

You Oughta Be in Pictures

A photo-booth business gets cheesy.

Entrepreneur Beth Johnson found inspiration for her company, Indy Photo Booths, while watching reality TV. "This guy was adamant about having a photo booth at his wedding, but the only place he could get one was at the mall," she says. "I thought, 'There's a real need there.'"

Johnson's first step toward filling that need was to purchase an 800-pound vintage booth that uses the old-fashioned alchemy of photo paper and chemicals to produce photo strips. She has since filled in her fleet with three 1950s-style booths with digital capabilities.

"There is something about being smashed into tight quarters that is fun in itself, but also knowing that there isn't anybody behind the camera," says Johnson, who notes that one thing has not changed with the technology: "People like to take their clothes off." —Julia Spalding



ENCOUNTER

My Drink with Varvel

A new buddy picks up the tab—and pulls a fast one.

IT WAS THE WEEK BEFORE the Super Bowl. I had just finished a quick nightcap at my neighborhood hideaway and was buttoning my coat when a gentleman nearby caught my attention, asking what I thought of the Colts' chances. We talked football for a few minutes. We got along. I shook his hand, introduced myself.

He said, "I'm Gary Varvel."

"You're kidding me," I said. "This is an amazing coincidence. I'm working on a story about you. I have a file of your stuff that's this thick."

All true: I have been following the work of *The Indianapolis Star's* lead editorial cartoonist for some time now. When Gannett, the paper's owners, had layoffs, I held my breath; cartoonists have been let go across the nation. But there his inimitable insights were, the following week, and the week after that. He'd survived, somehow validating my notion that the guy was just plain good.

He invited me over to a table he was sharing with a couple of buddies—"They're in politics," Gary Varvel said. He was having a Manhattan and insisted I did, too—he was buying. We were becoming fast friends. When I told Gary Varvel that I had expected him

to look older, he told me that he dyed his hair. We talked about his upbringing as the son of a steelworker in The Region, where he forged his prickly conservatism. He bought everyone cigars. Two hours later, we closed the bar.

The following day, I went to the newspaper's Web site to get Gary Varvel's e-mail address. Next to his contact information was a picture of Gary Varvel that did not look like the Gary Varvel I had met, dye job or no. I called Gary Varvel at his office, and asked him if he was the Gary Varvel I had been carousing with.

"I haven't been in a bar in probably 30 years," Gary Varvel said.

Varvel—I have come to find out—has been busily cartooning for the *Star* since 1994, and for 16 years before that he was with the *News*. The man is an actual Sunday-school teacher.

I returned to the scene to investigate. I found our cocktail server and told her about the real Gary Varvel. He's pesky, I said, and conservative, and successful, and, well, kind of famous.

"Famous?" she said, in a tone that proved that people who serve drinks are better judges of character than magazine editors. "That guy with you wasn't famous. That guy was an a--hole."

—DAVID ZIVAN

The actual Gary Varvel's work appears here courtesy of *The Indianapolis Star*.

