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Take Two

They say **you can't go home again.**
But what if **home** is a **go-to** bar from your **past**?

BY OLIVIA GUNN KOTSISHEVSKAYA

SERIAL DINING

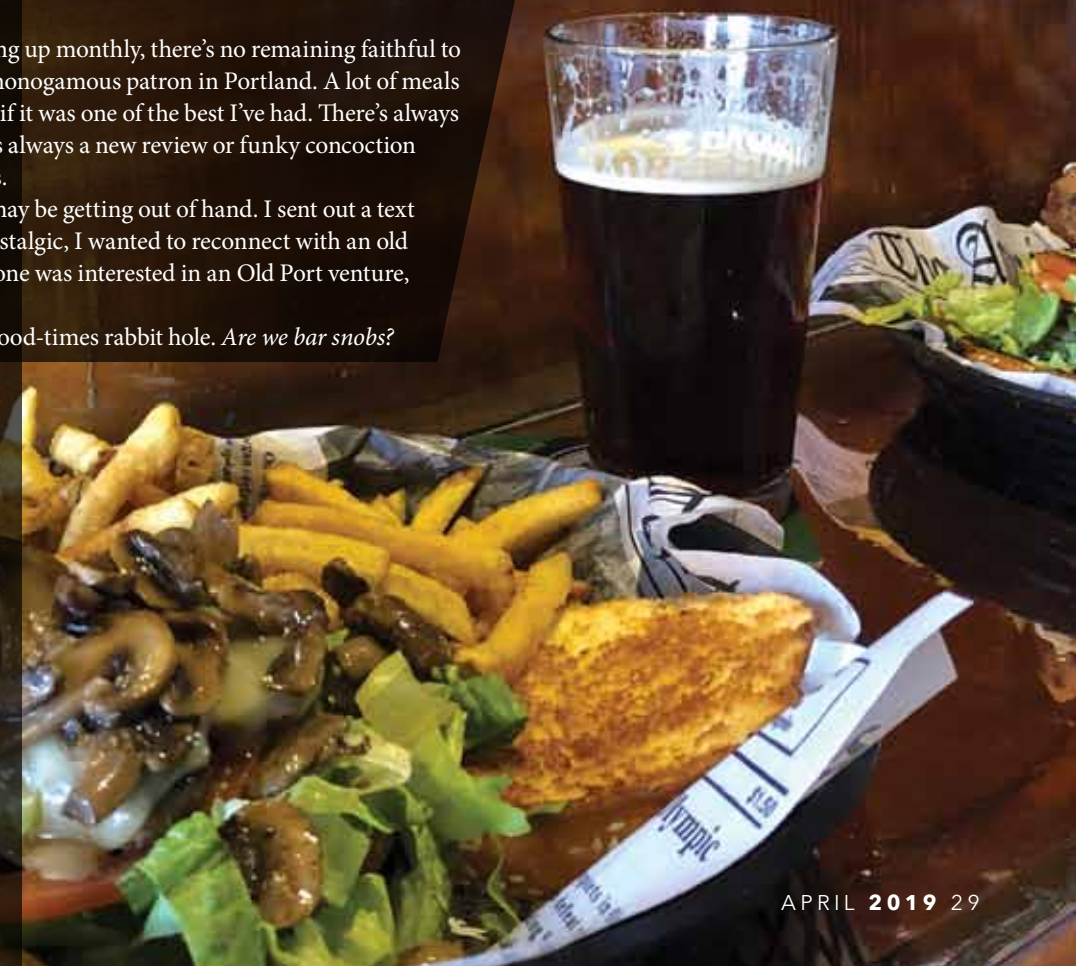
WITH NEW RESTAURANTS popping up monthly, there's no remaining faithful to our first loves. You can't be a monogamous patron in Portland. A lot of meals end up one-night stands, even if it was one of the best I've had. There's always a new restaurant or bar to check out. There's always a new review or funky concoction over at **Hunt and Alpine** giving me the eyes.

It was only recently that I recognized it may be getting out of hand. I sent out a text to friends inciting a get-together. Feeling nostalgic, I wanted to reconnect with an old flame. *Meet at Gritty's around 5:30?* But no one was interested in an Old Port venture, at least not with me.

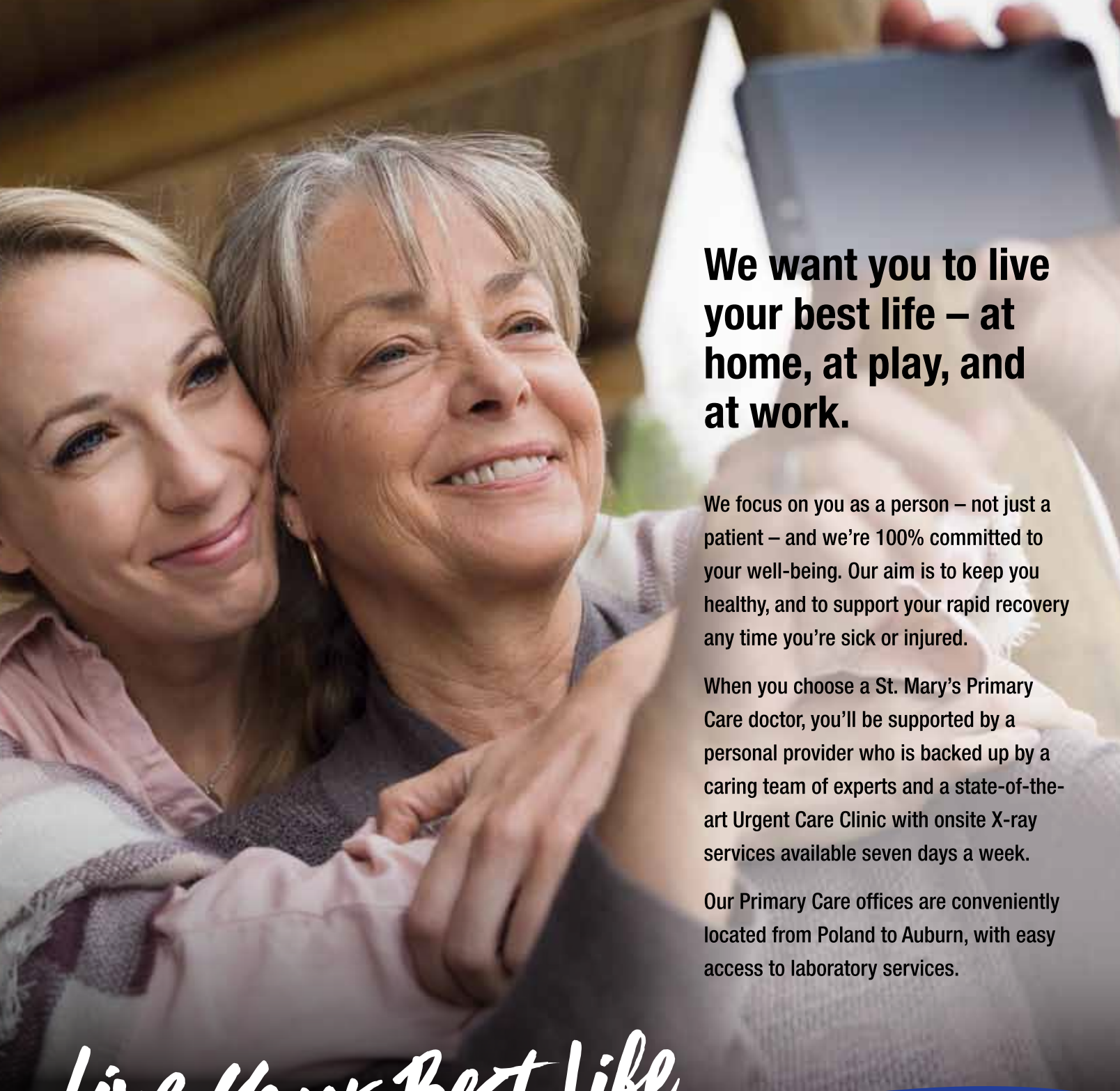
This all sent me down a remember-the-good-times rabbit hole. *Are we bar snobs?*

Can't fathom sharing a pint among the tourists? Do we only drink West End lavender-infused Manhattans now? (I've never had a lavender-infused Manhattan.) What about **Bull Feeney's**? "Oh, God. The last time we were at Bull Feeney's was for...brunch—and only because we were Christmas shopping." And yet it's wonderful. How wonderful does a bar or restaurant have to be in a world where an attraction's 15 minutes of fame is being shaved down to 12 minutes? "Ask Outliers," my friend said.

I climbed out of my rabbit hole, reminding myself there's no need to relive the 1 a.m. crawl out of **Rosie's**. Here are a few gems that have dropped off my radar for



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no valid reason, and some that were never on it. They deserve nothing less than a full-on, robust revisit in search of a deeper, more thoughtful experience. Take Two. And for good measure, I've brought my skeptical friend.

HELLO, OLD FRIEND

"I went to Gritty's for lunch last week."
"See any tumbleweeds?"
Harsh. Actually, I enjoyed one of the

best haddock sandwiches I've had in a long time. The Scottish Ale set me straight with a 6.2 percent ABV. Still unconvinced, my friend scoffs, "they haven't changed their beer list in like 25 years." All right, Bissell bro. Gritty's rolls out a new brew nearly every month. Have you tried the new Good Day IPA? Guess you're due for a visit.

"We used to go there all the time," Jessica, a life-long-thus-far Portlander, chimes in. "The Deering kids went to Gritty's. Falmouth and Yarmouth went to Bull Feeney's before the USM kids took over." Who

needs change when any beer is new for a 21-year-old?

If you're in your early twenties, you'll find here what you're seeking at any bar: beer, friends, and music. Gritty's now hosts game night on Sundays for those craving some Mario Kart action. Open mic nights showcase local comedians and poets. Trivia nights are livened up with hosts from WCYY.

Maybe I've outgrown Gritty's nightlife. I stopped celebrating Easter with two-day drinking binges a while ago. I have no interest in the Old Port mating rituals. Even so, there's still a seat for me at the bar. I'm owning it full-heartedly—I'm a Gritty's lunch lady.

LET ME UPGRADE YOU

The first meal I had at Walter's was with my friend's mother. She took me to dinner to celebrate my engagement. The meal was excellent, the wine perfectly paired, and I think she even ordered us dessert.

COURTESY PHOTOS

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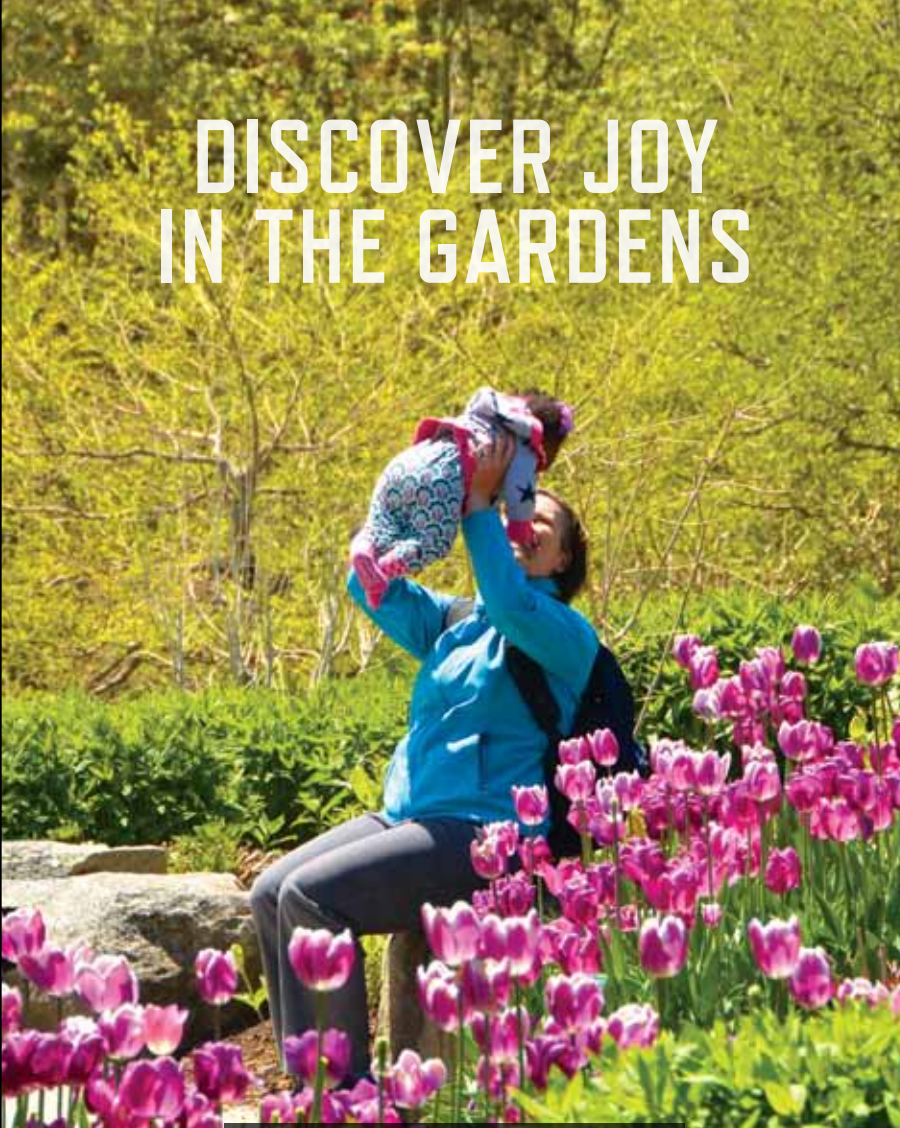


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PORTLAND AFTER DARK

And then I never went back. Not because it wasn't delicious. It was only that I was 26 at the time, broke, and still trying to figure out how to order a glass of red.

Today, I consider Walter's perfect for a happy hour. A dinner for two is still out of my price range. As my friend says, "Back Bay Grill is for doctors. Walter's is for lawyers." (She adds she saw Olympia Snowe there once—not just a lawyer!) What about writers? That's where the bar comes in.

During regular hours, Tuesday through Saturday from 4 p.m. to close, try dishes from the bar menu—as creative as chef Jeff Buerhaus's dinner menu. Consider the Cracklin Calamari with a "basil lemon cherry pepper aioli and candied jalapeños" (\$10) along with the Thai Chicken Lettuce Wraps (\$8) and a cocktail.

DÉJÀ VU

More and more I find myself rediscovering Portland, but it's never planned. A night with friends at **Novare Res**, where I hadn't been in at least two years, turned out to be one of those instances. After several rounds, friends filing in each time, the group stomped down to **Old Port Tavern** to play pool. The night ended with midnight tater tots at **Blue Rooster**. Classic.

Kathleen Pierce, director of member experience for **Hospitality-Maine**, knows it takes more than a top ten list to make it here. "In Portland's competitive restaurant landscape, there's a reason that stalwarts like **Five Fifty Five**, **David's**, and **DiMillo's** thrive," she says. "They're fluent in the latest trends but aren't slaves to food fashion. More importantly, these institutions lead with hospitality. That comforting feeling that you matter more than the latest Instagram influencer. That's how you keep regulars for decades."

You won't be surprised by one of her favorite haunts—a phoenix of the Old Port. "I'm heartened to see places like **Three Dollar Deweys** reopen with new energy and excitement. It's not trendy. It's homey and true. Plus, free popcorn and cold beer never go out of style."

You could spend an entire weekend visiting some of the original Portlanders, those timeless, comforting hangouts. These spots welcome us back again and again, no matter the time apart. If we consider our attractions with a fresh eye, we'll be fresher ourselves ■

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All four bridge projects will be under construction in 2019. All told, the improvements on the five-mile stretch may include as many as a dozen individual projects and will take several years, but the benefits will be substantial: a safer, smoother highway and reduced traffic congestion—paid for 100 percent by Turnpike tolls. **Please drive carefully through construction zones, and visit MaineTurnpike.com for more details.**



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