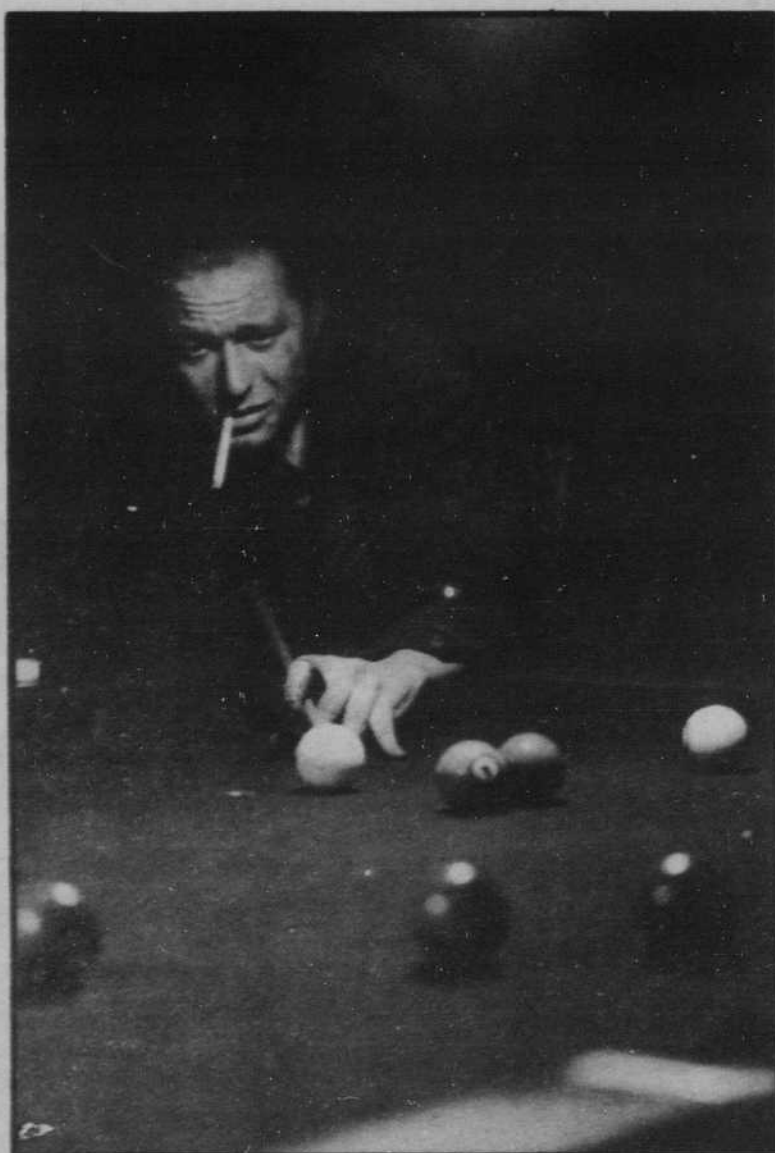




**"Q**uit it, you old fart!"

Mac's been caught peeking at the others' cards . . . again . . . but he doesn't look guilty. His thin frame erect at the round table, he returns his attention to the cards, as though he'd just glanced at the clock. A bright gold band fits loosely on one of the thin, freckled fingers that clutch his cards.

"C'mon, Mac, play your card!" urges the fellow across the table. For a long moment Mac's brown eyes, filling the thick lenses of his spectacles, seem to look through the cards. For many of his 70 or so years, Mac has come to Luckey's Club Cigar Store to trade cards and insults with his friends. At one time, 10 tables of men played poker and rummy. These days, Mac's friends barely fill one table.

"Hey, Mac, play your card, willya?"

**A** clutch of students breezes in, past Zhivio, the wooden Indian, and heads past the long bar for the pool tables, past the magazine rack with its alluring titles: *Knave*, *44 Mag*, *Real Detective Story*, *Gun*, *Gent* (home of the *D Cups*).

One of the two women in the group notices a yellowed sign on the mirror behind the bar: "The Club Cigar Store is a Man's Resort. No Ladies' Restrooms." She points it out to the other woman and they enjoy a hearty laugh.

In the old days, they wouldn't be laughing. When Tad Luckey took over the Club Cigar Store in 1916, his intention was firm: to run a place for men and men only.

And a man's resort it was. Coming down from his rooms, a man could get breakfast in Luckey's, get a shave, a shine, even a job. Back before hiring halls and labor temples, laborers and contractors would mingle in the lobby and arrange the day's work.

Men lived in Luckey's. They sat around the pot-bellied stove, swapping lies and missing the spittoon. They bought homes and sold ranches, using the back of a scorecard for a contract. They smoked, they drank, and they played pool — a lot of pool.

And when their days were up, some of them dropped dead at Luckey's.

**A**fter 50 years of management by the Luckey family, Ben Raycovich bought the tavern in 1967, and he vowed to carry on the character the place had acquired. His dedication to the flavor of the past helped Luckey's survive a few disconcerting weeks in 1974 when urban renewal claimed the old site at Eighth Avenue and Willamette Street in Eugene.

Somehow, the rustic charm of the place moved with it. The huge, magnificent Carabana, stained glass sign, the old pool tables, the bar, the vintage cigar cases, the big four-blade fans, all made the journey to a spot in the Eugene Mall near the Atrium. It's there the old men come, every day, to lose themselves in the past.

Off in the back corner they gather, where a prominent sign stakes out their territory: "Senior Citizens Only, 9 a.m.-6 p.m. No minors allowed (under 55)."

They play rummy through the day, oblivious to the brisk lunch-time crowd of workers and businessmen. They are gone by evening, when the younger crowd takes over.

These younger regulars know, too, that Luckey's is a special place.

**"I**t's a clean, respectful group, these youngsters," says Raycovich. "There's a few bad apples here and there, but mainly they're a nice bunch that comes in here. I can recall maybe 10 times in the last 11 years when we needed a cop. This is a low-key place."

He's right. Luckey's is underwhelming. Thick pipes shoot up the walls and along the high ceiling, lending a boiler room ambiance to the place. Dual lamps hang low over each of "the best pool tables in town," according to Dave Anderson, day bartender. "And the price is right. There's no other tavern in town that charges by the hour. For a buck and a half, you don't have to worry about some guy coming up and challenging you."

Despite the good deal, Luckey's is free of pool hustlers. "We don't allow them in here, period," declares Raycovich. "Nobody takes advantage of nobody around here. We know who they are."

"A guy can come in, bring his girl, shoot

some pool, drink some beers, and nobody's going to bother him — or the girl."

**T**here's something one notices right away at Luckey's — or rather, doesn't notice: music. No juke box bawls out Top 40 or moldy oldies. No radio delivers syrupy cowboy tunes. Waves of friendly talk and the crack of pool balls fill the air.

"We believe the art of conversation is still alive," says Anderson. It's not only alive, it's kicking, and signs along the walls remind patrons to keep it clean. Other "suggestions" line the walls: "No Sitting on Tables," "No Masse Shots," "Both Feet on the Floor," "No Mis-Deals in Rummy."

Sharing the wall space are photographs of Luckey's customers from days gone by: grinning men holding large fish; serious men playing important card games; men in Stetsons and suits with wide lapels, glasses of beer aloft, toasting the camera. Men whose ghosts mingle with the smoke curling under the green shades of the lamps over the pool tables.

**M**ac knew most of these men, played cards with them, bought them beers. Now, under the horseshoe-shaped neon sign in the back corner, Mac and the other survivors fold their cards into a pile and slowly, reluctantly, shuffle past their friends on the wall to the street.

"Where can these guys go?" asks Raycovich. "Tell me another place where they can come and stay all day and enjoy each other and not spend a quarter if they don't want to. There is no other place."

The last of today's rummy players files past Ben, and the two exchange warm parting words.

"You know, in the last few years we've lost a lot of our old customers. Someone you know, someone you've been buddies with for years — you look in the paper, bingo, they're gone."

"I hate to see the old scene go. I'll be in the corner pretty soon myself. Hell, I won't have anybody to play with."

By John Crowley  
Photos by Patrick Sullivan