

# SKETCHBOOK ADVENTURES

## Prompt 23: Awesome spots – Loving places away from home

There's something that I just can't resist about a dark dive bar. Maybe it's the leftover mystery they hold from my childhood. Every time my mom and I would drive through the downtown, it didn't matter if it was 8:30 in the morning, there was someone walking in or walking out of the darkest, dirtiest, scariest bar in our town. The windows were dark and despite my best efforts to peek into the door when my mom and I walked by, I had no idea what was inside that place where all sorts of people (from men who looked like Santa Claus but with nicotine-stained mustaches to women in smart-looking business skirts to guys in shorts and flip flops) went into or what they did in there besides drink.

When I turned 21 one of the first things I did was step inside that bar. It smelled just how I'd imagined, dank and musty with the faintest scent of urine. There was a long wooden bar in the center and a pool table off to the side. The bartender was wearing a tank top that was too tight and when she reached up for a bottle her belly jumped out from the top of her jeans. A gap in her teeth bordered between sexy and trashy when her wide lips parted with a smile and she asked me what I'd like to drink. At first being there was like solving a mystery that I'd been wondering about for years, but after my eyes adjusted to the darkness cracks appeared. Everyone's voice seemed hoarser, wrinkles around the eyes looked deeper and gazes seemed lonely. But then someone played Neil Diamond's "Sweet Caroline" and a woman stood up and started singing and dancing by herself, then everyone started singing, "Da da da... good times never felt so good!" Then an old guy told me a story about how he stormed the beach in Normandy and the only way he survived was tossing off his pack filled with all supplies so he wouldn't sink when he jumped off the ship into the sea. I don't know if his story was true but it didn't matter. I was seeing things I'd never seen before and got to be an interloper in a world I'd never be a part of but was more interesting at that moment than anything else I could imagine.

I left my dive bar days behind me a long time ago, but on a recent trip to Virginia City my husband and I stopped for a drink at The Millionaire's Club of the Washoe (which happened to be the oldest saloon in the town and a slice of the famed Old West history). There was a small band of guys who looked like they were retired playing Rolling Stones covers and a few middle-aged ladies dancing in front of them. I ordered a drink, pulled out my sketchbook and settled in, feeling like I could have stayed there all day. I traded in my dive bar adventures for a career I love, being present in my life and carrying out my adult responsibilities for a reason. Although I love the dive bar culture, I could never truly be a member of that club because I have far too much to do in this life to be weighed down by hangovers. But I like to get those glimpses into other people's lives and stories.

Maybe you don't share my love of and fascination for dive bars (which inspired the first example), but likely you have someplace aside from your home that holds memories of feelings that you want to remember and immortalize in your sketchbook. The second example on this page is the pool from a house my high school girlfriends and I rented for a weekend a few years ago. We shared stories about trying to start a family and changing careers, reminisced about the pranks we pulled in high school, and talked about pretty much everything that human beings can talk about. At the end of the weekend my eyes were swollen from crying and my side ached from laughing so much. I didn't want to forget that weekend, so I created a page in my sketchbook about it and every time I see it I'm transported (even if just for a moment) back to one of the best weekends in my life. The third example is from a day I spent with my husband and his friends in Napa Valley tasting wine and eating one of the best lunches I've ever had.

For this prompt you can choose any place that makes you happy outside your home. Maybe it's a friend's house or the playground at your child's school where you watch them play or a restaurant where you had an unforgettable meal. No matter which spot you pick, this is your chance to keep that experience going and the memory of it fresh by immortalizing it in your sketchbook.



Virginia City, Nevada

