

Q & A with author Ray Oldenburg

***The Joy of Tippling: A Salute to Bars, Taverns, and Pubs* by Ray Oldenburg**

Why did you decide to write about the role of bars and taverns in our communities?

R. O.: I retired in 2001 and needed to fill my time. I bought over twenty books on drinking and got busy. I can't recall how long the writing took, but the choice of subject fit my habits perfectly. The research was certainly enjoyable.

What is tippling, anyway?

R. O.: The word probably derives from the Norwegian word "tipla," which means to "drink slowly." In our definitions, you will generally find agreement as to the regular consumption of alcohol, some insisting it's moderate, others insisting that it's excessive. Nobody, except me, adds the social dimension and that's for lack of a better word referring to the habitual and moderate consumption of alcohol in good company.

Explain the idea of a third place for those who haven't heard of it.

R. O.: This is my concept and it derives from American suburbia, which put its inhabitants on wheels. The "shuttle" between home and work calls for a third place in which to relax with friends and partake of the diversity which city life offers.

We talk a lot about the decline of community. What does the word community mean to you?

R. O.: Community is place-bound. It exists where people who populate an area have places to meet and socialize outside of individual homes.

Let's talk about conversation. What goes on in a great bar?

R. O.: Barroom regulars know that everyone who enters the place is an equal; there is no leadership here. Conversation proceeds from one unrelated topic to another. Anyone facing a problem and needing information about it will take advantage of this collection of experts. When the membership is too much the same every meeting, there will be moments of silence; otherwise listening is as much waiting to speak. Laughter is frequent, most often because the participants enjoy kidding one another.

Name your most memorable experience, good or bad, in a tavern.

R. O.: These would have to be roasts that I arranged, and I can't single out any one as being above the rest. They were all conducted in a special room in Pensacola's finest bar, McGuire's.

Tell us about your saloon at home. How have you furnished it? What do you serve?

R. O.: Once a double-car garage, I made it into a tiled area with swinging wooden doors. I put a bar-counter with a sink and running water in one corner. I have seventeen cushioned arm chairs and a table that seats four comfortably and eight less so. A tall glass-door cabinet holds all manner of alcoholic beverages. I once counted eighty-four bottles on its four shelves. A black refrigerator contains bottled beer and cans of root beer and cream soda. Jugs of table wine sit on the bar counter. On one long wall hangs a dozen or more of my wife's paintings. Bags of popcorn and potato chips are always available.