

Trash and Tequila Drinks at the Cleanest Bar in Minneapolis

Dance more. That's been my one and only New Year's resolution for the past three years. It's the only resolution I've been able to even remember by February, which tells me it's the best one I've ever come up with. We've got a few dance venues in the small town where I live—a room behind the gas station, the local Eagles Club—but sometimes even a hobbit like me likes to make the scene in the Big City, so I make the pilgrimage to the fabled and fabulous Lee's Liquor Lounge.

Lee's is located in some weirdly forsaken no-person's land but they have free parking—repeat, free parking—in Minneapolis. Just take 11th Street through downtown and go around the bend to Glenwood.

My girlfriends Dish and Scorpio Princess always meet me at Lee's. They both live in Minneapolis, which in some circles would make them cooler than me, plus they both know how to dance, which definitely makes them cooler than me. Scorpio Princess has worked as a professional belly dancer and Dish knows a bunch of sexy Latin dances, plus swing, ballroom, and that old cowboy standby, the two-step. Me, I just swing my hair and my hips, and jump around on my Frankenstein-style platform loafers, awash in glorious cascades of live music vibeage. It's all good in this happy dance democracy,

where everyone from college hipsters to loving couples to old guys in suspenders are on the dance floor, and even the pull-tab lady rocks out. If you use your manners, you might be able to persuade Lee's punk sound guy to spin you around the dance floor a time or two.

It was Dish who turned us on to Lee's and its sparkling clean, urban honky tonk charm. Frontman Nate Dungan from Trailer Trash, a band synonymous with Lee's since the early 90's, describes TT as having a "VFW flavor with an Uptown sensibility." The same could be said for Lee's, with its wood-paneled walls, stuffed-wild-creatures-and-vintage-beer-art décor, and Elvis knick-knack shrine. Best of all is the gleaming expanse of linoleum; Lee's free-flowing floor plan treats dancers, spectators, and barstool patrons with equal generosity and respect.

Louie, the owner of Lee's, can usually be found behind the bar, serving up reasonably priced drinks with a stoicism that belies the kind of creative abandon that characterizes the musical offerings at his establishment. (If you want to see Louie smile, check out the drawing of him on Lee's website.) A sampling of bands and musical events at Lee's includes: Trailer Trash, of course (one of our very favorite bands); Johnny Cash-A-Raoke (*you* sing Johnny Cash songs with a LIVE band); The Belfast Cowboys (a Van Morrison

cover band); GLBT barn dance nights; a Tiny Tim tribute (Tiny Tim's second-to-last performance was at Lee's in 1996); along with a variety of other musical styles ranging from classic country to punk/surf to psychobilly to Americana roots.

Scorpio Princess, Dish, and I have danced to a bunch of bands at Lee's, from the funkified jazzy blues jams of Paul Cebar and the Milwaukeeans to the ferocious rockabilly of Jack Knife and the Sharps (bring a portable oxygen tank—you'll need it). Dish knows everyone and is always on the dance floor, while Princess and I usually chat through the slow songs or watch the other dancers. There are a lot of regulars at Lee's (dancers mostly) but otherwise the crowds are different for different bands. The one constant is the good-time vibe at Lee's—one of the best I've ever felt at a bar. It's friendly and familiar, enough so that when the notoriously tricky toilet in the women's bathroom acts up, at least one or two women in line will call out, "Jiggle the handle!"

It's the first Friday of the month—Trailer Trash night at Lee's. Dish, Princess and I nab a table in the corner, right under a snarling mountain lion. We settle in with our tequila drinks (vodka for the contrarian Princess) while Nate and the band set up. Lee's punk sound guy does sound guy stuff. Louie keeps a watchful eye on the place from behind the bar and the pull-tab lady hasn't even arrived

*yet. It's gonna be another good night at Lee's; making the world a happier place,
one two-step at a time.*