
Hangover factor Like the “sky-blue water” that used to go into this beer, Hamm’s leaves you with little to no hangover, even after drinking a 12-pack.
Cheapest we’ve found \$1.50 a can at Village Tavern (6912 W Belmont Ave, 773-736-9050)

Milwaukee’s Best

Fizzy facts It’s often mistaken as an offshoot of Old Milwaukee, but Milwaukee’s Best was created by Miller as an “economy” label.
Flavor There’s a reason it’s known as “The Beast.” Imagine the taste of Miller High Life watered down.
Belch barometer Like a motorcycle engine shifting gears, complete with Doppler effect.
Hangover factor Roll out of bed, take an aspirin, eat a greasy meal and roll back into bed. Just give up on the day.
Cheapest we’ve found \$2.99 for a six-pack at Binny’s Beverage Depot (true, it’s not a dive bar, but damn that’s cheap! For locations, visit binnys.com)





WARNING SIGN Watch out for the no-lock bathroom door at Stella's Sports Bar.

Signs of the times

Six bars. Six Old Style signs. One pub crawl. I lived to tell the tale. By **Margaret Lyons**

Pub crawls and I go together like...ugh, I'm too hungover to finish that thought. Let's just say I'm more of a settle-in-for-the-long-haul type than a combine-boozing-with-physical-activity type. But when faced with a crawl that was right up my alley (not to mention in my 'hood), it was pointless to resist. The plan was simple: Hit up a few of those bars whose only demarcation is an Old Style sign hanging outside. How could one tell apart these bars that are seemingly indistinguishable? Start by asking the bartender what the heck the place is called. Beyond that, it's pretty easy. In the spirit of the crawl, my boozing companions and I stuck to Old Styles all night.

My first stop was **Ed and Jean's** (2032 W Armitage Ave), where I was greeted by Miller, a friendly, big, black dog. At \$2.75 a bottle, beer was affordable and the environs inviting... provided you seriously love junk. Like, you love it so much you can't bear to leave your grandma's cluttered basement and your car is full of trolls. But hey, pool is free, the bartender is friendly and the crowd—if you can call two dudes on a Monday night a “crowd”—is welcoming.

Sadly, we couldn't stay. More Old Style signs awaited us, and next up was **The Corner** (2224 N Leavitt St). Were we cheating because, in

addition to the Old Style sign, the bar had an awning? Perhaps. Did it matter? Not a bit—at \$4.75 for a pitcher, the Corner was practically paying me to drink. The extremely personable bartender Ruthie asked us if it was our first time there (it was) and proceeded to rattle off the daily drink specials, asked us where we were from and encouraged us to bring our dogs to the pooch-friendly establishment. At that point, one of the regulars took off her wig and placed it on a perky cocker spaniel's head to the delight of her low-key, middle-aged posse. I'm considering getting a dog just so I can bring it to the Corner and let hilarity ensue.

Cheap pitchers be damned! I had an agenda. We left Ruthie and headed to the **Western Tap** (2044 N Western Ave), where we were greeted by a locked door. As dismay washed over my companions and me, the bartender spotted us through the window and quickly unlocked the Old Style fortress to let us in. We were the only people there, and if I had to guess, some of the only women to set foot in the bar for quite some time: After serving us \$2 bottles, the bartender rushed off to clean the ladies' bathroom. I decided to accept the “spongeworthy” *Seinfeld* rerun playing in the background as a good sign, plus the bartender gave me a free lighter. Bonus!

Once *King of Queens* came on, though, it was my cue to bounce.

A quick ride on the Western bus dropped us at **Gus Tap** (1013 N Western Ave), an immaculate joint with a mirrored cross hanging above the well-stocked bar. See? Jesus wants me to do this. Between the \$2.25 bottles, *Friends* on one TV and *Cops* on the other, I felt right at home. Equally homey for some people may be the scale in the women's bathroom. I thought for sure peeing would help me lose weight, so I took before-and-after measurements, only to discover I was mistaken. And should probably go on a diet if “peeing at a bar” is my fitness plan.

I peeled my self-esteem off the floor, and we pressed on to **Sportsman** (948 N Western Ave), where obscenely loud Polish techno was paired with \$2.50 bottles. The bowling game in the back looked fun, but the two regulars and the bartender were engaged in a pretty hard-core round-robin on which we dared not intrude.

Instead, I finished my night at **Stella's Sports Bar** (935 N Western Ave), a comfy, laid-back spot with the biggest mob of the night (around 15 people). The bottles were \$2.50, and a friendly fellow who introduced himself as “Mister Eddie” bought me and my pals a round, too, pushing my liver to its extreme. When you head to Stella's, go with a crew—I couldn't figure out how to lock the bathroom door, so you'll need a buddy to guard it for you. Or you can learn that one the hard way when someone walks in on you, which is what happened to me when I foolishly took my chances using the men's room. Hope you enjoyed the show, RJ! With Queen rocking off the jukebox and a jovial game of pool going on in the back, I barely noticed that it was almost 2am by the time we called it a night.