

## WHEN FIRST I CAME TO AMERICA....

And some adventures along the way.

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**By Kevin Herridge** (World traveler, former Mod, aging Hippie, Mardi Gras reveler, triangle player, man about town, thoroughly decent chap....and **always available for parties!** )

This is a re-written version of previous articles in the publications mentioned below, this time taken straight from my journal. There is more detail and everything has been put in the correct chronological order. I have also added some Youtube links to music that I hope you enjoy. Cheers!

## PART 1

*An introduction....*

This is the story of why I came to America on February 15th, 1993. It has needed to be written for a long while as my "story" has often been misquoted by well-meaning friends and family. When I first came to Louisiana, I kept a journal, as I did on other "journeys through life." Some of you may be familiar with my articles in "The Algerine," the quarterly newsletter of the Algiers Historical Society or read my jazz articles in the English magazine, "New Orleans Music." If not, how sad! Please take a moment and join the Algiers Historical Society NOW - [www.algiershistoricalsociety.org](http://www.algiershistoricalsociety.org)

. This story comes from a series of articles I submitted to the "View From The Point" and the "West Bank Beacon" on my introduction to Louisiana and Algiers, and the U.S.A. I thought I had better introduce myself. I was born in 1949 (yes, I know I only look 47!) and raised in the "Far East" of East London, England, and always had a deep interest in music and history.

I have traced both my own and my wife Wendy's family histories as far back as humanly possible. Coincidentally, our probable progenitors both had similar occupations. Wendy's direct ancestor was Louis Blanchard, a "wine maker," who traveled from La Chausee/Martaize in the Poitou area of France to Acadia in 1636. My probable ancestor (same name, same village in Bucklebury [a name made famous as the home of the Hobbits], Berkshire, England) was John Headache (from the Old French - "atte Hache") who was an "ale conner" in 1337. An interesting occupation...he had to make sure the beer that was made by the pubs was fit for consumption. This he did by pouring some on a bench and sitting in it in his moleskin trousers. If the beer stuck to the trousers when he stood up, the beer was given the O.K. If not, it was rejected. Seriously! Google it!

I traced the histories of several friends' homes in Algiers Point as well as several that I have lived in, both here and in England, through street directories, census returns, and many other sources.

I suppose my Dad was my first musical influence (although I didn't realize it and would have never admitted it back then) with the 78 rpm records that he used to play and sing along to from the moment I was born, providing my Mum would let him. He loved to sing! He had been in the church choir as a child and then sang on stage in the 1930's with his brother Ernest, as the "Stardust Twins," accompanying themselves on banjos to the tunes of the father of country music, the "Yodeling Brakeman,"

Jimmie Rodgers –

Blue Yodel No.1 (T For Texas) - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEIBmGZxAhg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEIBmGZxAhg)

Sometimes their sister Alma would join them on violin. I was a disappointment to him as I was tone deaf and thrown out of the school choir at ten or eleven years of age as my voice had broken.

As a young child, the family would have "Herridge family parties," where he and his brothers and sister would sing along to all the old songs, accompanied by their mother, Violet Jones, on piano. Although I never appreciated it at the time, they had great harmonies. Dad's record collection went from one extreme to the other. The following video, although not them singing, was typical of their harmonizing and a favorite as they quaffed their screw-topped quart bottles of Mann Crossman Brown Ale and glasses of "sailor's bum" – rum -

"We're three little lambs, who've lost our way, baa baa baa" –

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ql\\_sfN6iCso](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ql_sfN6iCso)

On the "good" side in Dad's 78 rpm record collection there were.....

Hank Williams & his Drifting Cowboys – “Jambalaya (On The Bayou)”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnKOVPhInE>

Lonnie Donegan – (a later recording with Rockabilly band, the Shakin’ Pyramids, featuring three of his biggest hits) – “Cumberland Gap/Wabash Cannonball/Don’t You Rock Me Daddy-O”

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYsoHYIa79s>

Jimmie Rodgers – “Waiting For A Train” –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbzc77Tz6PA>

Connie Francis – “Lipstick On Your Collar” –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TPBh3sd29w>

Johnny Otis – “Ma (He’s Making Eyes At Me)” –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OU1cRcSnEE>

and Spike Jones and his City Slickers - “Lulu Had A Baby” -

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6K\\_GZsZ7hE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6K_GZsZ7hE)

On the “bad” side there were Max Bygraves, Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby and Perry Como (I’m not featuring any of them J). I listened to 50’s rock and roll and skiffle music on the radio then started buying records just before I discovered the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, which led me into American rhythm and blues and soul music. Like all teenagers, I hated Dad’s taste in music, and he hated mine!

I have always been a fan of Louisiana music, although I never realized it was from here at the time, from those first recordings I heard by Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, early Louis Armstrong, Jelly Roll Morton, King Oliver, Professor Longhair, to the New Orleans’ recordings of Roy Brown, Smiley Lewis, Little Richard, Big Joe Turner, Ray Charles, Huey Piano Smith, Irma Thomas, and many, many more. I went to see Dr. John, Roy Brown, D. L. Menard, the Meters, and James Booker when they visited London in the 1970’s. Blues, rhythm & blues, early traditional jazz, 1950s rock & roll, Gospel, brass band music, Mardi Gras Indian music, Cajun & Zydeco....I loved it all. The first Cajun record I ever heard (and bought) was

“Saturday Night Special” by Lesa Cormier & the Sundown Playboys -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN4-AriPp3Y>

released as a 45 rpm on the Beatles’ Apple label back in 1972. It was love at first hearing! In the next twenty years I purchased many Cajun and Zydeco LPs, all released on British record collectors labels.

In 1983, after my first marriage ended, I started attending the Cambridge Folk Festival in England. A three day music festival where festival attendees set up their tents on the festival site and enjoyed the music and ambience, making many new, life-long friends. On my first day I met an English band (the Black Crow Band) in the Guinness Tent that played Cajun, folk, blues, Irish, Old Timey....in fact, anything with a folk-roots feel. They asked me if I played an instrument and I answered “no.” They asked if I could keep time. I answered “yes” and was invited to sit in with them with their high-hat cymbals and brushes, which belonged to the guitarist, Bryn Davis. The weekend went well, we had TOO much fun and they asked if I was going to come back the following year. I replied, “Absolutely!” I was told to buy a triangle, that wonderful Cajun percussion instrument, practice, and they would see me the following year. That year at Cambridge I saw several American acts on the main stage - the accordion “Queen

of Zydeco,” Queen Ida, with Pierre LaRue on fiddle; country singer, Steve Young; and Norteno (Tex Mex) accordion legend, Flaco Jimenez, who played in a three-piece band with Peter Rowan. I returned in 1984, became a band member and played triangle with them for ten years. We played at many festivals, clubs, and pubs. We even played at the prestigious 100 Club on Oxford Street in London, as Zipp Gunn & the Bayou Bigshots! This was a two-day Cajun music festival that included “famous” (in their own lunchtime) English Cajun bands, the Balham Alligators, Deaf Heights Cajun Aces, the Electric Bluebirds, and R. Cajun and the Zydeco Brothers.

## PART 2

*La Belle France...Frodo begins his great adventure....*

I finally decided that I had to go to Louisiana and discover what all this music, food and culture was all about. I read everything I could find, watched videos, went to see other British and Louisiana Cajun bands in England. In fact, in the 1980s, Cajun music was probably as popular in England as it was in Louisiana, maybe even more so! There were dozens of Cajun bands in Great Britain and also a few in France, Germany and Norway. It was the “in” dance music for many. With its infectious rhythms, it was difficult not to want to get up and dance, or at least tap your feet.

The more I read and watched on TV and video, the more I wanted to visit Louisiana. I remember as a child, first hearing “Jambalaya” by Hank Williams. My Dad had the 78 rpm recording. I never realized, until I discovered Cajun music and culture in the 1970’s that “Jambalaya, Crawfish Pie and File Gumbo” were all food items! I thought it was just a Country & Western spin on Little Richard’s lyrics, “Wop-Bop-A-Lu-Bop, A-Wop-Bam-Boom.” How was I to know?

In 1992, while attending the Cambridge Folk Festival, I decided to visit Louisiana for Mardi Gras the following year. I had seen the videos, read the articles, it looked like a lot of fun. But, unlike most foreign visitors coming to Louisiana, I did not want to see it in New Orleans. I wanted to experience the “traditional Cajun Mardi Gras,” outside Fred’s Lounge in Mamou! So, there I was, in the Guinness Tent, having a pint of Guinness with the Louisiana band, Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, like you do. I got talking to them and expressed my desire to visit Louisiana in 1993 for Mardi Gras. The first thing Kevin Barzas, the bass player, asked was, “Where are you going? You’re not going to New Orleans are you? That’s just too crowded, man.” I replied that I wanted to visit their hometown, Mamou, and that met with smiles and high fives all round. I didn’t even know what a “high five” was at that time but soon found out. I said I had two concerns. Firstly, my hair was shoulder length (I was going through another mid life crisis) and I was worried about “rednecks” picking on me. Kevin told me their fiddle player had a ponytail so I would not get any hassle over that. The second concern I had was that I was a vegetarian. They all choked on their Guinness and Kevin blurted out, “You’ll f\*\*\*\*\* die, boy!” We all laughed and I asked if they had any tips I should be aware of while I was traveling in Louisiana. I was told not to get into conversations about “politics, football, religion or color” and I would be OK. That was pretty much universal advice but I thanked them anyway.

Steve Riley & the Mamou Playboys – “La Danse De Mardi Gras” -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkeltBFsnXo>

After that Cambridge Folk Festival I put my car on the ferry and crossed the English Channel. My friend Dave Godby had bought a 250 year-old stone cottage, with no roof, in the Haute Alps (Lower Alps), in southeastern France, just above Provence, and wanted me to go and help him renovate it. The arrangement was that I would work from 8am to noon, not get paid but receive board and lodging. Between him asking me and me arriving, he had a new roof put on the building. I was invited to go for a month. On my way there I detoured to Lorient in Brittany, on the west coast of France, to visit my friend “Dede,” Andres Segalou, a French paratrooper whose was employed in the service as a sniper! His father had been a sniper, as had his grandfather. I had met “Dede” at Cambridge in the Guinness Tent and we took an instant liking to each other. He spoke very little English and I spoke a little more French but Guinness has a way of overcoming such language barriers. His favorite line was, “Kevin, you are my friend. You are a pacifist and I am a military man.” “You want Guinness?” “Let’s have some Jamieson’s Irish whisky?” “A glass of Pastis?” “Some champagne?” or “Shall we drink cider?” or “Let’s eat!” and “Let’s go the festival!” were about the limit of his English vocabulary. My French answers to all the above usually, “Oui!” His Belgian girlfriend had to translate our conversations.

Breton pipe band, Bagad de Lann Bihoue, play "Amazing Grace" –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KUqUvMYyOFQ>

He had invited me to stay with him for the Festival Interceltique, a festival of Celtic music with musicians coming from all the Celtic nations to play. We went to the festival site at midnight, after I had driven all day, and "Dede" introduced me to the delights of Normandy "*cidre*", better known in England as "scrumpy" cider, an unfiltered, potent, alcoholic beverage. At 5.30am, the band playing wildly and the crowd a heaving, dancing, drunken mass, the organizers made the mistake of trying to stop the jollities. The band would not stop so they turned off the electricity, plunging about 1000 revelers into pitch darkness. If you have never spent time with a drunken French mob plunged into darkness, I would not recommend it! They were not a happy bunch, were on the verge of revolting, when the riot police showed up. I was a little concerned. "Dede," the "military man," looked

very

concerned. The police asked the crowd to disband. The crowd shouted abuse at them, in French of course. "Dede" knew what was coming next. After all, he was a "military man." The riot police then fired tear gas into the crowd, sending the mob into a state of terror. "Dede" grabbed my collar with one hand and his girlfriend with the other, I grabbed my just-poured pint of

*cidre*,

and in seconds we found ourselves outside choking but safe.

The next day we made an early start – 1pm – on the way back to "Dede's" apartment, we could hear the sound of bagpipes coming from a hotel across the street. "Scottish!" "Dede" cried, and dragged his girlfriend and me into the hotel. There we were met with a sight I'll never forget....a whole Scottish pipe and drum band, laying on the floor, draped over the bar and staggering around in a state of complete intoxication. One or two were still trying to build up enough wind to play their pipes. Kilts, jackets and ties were strewn everywhere! It was as though we had just arrived at the end of a drunken orgy!! "Dede" suggested they play "Flower of Scotland" and I seconded that request, having spent 12 hours in bars, restaurants and beer tents that day at the festival. As soon as I opened my mouth, those that could raise their heads spun them round. A cry went up, "A SASENACH in our midst!!!" A Sassenach is a Scottish Gaelic word for Saxon or Englishman. In a split second I thought, "I'm dead!!!" Instead, one of them said, "You sing it, Sassenach, and we'll play it." "Dede", now caught up in the excitement grabbed a chair and insisted I stand on it to sing. My knees started to shake as the few that were still standing picked up their instruments and cranked up the pipes, which woke others up.



It was 2am. I thought I should be home in bed. Instead, as the pipes began to swirl, I broke into song and although I had forgotten some of the words, managed to struggle through as more musicians got up and played. "Dede" was waving his military arms around with tears rolling down his cheeks. "That's my friend. He is a pacifist and I am a military man," he told everyone as he made French noises that resembled the tune I was singing. I finished, thinking death would come swiftly. Instead, they cheered as only drunken Scotsmen can cheer at 2am, and forced whiskey on "Dede" and I until almost dawn. We had to sneak out in the end as we needed to rest.

"The Tartan Army" (Scottish football fans) sing "Flower of Scotland" – somewhat similar to my rendition:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CILLJc16Rzk>

I left Lorient the next day and continued with my journey down the west coast of France, turned left at Bordeaux, and traveled through the beautiful Loire valley and wine country towards the Alps. My time there stretched from a month to three but that's yet another story. My friend had a bluegrass/old timey country band in the mountains and I joined them on triangle, introducing them to Cajun music (as I had lots of it taped for my journey), which we played at several parties, bars and festivals throughout the region. I drove to the Oktoberfest in Munich as my cousin, George Berwick, was living there, then back to Dave's and later back my parents' home for Christmas.

### **PART 3**

*Tell the folks back home this is the promised land calling, poor boy's on the line...*

Johnnie Allen – “Promised Land” –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOxGCxoNTMw>

Christmas and New Year came and went. I had my flight booked to America. The nearest a plane flew to Mamou, Louisiana, excluding New Orleans, was Dallas. I thought I might spend two weeks around Cajun country and two weeks in Austin, Texas, for the music scene. The time came for me to travel to Louisiana for a month and see what adventures I could get up to. My family took me to Gatwick airport, just outside London, and I was both excited and nervous. I had hitchhiked all over Europe in the 1960's so was not concerned about being alone for a month. It was just the unknown. But, at least they understood English in Louisiana....or so I thought. I was soon to find out my “cute” English accent would cause some problems.

I arrived at Gatwick airport on Feb.15, 1993, and after a tearful farewell (my sister, Sharon, and niece, Tamar, not me), I went through security and arrived in the departure lounge. My flight was delayed for an hour. I sat down with my ten year-old book on traveling in America. Memphis was another place I thought I might try and fit in so read the chapter on that fair city. The first sentence stated something like, “If you travel into Memphis by train, don't get off, as the Downtown area is dangerous.” Memphis would have to wait until one of my “hurrication” trips. Looking up from my book, I espied a vision of loveliness, a drop-dead gorgeous young lady in tight jeans, cowboy boots, low-cut T-shirt and leather jacket. I threw that in for my gentlemen readers. She was on my flight but, unfortunately, not sitting next to me.

This was the first time I had crossed the “pond” so enjoyed the long flight, watching “Under Siege” and “The Last of the Mohicans” (suitable, I thought), enjoying the free drinks and watched out the window as we flew over Greenland, Newfoundland and northern Canada. There was a clear blue sky so I could see ice-packs floating off the coast. The first thing I noticed was the snow and as we flew over populated areas, how neat the streets and highways were laid out, in a grid pattern, and very straight, unlike London.

I landed in St. Paul, Minneapolis, at 4:30pm, and went through customs. I only had a small carry-on bag and was wearing jeans, a T-shirt and a thick lumberjack shirt over that. I knew I going to have fun here as I could see the security people looking at me and whispering to each other. I went through the metal detector and my triangle set the alarm off. I was asked to, "Follow me," by a female security agent who motioned me to place my bag on the table and open it. I obeyed and knew this was not the time to try and be funny. She asked me where I was going, what the triangle was for, and where my coat was as there was a foot of snow outside! "Where I'm going, I won't need a coat," I replied. "Where's that?" she asked. "Mamou, Louisiana. It's hot there all the time," I said, thinking everyone had heard of it. Wrong! She bid me farewell and I walked on, only to be stopped by another female agent. "I've just been searched," I explained. "Well, today's your lucky day. I'm searching you again." I thought I might miss my connection but she said she would put me on a bus to make sure I did not miss it.

So, after the second search, and the same questions, I boarded the bus, that only had one other passenger...the drop-dead gorgeous girl, Michelle, from my flight. "Did they search you?" she asked. "Yeah," I replied. "Me, too. A body search!" Hmmm. Too much information, I thought. "Where are you going?" she asked. "Mamou," I replied. "Where the hell is that?" I explained about this trip of a lifetime I was on and she said she lived in Austin, Texas. "Oh," I said, "I thought I might go there after Mardi Gras. Here's my address. Come and stay with me." Now you don't get offers like that every day. At least, I don't. Are you still with me gentlemen? It gets better. "What do you do there?" I inquired. "I'm a topless go-go dancer." Gulp! I thought my heart might give out. We said our goodbyes and I hopped a plane to Dallas, Texas.

Two and a half hours later, as I flew over Dallas at night, a song came into my head -

Joe Ely - "Did you ever seen Dallas from DC-9 at night?"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M30z7xsiGHc> )

It might not have been a DC-9 but I had seen it now and sang along to myself. I remember it looking very impressive in the dark – lots of yellow lights. On arriving in Dallas airport, I jumped in a cab, driven by a gentleman from Ghana, West Africa. He dropped me at the De-Lux Inn, which was run by a gentleman from India. He told me he was going to see his brother in Birmingham, England, in June. I crashed out in front of the T.V. in my big Texan bed at 10pm, knackered! The bed vibrated for 15 minutes if you put a quarter in the machine next to it. I never had a quarter, so fell asleep.

I made my way by cab to the bus station the next day at 8am, to “ride the Greyhound” to Mamou, only to find the bus never went to Mamou. The person selling the tickets asked what the nearest town was. The only one I could think of was Lafayette, about sixty miles away. I bought the ticket, only to find the next bus was at 4:45pm. I discovered the bus got into Lafayette at 1:35am the next morning. Another long day! The bus station was full of very poor looking Mexicans and African Americans. In the meantime, I had breakfast at a trucker’s café called Evelyn’s – had a cheese omelette. I spent some time in the Central Library that had an exhibit on the history of Texas and bought postcards of Davy Crocket, and cowboys and Indians, like you do.

East Texas in February is not a pretty sight! The long, straight bus route was littered with trailers, rusty tractors and cars, trash, flat, untilled fields, lots of those nodding donkey oil thingies, bare trees, bushes, poor, overweight people, and Mexicans. This was not what I had expected! And a Greyhound bus ride is not as romantic as portrayed in songs. It was like traveling in the Third World! I had my first bottle of Dr. Pepper – tasty but unhealthy. The journey was brightened up slightly by the sunset.

The bus arrived in Houston at 9:45pm and after waiting 20 minutes, I boarded another buse for Lafayette. The bus headed south to Beaumont, or “Boremont” as my Canadian friend later referred to it. She had worked there for a short time. I changed buses there and eventually pulled into Lake Charles, Louisiana, bus terminal late in the evening, which was set in the middle of an industrial estate if I remember correctly. There was no one around. Not a soul. A slight panic attack set in. What would Lafayette be like? In the illustrious words of ‘Mad’ magazine’s Alfred E. Newman, “What? Me worry?” I traveled on through Orange, Lacassine, Scott and Crowley, towns that I knew through Cajun songs and instrumentals.

## **PART 4**

*Allons a Lafayette....*

Boozoo Chavis – “Allons A Lafayette” (with some Zydeco dancing!) –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljwZBxWs2fc>

I arrived in Lafayette at 2:15am, an hour late. I'm here, I thought!! But now what? I asked the bus driver where the nearest motel was and how would I get there. He pointed to a gentleman standing in the shadows by his pickup truck, smoking a big cigar. Seeing my life flash before me, I went up to him and asked if he was a cab driver. “No, but I can take you where you want to go,” he replied. Like I had a choice! I asked him if he could take me to a cheap motel. He advised, “If I takes you to a cheap motel, man, you'se likely to wake up dead in da morning. They's full o' ho's an' pimps an' drug dealers.” O.K., that was not part of my travel plans, I thought. “What do you recommend in the mid-price range bracket?” We drove off into the darkness. I tried striking up a conversation, “Are you a Cajun?” “No, I'm Creole.” Whoops! I told him why I was in Louisiana. He looked at me as though I was crazy. This was a look I would get many times. Maybe I was? “You come all dis way jus' to go to MAMOU?” He was obviously familiar with the town, I thought. “Yeah, it's like a pilgrimage.” We both laughed. The only difference was, I didn't know why I was laughing!

He took me to a motel on the Evangeline Throughway and made sure I got to my room before he drove off, as, he pointed out, “You could get murdered back dere in da dark.” I asked how much I owed him and he replied, “give me what you t'ink fit.” How do you put a price on someone possibly saving your life? The motel was a ten-minute ride from the bus station. I gave him \$15 and he seemed delighted. I was also delighted that I was still alive on my first day in Louisiana and only had another 27 days to survive! I went into my room and soon discovered that this bed also vibrated if I stuck a quarter in the machine next to it. I switched on the TV and found I had porn channels! I knew right away this was a high-class establishment! I soon fell asleep while watching a vampire film. Welcome to Louisiana, I thought!

I awoke at 6am and forced myself to go back to sleep until 9am. The motel had a dining room attached so I sauntered down there for my first Cajun breakfast and a Cajun waitress came to take my order.

“Whatchou wan’, cher?”

Cher? I thought. If anyone, I resembled Sonny more than Cher.

“What you got?”

“Where YOU from, cher?”

“London.”

“London, England?”

“Is there another one?”

“Huh?”

This was a conversation I was to have several hundred times in the next sixteen years.

“Whatchou doin’ here, cher?”

"I've come to do Mardi Gras in Mamou."

"MAMOU???" she laughed. Was there something I had not researched in my master plan?

She was obviously confused with the breakfast question or just forgotten that part of the conversation so I asked again, "What do you have for breakfast?"

"We got eggs."

"That's good."

"How you like dem fixed, cher?"

"Are they broken?"

"Huh? No, how you want dem cooked."

"What are the house specialties?" I tried to joke.

"Huh? You can have dem fried, over easy or sunny side up, or scrambled."

"I'll take one of each."

“Huh?”

“And some tea, please.”

“You want dat sweet, cher?”

“No thanks.”

Maybe sugar was rationed here but I thought they grew it in Louisiana? A glass arrived on my table within seconds with what looked like watered down coke in it, ice cubes, a slice of lemon, and a straw.

“What’s this,” I asked.

“Tea,” she replied.

“But it’s cold.”

“Oh, you want HOT tea, cher?”

“I never knew there was any other type. If it’s cold we throw it away in England.”

“Huh?”



The assortment of eggs arrived with some toast and I devoured them then headed out, on foot, to explore Downtown Lafayette. It sounded so romantic. Was I in for a surprise!

## PART 5

*Cajun culture shock....Huh?*

I walked about a mile or two along the Evangeline Throughway then turned right towards Downtown Lafayette, I discovered Bee's Lounge by the railroad track, a bar so dark after leaving the bright sunlight outside, I could not see a thing. This was probably one of those times I should have done a u-turn, I thought, but not wanting to lose face, stumbled in, bumping into the bar after tripping over the step - and I was still sober! This did not look good at 11 am! A woman's voice came from somewhere in the darkness, "We just opening, cher, what you want?"

What's with this "cher" business, I thought. I soon found out that it was a term of endearment, similar to being called "love" or "sweetheart" in London.

I answered towards where the voice had come from as my eyes gradually adjusted and I could not make out any other customers. A thought flashed through my head, then another....was this a gay bar? A bikers' club-house? A Klan meeting place?

"What kind of beers do you have?" I asked.

The answer came back in one word, "Buddorbudlight."

"I'll take one of those."

"Huh?"

"A Buddorbudlight."

"No. It's a Bud OR a Bud Light," she laughed at my ignorance.

"I'll take a Bud, please."

"Can I see your ID?"

"You've made my day, my dear! I'm 44 and never been asked to show ID in a pub in my whole life!"

Confused by the accent she replied, "Well, you may not be as old as you look."

Another compliment? Bee's Lounge became my "local." The bar had salt containers on it. I asked the barmaid if they sold food and she said they did not but had free plate dinners on Thursday nights. I made a mental note. I like "free."

"Then what's the salt for?"

"People put it in their beer."

Hmmmm. This was the first of several conversations I would have with Bonnie the barmaid. I spent many a happy hour at Bee's and got to know "Miss Bee" and Mr. Lee, and the locals, including Lorita (65) and her husband (77). He had been the triangle player with Lawrence Walker's Cajun Band back in the 1950's! The only problem I had with the customers when talking to them they would chop from English to French then back again without even knowing they did it. They had a great juke box, full of Cajun and country tunes, and a pool table.

I got talking to two old Cajun guys and they started a discussion about an acquaintance they had not seen for years.

"I hear he married a fully retarded woman from Breauseaux."

FULLY retarded, I thought!

"Well, she weren't dat retarded. She charge him \$10 every time to have sex!"

All three of us fell about laughing.

I drank my beer and left, crossing the railroad track into Jefferson Street, Downtown Lafayette. It was like a ghost town! I went in Jimmy's bar then took a cab to Randol's restaurant, where they served Cajun food (I had my first gumbo there), and they had a band and dance floor. There was a two-piece band playing there lunchtime called Zydeco Aureaux – Danny Collett on accordion, Fabian on guitar (not THAT Fabian). When they finished playing they gave me a lift back to Jimmy's Bar and then I headed back to the motel, picking up something called a chicken taco supreme from Taco Bell.

The second morning at the diner, the same waitress approached me cautiously.

“What you want today, cher?”

“I’ll try the pancakes.” Got to be safe with those, I thought.

“How many you want, cher?”

“Six, please.”

She raised her eyebrows and waddled off, returning in a few minutes with a stack that seemed about six inches high. I learned later that what we call pancakes in England you call crepes here. I never made that mistake again.

I asked a local for a cheap place to eat and was sent to Louviere’s, famous for their “working man lunches.” It was a small hole-in-the-wall place run by an old lady whose daughter helped out. For \$4.65 I got crawfish, red beans, white beans and rice, and a slice of something called “Bunny” bread. It was white and stuck to my palate. The owner could not understand why I didn’t want the sausage that came with it.

“I’m a vegetarian,” I confessed, almost shamefully.

“A what? You wanna soda wid dat, cher?”

“No thanks, I don’t drink it.”

“You don’t eat no meat an’ you don’t drink no soda? Mai, cher, you gonna find it hard in Louisiana!”

She was right. The Cajun band at Cambridge was right. I thought I had better keep my views on politics, religion and war to myself! I felt like a second-class citizen....just for being a vegetarian. One lunchtime, when they were short of seats, a group of guys asked they could sit with me as I had a table to myself. Turned out they were in a band called Cowboy Mouth. Mrs. Louviere (Evelyn) asked me where I hung out in the evenings and I replied, "Bee's Lounge." Quick as a flash she replied, "Mai, cher, you know you hit *rock bottom* when you hang out at Bee's Lounge." Her daughter nodded in agreement. This was going to be an interesting trip, I thought!!!

Lafayette is an "interesting" town when you don't have a car. There was no bus service. I walked for miles! From Bee's Lounge, I walked to Downtown Lafayette, or Main Street, to be precise. It was just a matter of crossing the railroad tracks as they ran about ten yards from the bar. I could drink my beer, listen to the train roll by as the bar shook, hear its whistle, and sing all those old Hank Williams songs to myself. I left Bee's one afternoon, stepping out into the sunlight, and the barrier was coming down for the train crossing. I stood and waited...and waited...and waited. The train came along at walking speed, all 100 plus trucks of it. When the barrier lifted I looked at my watch. Fifteen minutes had passed – I could have had another beer!

Hank Williams - "I Heard That Lonesome Whistle":

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWmo3IBtWMc>

Main Street was the dead center of town, "dead" being the operative word! It was like a ghost town! I tried to imagine it in its heyday. There were a few small businesses trying to make a go of it. The travel book had said that about a quarter of a million people descend on Downtown Lafayette for Mardi Gras. When were the other 249,999 going to show up, I wondered? It's difficult partying on your own!

## PART 6

*My first taste of Mamou....*

I walked most of the way from Bee's Lounge to the Cajun Field to attend a Cajun and Zydeco music festival. It took me two hours in my brand new Dr. Martin boots. My feet were full of blisters for three weeks. I was hitching and one car stopped. He took me three blocks. He said he only stopped because I had my triangle hanging from my belt and figured I must be a musician. I finally gave in and caught a cab. At the festival I watched Cory and the Hot Peppers, my first Zydeco band, and Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys. Bumped into fellow Brit, accordionist "Slim," and had a chat with him. Try these tunes by two of his bands:

The Bluberry Hellbellies – "Drink Up Thee Cider"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWIFNMDZRyU> ).

The Boot Hill Foot Tappers – "Get Your Feet Outta My Shoes"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYvNfrBPzRAs>

I watched my first Mardi Gras parade that evening and could not see what all the fuss was about. They would turn out to be a lot livelier in New Orleans a couple of years later!

I went back to Cajun Field the following day and I met Steve LeFleur, singer and guitarist with the band, Mamou. I watched his band and they had Danny Collett on accordion. He asked if I wanted to go to Mamou after his gig at the festival as he had another gig in Mamou that night. "I'll get you a ride back to Lafayette," he promised. We jumped in his truck and an hour later I was in Mamou, a one red light town! The gig was in a building where the ceiling was about a

foot above our heads called Rumors Lounge. The words of another song ran through my brain, “Throw your hands in the air, and pretend that you just don’t care.” If I did that I would end up with broken fingers! The place was packed with dancers in cowboy hats, and I played triangle with the band. It was a blast! I got a ride back to Lafayette from someone I met in the bar.

I spent the next day in Lafayette eating crawfish etouffee at Louviere’s for lunch and hanging out at Bee’s Lounge and Dot’s Lounge across the street, watching the Mardi Gras parade. I met a couple from Indiana, Tim and Deana, who had been to Mardi Gras before and said they would drive me to Mamou the following day, Fat Tuesday. They took me to the Crawfish Kitchen in Breaux Bridge that night for my first \$10 “all-you-can-eat buffet.” I had crawfish for the first time there, fried shrimp and fried catfish, and rabbit. We have crawfish in England but they were not eaten in restaurants or anywhere else for that matter. English shrimps are small, like Louisiana bait shrimp, so you can eat everything after removing the head. With this strategy in mind, I could not keep up with everyone else peeling and eating crawfish so I just pulled the head off and ate the rest! Not recommended!!! A little on the crunchy side and wreaks havoc with the digestive system in the morning!

So, with a belly full of strange critters, I repaired to bed to watch T.V., too excited to sleep and ready to experience who knows what on Mardi Gras Day.

## **PART 7**

*“Take me to the Mardi Gras...in the city of my dreams”*

Paul Simon – “Take Me To The Mardi Gras” –

<http://www.songstube.net/video.php?title=Take%20Me%20to%20the%20Mardi%20Gras&artistid=11508&artist=Paul%20Simon&id=137786>

So now the big day had come....the reason for me coming to the United States. Would it be an anticlimax? I had read all the books, watched all the videos over and over again, bought and played the records, played in a Cajun band in England, seen Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, and Queen Ida at Cambridge Folk Festival....would I be disappointed with the real thing?

On Mardi Gras Day morning, Tim and Deana, the couple from Indiana I had met the day before, turned up a little late and we headed for Iota, better known as “T-Mamou” (Little Mamou). We drove up through Eunice and into Iota, which is pretty much a one-street town. It was a beautiful sunny day. Hundreds of revelers were already packing the streets and judging by the crushed beer cans in the street, had started reveling very early! Unlike Mamou, Iota has no red light so I’m talking “small town.” A stage was set up in the street and we arrived just to see the end of a Zydeco band’s set. We bought some beers and not having had any breakfast, hit the boudin, jambalaya, fried catfish and alligator. First time I had tried alligator and it was surprisingly good, similar to pork, I thought.

On an empty lot across from the stage were a group of bikers who we decided, probably not wisely, to go and make acquaintance with. For some reason they took to me immediately, and Deana was not unattractive. Whether it was the earring, the long hair and beard, the triangle hanging from my belt, the “cute” accent, or just the pure nerve of approaching them and wanting to talk, I don’t know. They greeted us warmly and offered us beer. I soon found out they were, in fact, two groups of bikers - the Lafayette Bandidos and the Evangeline Road Shakers - these were hardcore bikers! I thought to myself, well, I’ve survived this long in Louisiana, what’s another day and thirty or forty bikers going to change? The two leaders were very funny guys. I chose not to bring up the subject of race relations after reading the messages on their bikes. We got talking to two of them – “Gonzo” and “Rockstone.” “Rockstone” had a large turtle shell strapped on top of his headlight. They tried selling me a black and orange striped T-shirt with “Support Your Local Bandidos” emblazoned across the front. I explained I was “on a budget” and at \$15, could not afford one. Deana bought one. I had visions of myself walking round New



Orleans in it....probably not a wise move. They invited me to visit their “swamp,” a bar called “Wowees” in Milton, Louisiana, just west of Lafayette, as they had a band playing there the following Saturday night. I took the details and said I would try and make it. I never did.

They asked why I was carrying around a triangle. I said I played in a Cajun band in England and was hoping to play in Iota but a large sign on the stage said “No Guest Musicians” put me off. One of the leaders got off his bike, sauntered up on stage and spoke with the band. The next moment I was being invited up to play with the band - Scotty Preausont’s Cajun Band. It’s good to have influential friends, I thought! I took several photos of the bikers, with their permission.

The parade came down Main Street, with all the guys masked and in costume, some on horseback, carrying strangled chickens that they had begged the farmers to put in their gumbo that night. One of my cameras jammed and I dropped the other one, exposing the film and losing all the biker photographs. Deana said she would send me some of her copies but never did. We said our farewells to the bikers, ate some crawfish boudin and I had my first “Tootsie Roll,” then headed off to Mamou.

The Mardi Gras riders, all on horseback, came down the street. They were all in costume and masked. Several carried strangled chickens that they had caught on the “Courir de Mardi Gras” (the Fat Tuesday Run).

Arriving in Mamou, Tim parked the car and we headed towards the revelry. The Main Street was ankle deep in beer cans and plastic cups, especially outside Fred’s Lounge. One of the guys, Jeff, who I had met on the Sunday came over and said hello and several other people welcomed me with, “Hello, Kevin.” Deana and Tim said I must have made quite an impression when I was there before. We squeezed inside Fred’s and the place was jumping! It was packed with dancers, tourists, locals, and many in masks and costumes. I met a lady from New York who was a photographer and telling her of our encounter with the bikers, wanted to drive over to Iota and take their photographs. I gave her their “swamp” details, a phone number, names, etc. She said she had previously been invited to a K.K.K. meeting and took photographs there. I said I was off to New Orleans next and she gave me a phone number of a friend to call and take for a drink.

From there we went to the Legion Hall and just missed Mamou’s set but Don Thibodeaux and Cajun Fever were setting up ready to play. He invited me up on stage to play triangle for the dancers for two hours. After I got off stage I was dragged onto the dance floor by a lady twenty

years my senior. A mean dancer! Her name was Florence and turned out to be the daughter of the late, great, famous Cajun fiddler, Dennis McGhee! A mean dancer! From there we hit the Night Cap Lounge and Diana's Brass Rail, pumping money into the jukebox and playing all those old Cajun and Swamp Pop favorites. We drove back to Lafayette later that night, listening to the old rhythm and blues and jazz on the radio. We bought some bean burritos on the Evangeline Thoroughway and came back to my room to devour them. A long and exciting day! Was it worth the trip? In the words of a recent country music smash hit, "Hell, yeah!"

## PART 8

*Back to Lafayette, a weekend visit to Mamou, then back to Lafayette...*

Queen Ida and the Bon Temps Zydeco Band – Grand Mamou -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yvvy7HzyZtU>

Back in Lafayette, my feet covered in blisters, I wandered round the local haunts for a couple of days. I ate jambalaya, white beans and cabbage at Louviere's for lunch. A couple of Nuns came in and ate. I had the free plate dinner at Bee's Lounge – catfish courtbouillon, candied yams and rice. They even gave me an extra plate to take home for breakfast! The feet were so sore I got a cab both ways to Bee's.

I rented a car – a Honda Accord - on the Friday, and drove round "Cajun country," visiting all the places I had heard mentioned in their music. On the way out of town, I did not realize there was a law that said you could turn right on red. After several irate drivers had blasted their horns at me and I, in turn, had offered them some English hand gestures, I made my way towards

Opelousas and onto Ville Platte where I stopped at Floyd's Record Store and bought some Zydeco and Cajun music, then on to Mamou.

I checked into a sleazy hotel – the Cazan Hotel - the only one in Mamou, the same one Steve lived in although he was out of town touring with the band that weekend. I walked across the street to Fred's Lounge (the Cajun Mecca) and was told by the owner, "Tante Sue," that they were closed and the door was only open because she was expecting a beer delivery as the Mardi Gras weekend had cleaned her out. I pled my case and stated I had come all the way from London just to visit her bar. She told me to take a seat and offered me a beer. "Budorbudlight?" She asked me what I was doing that night as there was a free catfish supper at the Casanova Lounge. After a couple of beers I went back to my hotel and ran a bath. The water came out brown! I went down to the bar and was told to, "let it run, cher. It'll clean up." I went to the Casanova Lounge later and "Tante Sue" spotted me as I walked in and took me back into the kitchen where several other older ladies were cooking and dishing up the food. I had a plate of pork chops, macaroni and cheese, and snap beans thrust in front of me and I dared not mention I was a vegetarian. I managed to eat it all and was then given another plate! I was already stuffed and "Tante Sue" made sure "her friend Kevin" was kept in beer for the evening. Did she have desires on my body, I frantically thought? I slipped out unnoticed some time later.

Fred's Lounge opened at 8am and "Tante Sue" requested my presence at that hour and I was told to bring my triangle. I got there at 8.20am only to be told by "Tante Sue," "You're late." Don Thibodeaux' band would start playing at 9am she explained and guest musicians were not allowed but as we were "friends," I could join the band. By 9.30am the place was heaving with dancers, waltzing and two-stepping round the tiny bar. The whole show was broadcast live over a local radio station. That continued to about 1pm when the whole crowd moved to Diana's Brass Rail on the same block for more music and dancing until 5 or 6pm. The band there was J. C. Labbie et ses amis Cajun from Eunice.

I dashed off at 2pm to try and find Marc Savoy's Music Shop, just outside Eunice, as they had jam sessions there every Saturday. I later learned the sessions were only in the morning from 9 to 12am. I took a wrong turn down an unmade road, just before the one I should have taken and ended up in a trailer park and soon realized I was the only white face around. At that moment, a police car came along slowly from the opposite direction and waved me down. They asked me what I was doing back there and I told them what I was looking for and was obviously lost. One of the cops said, "This is the N\*\*\*\*\* part of town. Turn round and go back where you came from!" I did just that. His sheet and pointy white hat must have been in the wash, I thought. Did no one in Louisiana have a sense of humor or was mine just different? Everything I had heard or read said the Cajuns were a jolly, fun-loving bunch.

I was quite the celebrity in Mamou, being “Tante Sue’s” “friend,” a part-time band member with Mamou, and English. I played Cajun songs on the jukeboxes and the locals would ask the barmaid, “Who’s playing dem French records, cher?” “Dat English guy.” They smiled and nodded at me knowingly, like I was a retarded person. I was beginning to think I was!

That night I went to Wild Bill’s Lounge and had the free supper – pork in mushroom gravy, rice and coleslaw. Then headed off to the Night Cap Lounge and played the jukebox as there was only one other customer in there then headed off to bed.

Being a “celebrity” in Mamou is not a difficult task, especially when you have a “funny accent.” Mamou has one red light, a few hundred residents, is surrounded by rice fields and crawfish traps, and only comes to life on a Saturday morning at Fred’s Lounge. Other than that it is just a sleepy Cajun village for the rest of the week. I did meet some interesting people in the bars in Mamou, though.

I met four brothers on four separate occasions (small town, or what?). One worked behind a bar and the other three were customers in different bars. Their mother was English so they were interested in talking about the *Olde Country*, having never visited. One of them referred to the hotel I was staying in as the “rat hole.” At \$20 per night, I could be a rat! I was that rat! Struggling to make conversation, and him introducing me to a tongue-loosening drink called a “Hot Damn,” which I was informed was hot cinnamon schnapps, I asked him how he got the peak of his cap to be perfectly arched as my peak was dead straight. He explained that before he went to bed he sprayed it with starch and left it overnight in a glass so that in the morning, the shape would be perfect. I was surprised he never wore it in bed! Knowing nothing about American football I turned the conversation to the K.K.K., like you do down south. I asked if it still existed and he replied, “Big time, man, big time.” “Are you a member?” I foolishly asked (mental note here....keep off the “Hot Damns!”). He said he was not but his boss was, and though he wanted to join his wife said that if he did, she would leave him. So he never joined “and then she left me six weeks after that, anyway!” A marriage made in Heaven, I thought.

Later that night he took me (and two ladies of dubious character) for a drive out into the sticks. We drove down a dark, unmade road, surrounded by trees. At this point my life flashed before me and I thought I would end up as an alligator’s midnight snack! Soon we came to a trailer parked in the middle of the trees with a small lake nearby. We got out of his car and headed toward the trailer. Inside I found it had been converted into a bar! The owners were the only two people there. I’m not sure if they had a license to sell alcohol but we had one or two, and then

drove back to Mamou, singing along to the Cajun songs on the radio, including “Opelousas Sostain” by Rufus Jagneaux. They were stunned that I knew them and could sing along with them, even though I had no clue what the lyrics meant! I later discovered that most of what I thought were romantic sounding songs were, in fact, about crawfish, catfish, sausages and many other types of food.

Rufus Jagneaux – “Opelousas Sostain” –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=018Wyc36YGc>

The next morning I drove back to Ville Platte to visit Floyd’s Record Store again. “We get a lot of Europeans in here,” Floyd explained to me, not surprised in the least that I had come “all the way from England” on this Cajun pilgrimage. I bought some more Cajun and Zydeco cassettes and 45s and headed back to town, stopping at T-Boy’s butchers for some fresh boudin on the way. Although I had been a vegetarian for four years, Louisiana had broken me! I did a tour of Diana’s Brass Rail, Wild Bill’s, the Casanova Lounge (for a free plate of fried catfish, rice and pasta....I think Cajuns consider either rice or pasta or beans a vegetable), and ended up in the bar of the “rat hole.” I said my goodbyes to one and all as I was driving back to Lafayette the next day.

I drove to the Lafayette Greyhound Bus Station to purchase my bus ticket to New Orleans in the morning and my “cab driver” was still there doing business. I returned the car and they gave me a ride back to the Gateway Motel. I asked for an alarm call at 4:45am as the bus left at 6am. I thought I had a cold coming on so went Downtown to say my goodbyes and had an early night.

*Come on everybody take a trip with me...down the Mississippi, down to New Orleans....*

Gary U.S. Bonds – “New Orleans” –

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9Ib8sC\\_wX8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9Ib8sC_wX8)

## PART 9

*“Get your ticket in your hand, you wanna go to New Orleans...”*

Professor Longhair – “Go To The Mardi Gras” – featuring one of the best intros ever!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv0n8n1pz0s>

Well, I had missed Mardi Gras in New Orleans but there would be plenty more time, including riding in the Zulu parade! Needless to say, I never slept a wink and didn't need the alarm call. I decided the topless go-go dancer in Austin might be too much for me. Another adventure on the horizon! I got a cab to the bus station, boarded it and headed off to Baton Rouge. A Mexican sat next to me and promptly fell asleep, using my lap as a pillow. It was pouring with rain and a miserable day that was brightened as we drove through the swamps along the I-10 and passed over what I thought was Lake Pontchartrain. A song ran through my head - “The Lakes of Pontchartrain.”

Christy Moore – “The Lakes of Pontchartrain” –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6o1Ey-Csy7M>

The bus arrived in New Orleans at 9.30 am and it was still raining. I took a cab to the St. Charles Guest House on Prytania St., and checked into a “back-packer’s cabin,” an outbuilding at the rear of the property. There was a swimming pool and trees loaded with bananas. Breakfast!!

After several attempts to leave my cabin I decided to brave the rain that was now bucketing down (like an English summer’s day!) and took a cab to the French Quarter to visit Sloppy Jim’s Bar. I had read about it my guidebook but soon discovered it had closed down. I wandered round in the rain, heading first to take a look at the Mississippi River only to find the fog was so thick I could not see it but guessed it was still there. I’ll come back, I thought. I continued strolling round in the rain....up Toulouse Street, along Bourbon, Rampart, Basin, the French Market, past Preservation Hall, and tumbled, like a drowned rat, into Lord V.J.’s Bar on Decatur Street. I had some Gumbo at Johnny’s Po-Boy Shop to warm me up and fill me up. I discovered O’Flaherty’s Irish Bar that would become one of my “locals.” I took the streetcar back to the Avenue Pub, which was round the corner from my B&B. I met Vic there, owner of Vic’s Kangaroo Café, an Australian Bar on Tchoupitoulas St.

The next morning, after breakfast, I went to find Vic’s and was greeted by an Australian barmaid, Louise, who asked me what part of Australia I was from! I explained that I was from East London and that the reason I spoke like her was because a lot of the convicts that were transported to Australia came from my hometown, hence the similarity in accent. From there I walked down to the River Walk and watched the Mississippi flow by as it was a beautiful day. Then I experienced what I described in my journal as a “barrel-organ” playing “My Old Kentucky Home” on the Cajun Queen. It was a calliope. Horrendous! I wandered round the Quarter, listening to the street musicians play blues and jazz. The songs of Leadbelly and Robert Johnson filled the air. I could like it here, I thought. I found another bar that is no longer around - the Rebel Arms on Decatur - that my journal entry describes as “a hang-out for reprobates, punks and ageing hippies.”

Later that evening I called the girl’s number I had been given in Mamou. We’ll call her Laura, to protect the innocent, who used to live on the Point! We went for a drink at Parasol’s, her local, and she introduced me to the locals. Some very interesting characters drank there. I was soon

to find out that EVERY bar in New Orleans had its share of characters! One lady I met there, Bonnie, told me a story about when her husband shot her. She said the bullet went through the side of her mouth, broke her jaw, came out, hit the kitchen cabinet, ricocheted past her head, and imbedded itself in the wall! I made an instant mental note....don't accept any dinner invitations from Bonnie. A gentleman staggered in next, drunk, shoeless, and wearing odd socks. He got a beer to go and left. Then in came another friend of Laura's, with a ferocious looking Doberman straining at the leash. She asked how he was and he said he had been mugged a few days ago while walking to the bar with his dog. He said the mugger held a gun to his head while petting the dog and took his wallet! Seems like a nice town, I thought!

Because of my love of Cajun music, Laura suggested we go to Tippitina's on Sunday afternoon, to the "Fais Do Do." Sounded like a plan to me and as it was now Wednesday, I could fit in lots of fun-packed activities. The following day was a beautiful sunny one and I donned my shorts and sunbathed by the pool, unheard of in England at the beginning of March. Lunching on bananas fresh from the tree and listening to the African American chambermaids chatting away in their New Orleans' accents, I lay there until I got sunburned then headed for the Avenue Pub. I ordered some take away as the barman suggested I should not eat the food made there. He was also the cook! I gather it has improved since.

The following evening I went to Tipitina's to see Buckwheat Zydeco. Although very good, I would later discover Beau Joque, who was much more exciting.

Beau Jocque – "Beau Jocque Boogie/Low Rider" –

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hy\\_gsd7jlnY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hy_gsd7jlnY)

However, the supporting band, Mem Shannon and the Memberships, was a great funky blues band, and still are! I spent the next couple of days sunbathing and wandering round the Quarter, looking forward to Sunday's Fais Do Do at Tip's.

Dr. John – "Tipitina's" - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4Ec9JnTZQ>



## PART 10

*Tipitina's, oh Tipitina's...*

Dr. John – “Tipitina’s” - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i4Ec9JnTZQ>

Spent Saturday morning breakfasting at the Avenue Pub then did some sunbathing, wrote letters and read my book. Sunday arrived and I called Laura to make arrangements to go to the Fais Do Do (or *Faze Doo Doo* as a friend called it when he first moved here from Chicago) at Tipitina's. Did some more sunbathing then walked to Laura's, had a couple of beers, then took a cab to Tip's. Bruce Daigrepoint's Cajun Band was playing and the gig started at 4pm. The dance floor was full, with dancers alternating between the waltz and two-step. When the band took a break I asked Bruce if I could join them on stage with my triangle. I was invited up, played a stunning set J, and was asked to come back the following Sunday to play, the day before I flew back to England.

The gig finished at 9pm and from there we hopped in a cab and I told the driver we wanted to go to the Lion's Den, Irma Thomas' club, on Gravier Street, for her 53<sup>rd</sup> birthday party. The driver looked at me and asked, “Do you know where you're going?” I said, “Yes, I just told you, the Lion's Den on Gravier Street.” He replied sternly, “No. Do you KNOW where you're going? That's a bad area and I'll drop you right at the door. Make sure someone orders you a cab to come home and stay in the club until it arrives! Don't wander away from there.” “Oh, oh!” I thought to myself, “What have I landed us into?” He did as he said, dropped us at the door and the music was busting out through the walls. As we entered, the place was packed, people were dancing and waving handkerchiefs in the air. There were very few white faces but we were made welcome and bellied up to the bar. From there we found a table with a girl from Switzerland and one from Austria - Daniella and Edith. There was free food - red beans and rice, and jambalaya - all made by Irma, we found out. We had just missed Barbara George performing and I was a little upset about that but soon got over it when the Dixie Cups got on stage. They were followed by Irma and the small, packed club went wild! Out came the handkerchiefs again and the place was a seething mass of dancers. I thought I had died and gone to Heaven! Free food, cheap beer, surrounded by lovely ladies and some of the best

music I had heard since I arrived! But, it all had to end. From there we took a cab to Molly's Bar on Decatur Street and then all went our separate ways.

I spent the following day working on my tan and visiting the Avenue Pub. I had made friends with the locals there - Annie, Dave and Vicky (the bar staff), another guy called Dave from Edinburgh, Scotland, Mike (Annie's husband), Dan, Dick, Dennis the alcoholic, "Sid Vicious" (who spent the whole day in the Pub watching old Western movies), and Mike - "The Evil One." A strange bunch but good company, although not the type to take home to meet your mother! Mike and Annie took me to the China Rose restaurant on Robert E. Lee Blvd. on the Wednesday night as half the place was a Chinese restaurant and the other an English pub. We had fish and chips and listened to English clarinetist Chris Burke play traditional jazz and tell jokes.

The following evening I went to the Avenue pub and met Vic, who owned Vic's Kangaroo Café, and his bouncer, "Mescal Mike," a formidable looking character! I hung out with them until midnight then faded and left. Their evening was just beginning! They were drinking Tuborg Elephant Beer, chased with Mescal! Seemed like a dangerous mix, and yes, Mother, I was sensible enough to steer clear of the Mescal as the Elephant Beer was strong enough. It was interesting to me, coming from England, to see people going out to drink at a time when the English pubs were closing and their patrons going home to bed. New Orleans really was a 24-hour a day drinking kind of town!!

The weather had changed drastically in the past couple of days and as I was sitting in the Avenue Pub on the Friday evening, a patron spotted snowflakes coming down. It had already been raining so I knew it would not settle but they panicked, transferred their drinks into go-cups, and fled as a man. There were comments like, "I can't drive in the snow," and "I don't want to get snowed in here." I discovered after they had all left that snow is quite rare in New Orleans, which would account for their state of panic.

The following morning I headed to Shoney's restaurant to partake in their "40 item breakfast." Being a vegetarian and not fond of junk food, I only managed eight items. Maybe I should have asked for a refund? From there I went to the Avenue Pub across the street, just to say hello, before heading to Parasol's and the Irish parade. Vic and "Mescal Mike" were in there, the worst for wear at 10am!!! Vic asked when I was leaving for England and invited me to his bar the following day for "free beer all day." Sounded like a plan! I met Laura outside Parasol's and was introduced to her friends, Maggie and Catherine. The streets were packed with revelers and it was impossible to get into Parasol's because of the crowds. I was introduced to something called a "Jello Shot," which I'm sure you are all familiar with. My journal entry described it as

“green colored jelly with vodka in it.” That about covers it! We watched the parade, caught more beads and cups than I really knew what to do with, plus a couple of cabbages and carrots. We headed to a great party in the afternoon where we were treated to such dishes as jambalaya, red beans and rice, and crawfish. The house had a great sound system, blasting out African and World music all afternoon. Ended up at the Avenue Pub for more jambalaya and said my goodbyes to the locals as I would leaving New Orleans in two days.

Sunday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1993 - So this was to be my last day in New Orleans. My journal entry for the previous day stated, “The New Orleans people can certainly party!!!” I got up, packed and headed for the Avenue Pub and coffee, and more goodbyes. I walked to Vic’s, drank my free beers and ate crawfish before taking a cab to Tipitina’s for my last session with Bruce Daigrepoint’s Cajun Band.

After the first set, I jumped down off the stage, bought a beer and three Canadian nurses engaged me in conversation for a few minutes before they were whisked off onto the dance floor. I turned round towards the bar and met Wendy, a Cajun lady from Houma, Louisiana. “Can you Cajun dance?” she inquired. “No,” I said, “I can waltz.” “Come on, I’ll teach you.” And we were off, swirling round the floor like whirling Dervishes, with me crushing her toes with my Doc Martin boots.

## **PART 11**

*Now is the hour, when we must say goodbye...*

Hank Snow – “Now Is The Hour” -

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFkRuNJbYDY>

After the “Fais Do Do” at Tipitina’s, Wendy asked me where I had been since arriving in New Orleans. It appeared I had not been to any of her “favorite” places so we hit the French Quarter and had a fun evening. We ate at Hooter’s then went to listen to Patrick O’Flaherty at O’Flaherty’s Irish Pub. We then went for a stroll along the Moonwalk. She dropped me off at my hotel about 2am as I had to get up at 5am to make my way to the airport. She gave me her address and I said I would write and send copies of the photos she took for me. She said she lived in Algiers on the “West Bank,” where the sun rises. The sun rises in the west here? I rose at 5am, and having had too much fun and been “overserved” the previous evening, knew I could not face flying. I called the airline. Yes, I could change my flight for a \$50 fee. I delayed the flight for two weeks thinking if Wendy did not want to see me again, I could still have fun in New Orleans. I called her at 7am, explained what I had done, and asked her if she was married and if she wanted to go out with me for dinner that evening. She seemed both surprised and pleased. She agreed but took me out, and we had Central American food at Taqueria Corona. I stayed another two weeks, cancelled my flight again, and finally left in May, the day my three-month tourist visa ran out!

*We are family, I got all dem Cajuns with me, cher...*

Meeting the family: In April, Wendy’s family rented a house on Dauphin Island, Alabama, and we went down to spend a couple of days with them. I met Wendy’s Mum, her two sisters, Joann and Dana, two nieces, Alexis and Britney, and a nephew, Vic. The kids all called me “Mr. Kevin,” which I thought was very cute. Lexi asked me if I came “from a rich family.” I had long hair and when Wendy’s sister Joann saw me she said, “Oh, my God, what’s Daddy going to say?” But Daddy and I got along just fine. Over dinner, and having very little knowledge of England, Joann asked me if we celebrated Christmas in England. And they could not get their heads around me being a vegetarian, but we had plenty of seafood.

Later, we went to meet her Cajun Grandma, who lived in Napoleonville. We were invited for

lunch and Wendy had warned her I was a vegetarian and Grandma cooked vegetable soup. Halfway through my bowl I fished out something on my spoon and asked Wendy what it was.

“Grandma, what’s that on Kevin’s spoon?”

“Mai, cher, dat’s a piece o’deer meat.”

“But he’s a vegetarian.”

“Well, tell him to leave it on da side o’his plate!”

I had been totally missed in this conversation, as though I was not there, but left it on the side of my plate as I was told.

After lunch we sat on rocking chairs on Grandma’s screened-in porch. Not much happens in Napoleonville and Grandma lived in the dead center of town, across the street from the funeral parlor so she knew exactly who was dying. Remembering the lunch discussion, she asked me, “Do you eat deer meat in England?”

“Not really,” I replied.

“Do you eat crawfish in England?”

“No.”

“Do you eat redfish in England?”

“No.”

“Do you eat gumbo in England?”

“No.”

“Do you eat jambalaya in England?”

Almost apologetically, I replied, “No,” again.

“Do you eat etouffee in England?”

“No.”

Finally she had enough of this conversation and asked, “Well, what the Hell DO you eat there?”

She also asked me if we spoke French in England.

I have summarized the next 11 months here. I eventually flew back home in May and Wendy came to England to meet my family in the summer and that was much more of a culture shock for her than it was for me meeting the Cajuns. She could not understand anything my family was saying, especially my nieces. I had proposed over the phone to her in June but she wanted me to do it properly in England so we went down to Lands End in Cornwall, I sat her on a bench, knelt down on my knee and proposed. Luckily she had not changed her mind!

Over the next year we flew back and forth across the Atlantic to see each other (all documented in my journal). I took her to the Cambridge Folk Festival and she taught everyone in the Guinness Tent that was interested, how to Cajun dance, both male and female. I came back to New Orleans for another three on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 1993. Two nights before, my uncle Alex and I attended a show at the Grand Theater, Clapham, South London, called "Another Louisiana Saturday Night" that featured Cajun and Swamp Pop legends Johnnie Allan, D. L. Menard, Warren Storm, Tommy McLain, Jimmy Anderson, Harry Simoneaux, Eddie LeJeune and Belton Richard. Much Guinness, Pernod and curry was consumed that night and the following day was a day of goodbyes...and hangovers – I was leaving London and moving to New Orleans! I flew from Gatwick to Houston on the 20<sup>th</sup> and all the Cajun musicians I had seen Saturday night were all on my connecting flight from Houston to New Orleans! Mai, cher...I arrived in good company, yeah, and Wendy was at the airport waiting for me!

The following year, thanks to a "fiance's petition," I returned to Algiers on March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1994, and we got married on April 30<sup>th</sup>

, in Thibodaux. I arrived here as what was called a "permanent resident alien," and in 2002, became a citizen. One of the questions they asked at the Immigration Office was, "If called upon, would you be willing to bear arms for the United States?" Having never even held a gun in my life, I answered, "If you're desperate." Back came the curt reply, "Yes or no answer please, Mr. Herridge." "Yes." "Congratulations, you are now an American citizen!"

So here I am, English by birth, American by citizenship and "Who Dat" by Nation! Geaux Saints!!!

And finally...one of my favorite Cajun songs by my favorite Cajun singer, Erath, Louisiana's answer to Hank Williams - D. L. Menard. Thank you, D. L. for the hospitality you showed me, my wife and parents when we showed up on your doorstep back in 1994 and you invited us in for coffee -

D. L. Menard – "The Back Door" –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AazJUQIEqNM>

“Deep down in Louisiana close to New Orleans  
Way back in Algiers Point among the evergreens  
There stood a Bed & Breakfast made of cypress wood  
Where lived a London boy named Kevin B. Goode  
Who never ever learned to read or write so well  
But he could play the triangle just like a ringing a bell

Go, go. Go, Kevin, go.  
Go. Go Kevin go.  
Go. Go Kevin go.  
Go. Go Kevin go.  
Go. Kevin B. Goode.”

(Apologies to Chuck Berry)

Chuck Berry – “Johnny B, Goode” –

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8JULmUIGDA>

Kevin Herridge (2013 copyright)

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**Suggested reading:**

There are many excellent books on Louisiana and its music (too many to list here) but here a few of my favorites:

**Music & Travel Books:**

“Cajun Country Guide,” Macon Fry & Julie Posner, Pelican Books

“Walking To New Orleans: The Story of New Orleans Rhythm & Blues,” by John Broven, Flyright Books

“South To Louisiana: The Music of the Cajun Bayous,” by John Broven, Pelican Books

“Cajun Music: A Reflection of a People, Vol.1,” by Ann Allen Savoy, Bluebird Books

“The Makers of Cajun Music,” by Barry Jean Ancelet, Texas Books

“Memories - Vol.1&2 combined): South Louisiana & East Texas Musicians; A Pictorial History of South Louisiana Music, 1910s-1990s,” by Johnnie Allan, Jadfel Books

“I Hear You Knocking: The Sound of New Orleans Rhythm & Blues,” by Jeff Hannusch, Swallow Books

“The Soul of New Orleans: A Legacy of Rhythm and Blues,” by Jeff Hannusch, Swallow Publications

“Blue Monday: Fats Domino and the Lost Dawn of Rock ‘N’ Roll,” by Rick Coleman, Da Capo Press

“The Blues Highway: New Orleans to Chicago: A Travel & Music Guide,” by Richard Knight, Trailblazer Books

### **The Cajuns:**

“A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from their American Homeland,” by John Mack Faragher, Norton Books

“The Founding of New Acadia: The Beginnings of Acadian Life in Louisiana, 1765-1803,” by Carl A. Brasseaux, LSU Books

### **Music:**

Suggested Louisiana music to listen to...**listen to it all!**