

BIG-TIME ART COMES TO TOWN

Card Room Boom

READER

SAN DIEGO'S FREE WEEKLY

June 28, 1973



Card Room Boom

—Jane Weisman Stein—

You can spot a Fourth Avenue player right away, and I hate 'em.

"Card rooms are given a black eye by the public and they shouldn't be!" The woman's police-issued identification badge, complete with a photograph, says her name is Helen. Helen has been a "housewoman" in card rooms for over twenty years and is tired of the bad image the community paints of her livelihood.

Helen's room is bright and clean and is located in Ocean Beach. It is a far cry from the downtown card rooms that one usually imagines—the eerie, depressing rooms squeezed between the bars along 4th and 5th Avenue. There, a man in grey frayed trousers and a dull white shirt with the sleeves rolled up usually lounges in the doorway. One wonders whether he is posted there to keep people in, or out. If any light filters out through the dusty windows, it is as pale and colorless as the people inside. Several rooms have their curtains

partly drawn, or the front window is so grimy it is difficult to see the table tops from the street. The patrons of the downtown clubs are usually local wins, young sailors, and men with meager pay checks trying to win big, just one time.

Clubs like the Newport Avenue Card Club serve the many neighborhood poker fans who don't want to go downtown. "Our room is here to offer our customers service and protection," confirms Helen. She leans on the poker chip counter, joking with the men at the two full tables. Helen has a city-wide reputation as a fair housewoman. All her decisions are respected as final, and she is a competent poker player whenever she has to fill an open slot at a table.

A coffee can on the counter boasts four huge, pinkish orange roses given to Helen by a patron. "The regulars who come here become very friendly, almost like a family," she glances at the clock. Almost eight o'clock. Helen nods to her assistant Sammy, a girl, who leaves the counter to collect the fifty-cent fee due every half hour. Sammy collects two twenty-five cent chips from each player, and gives each man a smile.

"I used to be a cocktail waitress," Sammy explains as she counts up the piles of chips and carefully marks the total on the tally sheet. "The customers here are so much nicer to work with."

Helen says a pretty girl like Sammy could make a great living as a chip girl if she moved to Vegas or Reno. Sammy blushes and stacks the chips carefully in the cabinet. She stacks the chips in alternating colors. There are only

about a dozen of the black and white \$100 chips.

Any cardroom is a utopian microcosm. The people sitting side by side have left their jobs, families and troubles, as well as their prejudices outside the door. On this Thursday night, at one table, a dental technician from Point Loma sits next to a long-haired, freshly graduated law student. On the student's left, an impeccably groomed oriental man in stark white slacks concentrates on his hand. He is a portrait painter and, according to a friend, has painted portraits of Jackie and John F. Kennedy as well as Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Reagan. Next to the painter, a twenty-one-year-old who has had polio since he was four is perched in his electric-powered wheel chair. To his left, a city clerk dressed in a white wash-and-wear shirt piles his chips meticulously. "Where is my straight flush tonight?"

The California Supreme Court has deemed draw poker a "game of skill," so draw poker and bridge are the only card games legal to play in a card room. According to regulations passed shortly after World War II, San Diego card rooms operate under strict police control. The owner and his employees must pass a police investigation and cannot get a license if they have any record of felonies. Minors are not allowed to play. A limit of five tables, each with seven chairs, is allowed in each room, and no more than a dollar an hour may be charged. Draw poker is usually the only game in progress because, card buffs say, bridge takes too much concentration and energy to be enjoyable.

But good poker playing is exciting, too, according to a man named Harry who used to own a plumbing business in New Jersey. "I'm a hardened card player. I make my living at it. I work three or four days a week and make good money." In his pasley shirt and grey doubleknit slacks, Harry looks more like an insurance salesman than a professional poker player.

"I don't stick with one room, and I never play unless I know the people or at least their reputations. I stay away from the crummy dives downtown, unless there's a big no-limit game." Harry claims he's seen as much as \$1,000 in a downtown no-limit pot. His own biggest win was \$800 in five minutes at the table.

Harry wants to see the business cleaned up even more. "There's still about a dozen crooks working the area. They usually work in pairs. I see 'em cheating suckers by passing cards to each other, holding out high cards, and cold-decking—that's arranging the deck in a good way when you shuffle." Beads of sweat collect on Harry's forehead and begin trickling down his sharp, narrow nose. "The vice squad doesn't supervise the card rooms enough. They come in, dressed in suits and ties as out of place as a black in the Ku Klux Klan. They might as well have 'Police' written on their foreheads."

"You can spot a Fourth Avenue player right away, and I hate 'em." He stands up and tucks his shirt beneath his wide leather belt. Harry won \$385 last night and wants to find a higher stake game

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notices

COMMUNION... watch for it Grand reopening and expansion sale...

SUMMER PROGRAMS FOR U.C.S.D. - 12 Meet at Mesa Nursery School...

ARE YOU GAY? That's great. We need you at the Gay Center...

COMING SOON - watch for it Grand reopening and expansion sale...

HELP de criminalize marijuana Assembly Bill 376 will de criminalize marijuana...

Humanism, the position of Fuller Fromm, Huxley, a complete movement...

wanted

WANTED: wooden single scull for competitive racing Phone 453-3947

IS THERE a good samaritan around? I'm disabled and on welfare. I need the donation of a new bicycle...

WANTED: lead singer for rock band Call Gino 234-4366

WANTED: Two full-blooded female color pairs, same litter. Will pay \$281.32/ave. make offer.

WHY NOT? Donate a bike to a needy, partially handicapped woman. One speed 234-8022

WANTED: books, pamphlets, calendars, periodicals, bookshelves, desks, filing cabinets...

WANTED TO BUY: stereo tuner and/or cassette tape player...

WANTED TO BUY: record albums, tapes and Hi-Fi by Elmer Bernheim...

for sale

BE A ROCK STAR! Excellent semi-automatic guitar...

12" BEARS radial air, 424-204

GUIDO D-40 brand new \$300 Gibson nylon brand new \$100. Both with case. Call 288-0850, eve for Tom.

SISTERS, you can look like a big fat girl. For sale, beach shoes with new stacked heels...

TOPS-NEOPHYS 1917-1965. Oldies-physical moves, musical, 24-28, 28-32, 32-36, 36-40.

GREEN VINYL COUCH no rips \$15. 24" x 48" automatic \$16. 36" x 72" \$25.

WALK UP TO 50% OFF clothing from TURKEY, PAKISTAN, INDIA, ECUADOR, MEXICO, PARAGUAY, GUATEMALA. L.A. COSITA PACIFIC BEACH IMPORTS



dressers, \$10 each. MacLarenian furniture, \$108 Ventura (Belmont Park) after 11 A.M. VW PARTS - driver's door, perfect condition...

rides

NEED RIDERS to share driving and expenses to San Antonio, Texas. Leaving Saturday, June 16, 281-3116

COUPLE NEED RIDE to East Coast Boston or that area, around July 15 to 21. Need experienced and driving. Call Ron anytime at 222-7784.

RIDE NEEDED to Alaska. Anytime after June 16. Can help with gas. Leave message for Leslie, 224-2244.

TWO RIDERS needed to share expenses and driving to Colorado. Leaving June 25. Call 755-0745.

RIDE WANTED to Houston, Texas, around July 7th-7251.

lessons

CELLO lessons. All types of students taught. Call Jon Petropoulos, 753-8965. Encinitas.

TENNIS lessons in beach area by Kim Cole. \$8 per hour, series of 10, \$65. 488-8688.

YOGA: a four-week course covering all major techniques of meditation, relaxation and awareness development. For information, call 459-7837.

bikes

1971 HONDA motorcycle, 70 cc. Excellent condition, only 5000 miles. \$195 or make offer. Call 565-2803.

SUZUKI X6 250 Twin. Recently rebuilt, good condition. \$250. 287-0539.

SCHWINN Varsity girl's bike. Five months new. \$80. Best offer. Renee, 299-0638.

personals

DEAR JOHN - Your Gooze loves you. FREE Half Siamese kittens (two males). Call 755-7724.

NEED HOME for gentle, six month old German retriever. 270-2655.

TO NUMBER 52, U.S.D. as night I tell her who I am! Know that I look for me/Fairer than flaxen, sultry as night I tremble unseen, beneath thy sight. Love, Love Guyver.

NEE TO good home. Three and a half month old German shepherd. Beautiful dog named Hero. Needs someone who can love. Call 459-5888.

housing

TWENTY-THREE-YEAR old graduate student in English needs place to live. Prefer some place cheap, not too far from State College (got miles level). Call, Love Guyver.

HARBOR view lot for sale, Leves, R. paved street, \$2600, 460-3139.

PRESCHOOL TEACHER, vegetarian, wants to rent small cottage/studio in North County. Any information, please call Pat 753-7390.

FEMALE ROOMMATE to share three bedroom Pacific Beach home. \$58.50 per month. Must be at least 21. 5-7 P.M. 273-0371. Ask for Judy.

FEMALE ROOMMATE needed to share furnished apartment in Ocean Beach. Own bedroom, only \$55/month. Call Wendy at 278-0336.

FOR RENT: 16-foot Terry Travel trailer. Now 11 July 19 or 20. \$45 per week or \$150 per month. Further details, call 459-9729.

NEED MELLOW PERSON to find room with me in beach area. 272-4857 Linda.

ROOMMATE NEEDED to share nice La Jolla house for summer. \$80/month. Call messages at 453-0003, ext. 2095, for Jay Julian.

OWN ROOM in comfortable Lucinda house with three other. Big pool. New beach. \$75. First ad, second \$50. 462-4622.

cars

59 CHEVROLET panel truck. Only 65,000 miles. Excellent truck. \$550 or best offer. 293-9205.

1967 FORD 10-passenger wagon. \$475. 390 cu. in. Automatic, power steering, radio, high, rack and good condition. 453-5817 or 465-0007.

1965 CORVAIR COPEA convertible. Four speed. 140 HP Amazingly clean. Original owner. \$650. Call 275-9696.

62 VW VAN. Engine rebuilt in 1972. Runs very well. New tires. 453-6178. Will sell for \$295. 298-8510. \$250 or best offer.

68 BMW 1600. Three liter, high speed, slushy steering box, squeaky brakes. One big asset - low price. \$4000. \$2000. \$1000. \$500. \$250 or best offer.

68 VW VAN. Engine rebuilt in 1972. Runs very well. New tires. 453-6178. Will sell for \$295. 298-8510. \$250 or best offer.

68 MUSTANG convertible. Excellent mechanical condition. Dick Brakes. Needs body work. 755-8015.

67 DODGE VAN fully equipped. Must sell. 755-2953. Chevy.

CLEAN '65 Chevy. Four-door, automatic transmission. Runs well. \$150. Jim 222-0888.

63 T-BIRD Deluxe. Runs great. New tires. First \$395. 468-0107. mornings only.

66 T-BIRD. Good shape \$700. 488-0107. mornings only.

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neighborhood will hang the fireworks during "Peach Tree" perhaps the most delicate and seductive piece in the show. Robert talked about bringing this out just to show to a very dear friend of his and so the piece is not for sale. While autographing several Rauschenberg T-shirts, silkscreened with an emblematic ram's head, Bob was approached by a trembling young woman in the audience of an encounter with "Peach Tree". She claimed to be a friend that she was fine until she saw the drawing but now she will never be the same.

THE PACIFIC BEACH convention IS A HEAD SHOP... BUT this week you can buy your GUITAR STRINGS at the convention for 20% off by mentioning the READER.

The work of Robert Rauschenberg will be on display through July 20 at the JERK GLENN GALLERY 424 Fashion Valley, 291-5978, open 125 daily. Future exhibition plans include Frank Stella, Roy Lichtenstein, Nancy Graves, Robert Motherwell, Wayne Thiebaud and Nicholas Kraushnick.

"I moved here because I didn't like skid row," explains Geier. He maintains a perpetual poker face as he speaks. "I got tired of opening up in the morning and having fifteen or twenty drunk bumps begging for money."

Edith Geier nods in agreement, her white plastic earrings, bouncing and dangling. "I rarely went to the old place. It was so... depressing, that's the only word..." Soft music is piped into the carpeted and wood-paneled room. The orange chairs are extremely comfortable, and the table tops are bright green.

"I don't think there's a place in town so lit up," he beams proudly. They plan to add a few couches and a coffee table, so players can relax between bouts at the table. "This is a personality business," says Geier. "We have to attract a group of regulars who will like the way we treat them."

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