



*John Tebeau*

WHERE TO GO

BARS, TAVERNS,  
AND DIVES  
NEW YORKERS LOVE

WHAT TO DRINK

RIZZOLI  
NEW YORK

# JOYCE'S TAVERN

3823 Richmond Avenue (between Wilson Avenue and Coryn Court) ELTINGVILLE, STATEN ISLAND  
joycestavern.com · 718-948-0220

WE'RE STANDING AT THE BAR AT JOYCE'S TAVERN—me, Colleen, our friends Juan and Tony, and Tony's mom, Virginia, who trekked over from her house, where Tony grew up, just a few blocks away. After a while the front door opens up, and an old man with a walker pushes in, making his way slowly toward the back. Before he gets to where he's going, a guy slides off his bar stool and moves down a couple, and the bartender, a big guy with a Mount Rushmore chin, draws a beer and sets it in front of the vacated seat. The old guy slides onto the stool, nods a thanks to the bartender, and all is well.

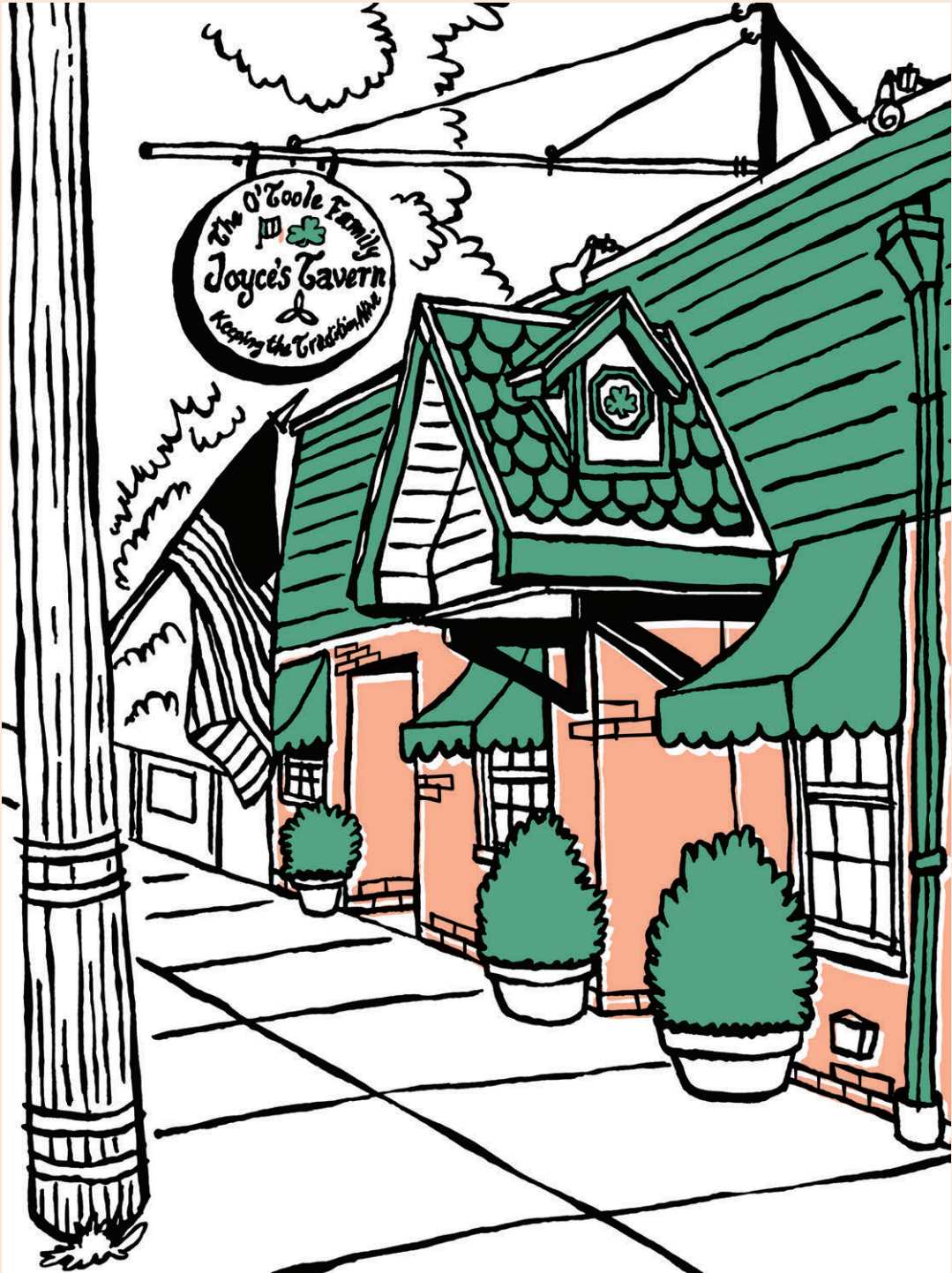
"Yeah, that was Mr. Toomey," owner Joe O'Toole, Sr. tells me. "He's a retired FDNY lieutenant. Bud drinker. He calls before he shows up and asks if anyone's in front. That means 'move your damn car,' so he can park there and be close to the front door."

That's the beauty of the old neighborhood tavern. It belongs to The People. Technically, Joyce's now belongs to the O'Toole family, who bought it after founder Robert Joyce (always referred to as Mr. Joyce) passed away in 2015. But the *tradition*, that belongs to everyone. To the regulars, to the Eltingville neighborhood, to Staten Island. The sign out front says it all: THE O'TOOLE FAMILY/JOYCE'S TAVERN/KEEPING THE TRADITION ALIVE.

It's a family place, run by a clan who all pitch in to make it work, and that's getting scarcer by the year in this city, where rising rents often push out small family-owned businesses in favor of corporate operations, or businesses with deep-pocketed partners. But a real, family-run business? That's become rare.

Before Mr. Joyce died, he gave the O'Tooles his blessing to buy the tavern. Joe Sr. even delivered Mr. Joyce's eulogy, and later that year the O'Tooles added their family name to the sign. The sons of Joe and his wife, Claire, help out, too, and Mom and Dad recently gifted Joe Jr. and Ken shares in the business, "for all they have done to keep the tradition alive."

Joyce's is an old-fashioned place, clean and orderly, with a crocheted 1776 U.S. flag on the wall, made by Mrs. Joyce herself in 1976 for the Bicentennial; a back room nicknamed "Tammany Hall" used for business and pleasure by local clubs, cops, and firemen; and a jukebox that can be overridden by the bartender if anything too weird gets played. (You'll get a refund if you ask.) It's where people go for wakes, for receptions, for reunions. Joe Sr. says, "It's the best place in the world to bring a date. It's got a great reputation. When people come back to the neighborhood, they come to Joyce's."



JOYCE'S IS SO IRISH THAT IN ADDITION *to the USUAL*  
ST. PATRICK'S DAY PARTY, THEY ALSO HOST A  
"HALFWAY *to ST. PATRICK'S DAY*" BASH EVERY SEPTEMBER.

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**WHEN TO GO**

Stop in at 4:30 or 5 p.m. on a weekday and see the place during the post-work rush. O'Toole says, "That's when all the people getting off the train come in, and the retirees after their chores for the day are done." There's always live entertainment at Joyce's on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, usually bands playing pop from the fifties, sixties, and seventies, or traditional Irish music.

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**WHERE TO SIT**

At the back half of the bar, near the door leading out to the deck. There, you're near the taps and within a quick strike of the jukebox, with the fireplace at your back, a blessing in the winter. But if Mr. Toomey comes in and wants his seat, move on down.

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**WHAT TO DRINK**

A Guinness, boyo! What else? Follow that up with a little Jameson Irish whiskey. Joyce's carries six or seven varieties of it.

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**HOW TO GET THERE**

The Staten Island Railway stops half a block away, at the Eltingville station. To get to Staten Island, take the free ferry from the Whitehall Terminal in Manhattan. Of course, driving is a fine option, too, via the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge from Brooklyn.

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**WHAT ELSE?**

Mr. Joyce was a cat lover, and the cat he loved most was Coco, a rare male calico. A "money cat" that people used to pet for good luck. There's a picture of Mr. Joyce and Coco over the fireplace in the main room. Every year Mr. Joyce threw a birthday party for Coco, with an open bar and a spread of food for twenty-five dollars. Regulars were sort of required to be there (or risk Mr. Joyce's ire), and the proceeds went to local animal shelters. When Coco was getting old and on his way out, someone gave Mr. Joyce another cat, Katie, who you might still see hanging around the fine back deck behind the tavern. "They knew Mr. Joyce wouldn't be good without a cat," Joe Sr. told me.

# Day Drinking vs. Night Drinking

I'm a fan of good old wholesome day drinking. Have been since college, when I waded, awkwardly, into those waters, never having done much drinking in high school, or elementary school or preschool, for that matter.

Anyway, this book is about having some nice, social time while enjoying a drink, not about getting wrecked. This means judicious use of the drug known as alcohol. If there's any doubt in your mind why day drinking beats the after-hours version, please see the points below.

## DAY DRINKING

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Plenty of time ahead of you. No rush. Pacing is leisurely and relaxed.

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Slower pacing yields moderation, known since antiquity as the key to happiness.

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Vitamin D! ("Thanks, Mr. Sun!")

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Laughs, wit, *bon mots*, lighthearted tomfoolery, and the occasional innocent shenanigan.

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One or two full meals (plus snacks) still lie ahead of you, delivering you much-needed ballast, nutrition, and the rejuvenating properties of salt, fat, and starch.

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Plenty of time to sober up and get a good night's sleep.

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Tomorrow holds the promise of glory.

## NIGHT DRINKING

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The clock is ticking. Last call looms. Bad decisions are made concerning frequency of ordering. Someone shows up with two rounds of shots called Dirty Girl Scouts.

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Abject drunkenness is a distinct possibility and must be guarded against. This hovers over true carefree fun like the Sword of Damocles.

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Vitamin Regret.

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Between midnight and four in the morning, poor cognition leads to all manner of horrors, bad judgment—and even worse decisions—among them.

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Your best meals are behind you and may indeed come back to haunt you in spectacular fashion.

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Kiss your eight-solid-hours good-bye. Horrible, fitful sleep, if any, awaits.

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Tomorrow promises to be gory.