

MY FUNNY

Valentine

STORY BY
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If I want to know the time of year, I need not look any further than my hallway. My next-door neighbor, Barb, is sure to adorn her front door with decorations heralding whatever holiday is about to occur. Oh, how I loved her miniature Santa suits, strung all around her doorframe at Christmas. It's like I'm a kid again, waiting to see how my teacher is going to decorate the bulletin board next.

These days, however, I pause before I open the door. Hearts line the walls outside my apartment. Oh yeah, it's Valentine's Day. Oh yeah—I'm single.

But then I remind myself, Valentine's Day isn't just about lovers—it's about love. Why can't February 14th commemorate celebrating the awesomeness of me? I think the time has come to be my own Valentine, and find some cool things to do solo in Queens.

Of course no day can begin without my daily dose of coffee. A habitual early riser, an IV straight into my vein is probably what I need to jolt me awake, but I could never dream of depriving myself of the wonderful aroma and

taste of a good cup of joe. So off I'll go to the **NEW YORK CITY COFFEE & BAGEL HOUSE** (29-08 23rd Avenue, www.nycbch.com). The visually stunning decor combined with friendly service and free Wi-Fi makes this a go-to place for yours truly. And they leave water bowls outside for dogs.

Sufficiently caffeinated, I'll hit an early morning 'Surf' class at **TONÉ PILATES & WELLNESS STUDIO** (36-19 Broadway, www.toneny.com). I'll be hanging five on my surfboard, with owner Jessica Hope Restrepo making sure I don't plummet off. In fact, Jessica and her partner, Alicia Lavender, take great pride in making their clients feel safe and cared for. No key tags are needed at this studio. These ladies know everyone's names, and have created a sense of community and family. Classes are purposely small—6 for Surf, 9 for Mat, and 3 for Reformer—but the prices rival area studios. And it's not just about teaching people Pilates. Jessica expresses a higher purpose for what she's doing. "We want to be something bigger than what we are," says Restrepo. "We want to give out something more to the universe than what we are. We want to change the world, and even by us changing one body at a time, it's what we're doing. Everyone who walks out of here not only feels good physically, but emotionally." That's what I call an all-inclusive workout.

Now that I'm energized, I'll be ready to expand my mind and for me that means a book. Coming from a mom who reads three books per week on average, books matter to me—a lot. Lucky for me, the **ASTORIA BOOKSHOP** (31-29 31st Street, www.astoriabookshop.com) is around the corner from the Pilates studio. It's a cozy space, with nifty handwritten cards attached to certain shelves which highlight featured books. Personalized service is the cornerstone of owner Alexis Beach's business, whether

that means to recommend a book, or to special order one for any of her customers. The store also hosts various events, including story time for kids, author readings, and my favorite, the Drunk Vocab Bee, co-sponsored with Astoria Coffee (30-04 30th Street, www.astoriacoffeeny.com) taking place on February 7th.

At this point, I'll be in desperate need of nutrients. **JUICE DOCTOR** (23-92 27th Street), celebrating its grand opening on February 7th, is owned by brothers Sal and Angelo Beninati—their father owns Othello Deli next door. These guys truly walk the walk and talk the talk. Both are avid juicers and health advocates. Sal graduated with a Culinary degree from Johnson and Wales in 2011, and his knowledge of juicing is impressive. Their menu is based on the human anatomy, with a chart on the wall illustrating which juice is good for which part of the body. Juices catered to your specific needs can be made, and they also have grab and go options. Delivery service is an added bonus. Everyone on staff has a background in health and nutrition and is available to provide onsite counseling to customers. Besides Juice Doctor, Sal is also the chef at Othello, overseeing their menu and doing all the cooking. As for my juice, I'll have what he's having if it means I can keep up with Sal's pace.

Next, I'll head to the **FIRST CON-TACT CONVENTION, ENIGMA EVENTS' VERSION OF COMIC CON** (New York La Guardia Airport Marriott, 102-05 Ditmars Boulevard, www.enigmasevents.com) to embrace my inner nerd. Geared toward independent artists, the convention will feature illustrators, colorists, and authors of comics, fantasy, and graphic novels, as well as films, panel discussions, vendors, and Cosplay awards for the best costume. Wondering if this is truly up my alley? FYI, I read Orson

Scott Card's "Ender's Game" long before it was ever a movie with Harrison Ford. Don't know the book? Check it out. It's a sci-fi classic.

If I'm indulging my inner nerd, then why not also release my inner child? Bowling takes me back to my childhood, when my parents used to throw me birthday parties at the local bowling alley. **ASTORIA BOWL** (19-45 49th Street, www.astoriabowl.com) has 28 lanes split on two sides, a bar, concession stand, a movie screen, and banquet facilities upstairs. Bowling is a yin/yang experience for me, balancing the spiritual with the physical. As I throw the ball down the lane, I can ponder the meaning of my life while simultaneously knocking things down! Unfortunately for me, I don't always knock things down and usually have more gutter balls than I do strikes. Manager Jorge Lopez claims that even with a \$300 bowling ball, I only have a 64% chance of getting a strike. Apparently there are algorithms for how you stand and throw to make a strike more likely. I'm unsure about all that. What I do know is that when I stroll through the doors on Valentine's Day, I want Jorge to flip on those disco lights so I can get the party started.

Speaking of partying, is it happy hour yet? After hitting one too many gutter balls, I'll probably need a drink, and by that I mean beer. Newcomer **JUDY & PUNCH** (34-08 30th Avenue, www.judyandpunch.com) is a



New York City Coffee & Bagel House



The Creek and the Cave

welcome addition to the 30th Avenue neighborhood with its warm and friendly vibe.

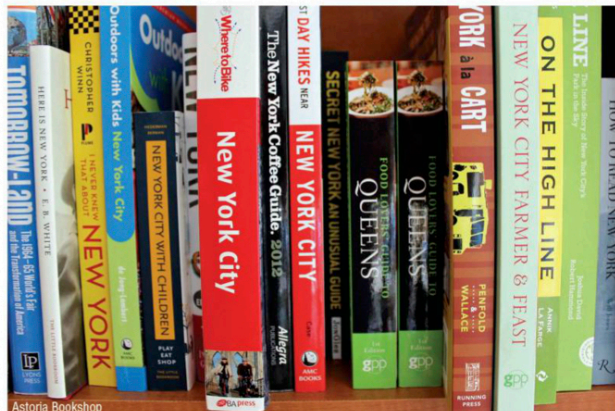
The bar boasts an eclectic list of craft beers that change on a regular basis. A backyard will be opening this spring. Live music from Without George happens every Sunday, and trivia night is on Tuesdays.

I want to finish my day on a high note, and laughter and dancing are two things I absolutely love to do. **THE CREEK AND THE CAVE** (10-93 Jackson Avenue, www.creekandthecave.com) in Long Island City will have both, with a special comedy show that ends in a dance party. The Creek and the Cave is like an entertainment center for grownups. This multi-room venue features a bar, lounge, a 'Cal-Mex' restaurant,

and an area with pinball machines—The Wizard of Oz is one of my faves. But the main attraction for me will be the theater where Peggy O'Leary's "Hard Lonely & Vicious" comedy show is set for 8:00 p.m., followed by a dance party in the lounge at 10:00 p.m. Valentine's Day marks the two year anniversary of "Hard Lonely & Vicious," with all proceeds benefiting Lady Parts Justice, an organization dedicated to using humor to promote women's reproductive rights, as well as combating the policies and politicians trying to prevent them.

The show will begin with Peggy and co-host Molly Austin playing a drinking game show with the comedians who will be performing that night. Ticket prices are \$20 for the show, or \$35 with a three hour open bar from 7:00 - 10:00 p.m. included—one guess which option I'll be taking. After the show, I'll burn off all my drinks by shaking my groove thing on the dance floor.

Sound like an exhausting day? Sometimes those are the best ones to have, where you get into bed at the end of it knowing you were actively a part of the world and the people in it. Don't get me wrong—as an independent person, I am just as happy to spend the day on my couch, reading a great book or watching back to back episodes of "Breaking Bad" or "House of Cards" on Netflix. However, if I'm truly going to celebrate myself on Valentine's Day, then I need to do it out loud and in public, where I can look around and say to myself, "I belong... I rock!" So whatever you're doing this Valentine's Day, be it solo or with a significant other or a good pal, don't forget to take a moment to recognize your own awesomeness and the unique qualities that make you, well, YOU. As for me, you know what I'll be doing—so if you see me around, make sure you say hi.



Astoria Bookshop