

# Tales from The Big Easy

## Child's Play in Crescent City

I'LL NEVER FORGET 1951, the wonderful year during which I lived with my family in New Orleans' French Quarter.

Mother taught music at St. Xavier University, and my father was in the loan business. I used to play in Jackson Square Park as well as on Bourbon Street.

There was a man with no legs who rode around in a small metal cart on wheels. He and I used to race up and down Bourbon Street.

One Saturday, Mother came looking for me and was horrified to see me racing this poor man.

She started to scold me, but the man asked her not to, saying this was the most fun he'd had since he lost his legs in the war.

—Wilhelmina Briggs, Phoenix, Arizona

## Joy Swept Through the City

THAT LATE-AUGUST DAY in 1944 was the last day of a shopping trip my girlfriend and I made to New Orleans from Selma, Alabama before I started college.

The city came alive when news of the liberation of Paris came over the news wires.

New Orleans reacted with people running, shouting, crying and hugging; confetti was falling on us. The whole downtown area was

alive with joy.

Soon we saw French sailors climbing on top of the metal awning that sheltered the entrance to the Maison Blanche, a leading department store. They were raising French flags!

All this excitement was more than we could stand. We went into a nearby church to recover, thanking the Lord for this giant step forward in World War II.

—Mary Jane Teague, Opelika, Alabama

### **House Near Bridge Was a Little Fishy**

IN 1944, my father, William Robert Henry, was an Army captain stationed at Camp Plauche, located under the western end of the Huey Long Bridge near New Orleans.

We lived in a small, but very special, house on St. Roch Street, off Gentilly Boulevard. It had a fireplace, but the people who had lived there previously had enclosed the fireplace with glass, both inside, facing the living room, and on the outside with a removable panel. The fireplace was used as an aquarium!

When we moved in and saw it, of course, we had to get some fish. To feed them, we went outside, removed the panel and dropped the fish food in the tank.

We lived there from February to December of 1944, the only year that no Mardi Gras was held.

I've been back only once, in 2004, at an Elderhostel, and we were all put in a room in a hotel and told we could not leave until we could pronounce the name of the city correctly—Noo Awlins!

—Marilyn Tomlinson, Jacksonville, Florida

### **No Room at the Inns**

I MARRIED my new first-lieutenant Marine pilot on January 19, 1944, in Corpus Christi, Texas, and we traveled by train to New Orleans the next day.

When we arrived, there were no rooms available at any hotel. Cots were all over the lobby of the Fairmont Hotel.

Our cab driver knew of a French Quarter hotel that was to open the next day. He drove us there and prevailed on the owner to give a pre-opening room to newlyweds and desperate young people—I was 19 and my husband was 20.

The room had linoleum on the floors and the bathroom was down the hall, but to us, it seemed like The Waldorf=Astoria.

The cabbie received a \$20 tip that my husband gladly gave him. It was a memorable first night in the French Quarter.

—Betty James, Chesterfield, Missouri

### **Six Hours of Memories Have Lasted a Lifetime**

JUST SAYING the words “New Orleans” brings back so many memories—a train ride, a Soviet soldier, a stop in the city and me.

I was traveling from St. Louis to West Palm Beach, Florida in 1951 to see my husband off before he was shipped overseas. I also was in the service as a Wac.

Before arriving in New Orleans, I met another soldier, one wearing a Soviet army uniform and who spoke very little English. I spoke no Russian, but we found a near-common ground—Czech, which I could speak a little and he could understand a little.

His name was Walter, and he was in the U.S. attending a military school of some sort. We both had 6-hour layovers in New Orleans before he went to New York and I went to Florida.

We decided to pal up and see the sights, since neither of us had ever been to New Orleans before. We did more sightseeing in those 6 hours than most people do in a week.

We went everywhere, walking the streets, and even visited one “watering hole” where we left our mess passes tacked on a wall where service personnel had left mementos for many years.

People did a double take when they saw a Soviet soldier walk in somewhere with an American female soldier. Neither of us paid for a drink, which was good because we didn’t have much money.

After the 6 hours were up, Walter walked me to the train station and gave me a good-bye kiss on the cheek. That was the end of a fabulous day in a fabulous town that I have never forgotten.

—Dolly Jarousek Santos, Long Beach, California

## **Pond Was Too Enticing**

A BRICK COURTYARD in the French Quarter in the 1930s is an early memory of mine. My family had come to see my aunt, who lived in New Orleans, and she took her 6-year-old son, my mother, my 3-year-old brother and me sightseeing.

The beautiful courtyard had a fountain in the center with goldfish swimming in it. When Mother and my aunt went inside an antiques shop, my brother, cousin and I looked at the goldfish.

My little brother sat contentedly on the edge of the walled pond, then began gently splashing his hand in the water.

About that time, a woman came running from a doorway, jabbering in a language I could not understand. But her gestures were clear; she wanted my brother's hand out of the pond.

I tried to stop him, but he paid no attention. The woman became more agitated and I became very embarrassed as my brother continued to glide his fingers through the water.

My mother and aunt heard the commotion, took my brother away from the pond and towed us to the French Market, where I enjoyed chicory-laced coffee diluted with plenty of milk.

—Anne Sowell, Hendersonville, Tennessee

## **She Was a Big Easy Animal**

JUST LIKE my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, I

was raised in the uptown section of New Orleans. Our house was 2 blocks from the Mississippi River and five blocks from Audubon Park.

I often took my younger sister and several other kids from the block to the park.

In 1938, a new zoo was being built. What fun we had walking into the almost-finished cages! Later, we told people we had been in the bears' or lions' cage.

—Dora Watson, Glasgow, Virginia

### **So Many Stars, So Little Time**

IN MAY 1966, my new husband and I were spending our honeymoon in New Orleans. While sightseeing, we happened across “Lassie,” the famous movie and TV collie, filming a television episode.

Lassie's trainer was very friendly, and we had a nice visit and took pictures of this beautiful dog.

As we continued our walk, we ran into a group of excited people and were told that Rod Taylor, a popular movie actor, was making a film and would be coming out to sign autographs.

We were very excited and said, “Wow, first we see Lassie and now we get to see Rod Taylor!”

A lovely older woman turned to us and excitedly asked where we saw Lassie.

When we told her, she hurried off, saying, “I can see Rod Taylor anytime, but I’ll never get another chance to see Lassie!”

We still chuckle over that dear old lady who preferred to see a dog instead of a very handsome movie star.

—Bette Van, White Cloud, Michigan

### **They Saw the Sights**

WHEN KENNY AND I were married, in December 1951 in Rockford, Illinois, we set out for St. Augustine, Florida for our honeymoon.

Weather conditions changed, and we ended up in New Orleans instead. We arrived mid-afternoon and found a motel on the outskirts of town.

We got lost seeing the city and put about 100 miles on the car trying to find our way back to the motel.

After that, we decided to take three Checker tours—the French Quarter in the morning, modern New Orleans in the afternoon and the nightlife tour.

What a glorious time it was. We saw nightclubs and casinos and other places we would not have seen otherwise.

—Beverly Farr, Roscoe, Illinois

### **Intrigue Filled Their Trip**

MY OLDER SISTER, Bobby Randall Kania, and her friend Dottie Wolf Shriver had planned a train trip in 1940 and invited me along

at the last moment.

We had a great time and met all kinds of interesting people. On the train, Bobby struck up a conversation with the conductor. When he learned her last name was German, he said his name was German too and introduced her to the honorary German consul from Mobile, Alabama.

When they found out our first train stop was New Orleans, they directed us to a good German restaurant, Kolb's, and insisted we visit the residence of the New Orleans German consul.

A beautiful girl greeted us there as we stood with mouths open. Behind her desk was an enormous picture of Hitler! We cut our visit short.

Another person on the train was a professor from Japan. When we returned home from our trip, we started getting a propaganda publication that our parents quickly stopped.

We always wondered how many of our new acquaintances were spies.

—Miriam Randall Cronin, Windsor, Colorado