A love affair with Acadiana that has endured the years

By Jack M. Preffitt

My love affair with Acadiana began many years ago and it has been a lasting one. It was definitely not love at first sight and not without pain and rejection to temper the ecstasy. It has been more like a marriage of convenience where love grows slowly — and surprisingly — as one becomes fully aware of the clearly defined values of one's partner, the deeper lies which are within, of an unsuspected gentleness.

I awoke very early one morning in 1947 after an all-night train ride to find myself in Donaldsonville, La. A country boy from Iowa, fresh out of the Navy, I was beginning a career as an oil explorationist.

I stumbled out of the small railroad station into the damp pre-dawn of an early spring morning and into the Fertile and Last Chance Cafes seeking a cup of hot coffee to stimulate a mind and body numbed by many hours of travel. And with its delivery, the cultural shock began.

The last cafe accented a steaming black brew which enveloped me in an amber haze. It was nothing like the tea I was used to, and I was unaccustomed to it. I took a deep breath and asked for a second cup. The barista poured it into a black cup and handed it to me.

Meanwhile, the counter, unshaven, and with a definite smell about him, seemed to imply that he would take it very seriously. I complained about his coffee. After a few quick sips, which convinced me that I could never finish the cup, I dropped a dime on the counter and quickly left the place. Too much for my introduction to Louisiana coffee, to which I later became addicted.

I arrived during the Season of Lent, which like other unenlightened pre-Vatican II days saw a small half-shirt penance in which all enjoyable indulgences were put aside for six weeks while the whole community enjoyed the latter part of the Easter season. I fought strongly that this was not for me.

When Lent ended, as it did in those days, it was on Saturday before Easter. I was totally unprepared when all hell broke loose. That was my introduction to the fun-loving, dancing, drinking, and truly dirty Cajun Cajuns.

If immediate post-World War II period we were not the first outsiders to come to Louisiana in search of oil but were still few enough to be a highly visible minority.

By 1947, the Mamas and Papas were assaulted, they embraced us and finally accepted us fully into a loving family. For me and for many others who came here as outsiders, the love of a girl and the love of her family became intertwined with a growing love of a people and a Parish, just a short ride from St. Mary and Grand Coteau.

Cajun dancing — a tradition that keeps on growing with increasing popularity.

Our Cajun dancers included a large colony of squirrels and a variety of birds whose population fluctuates with the seasons. A Great Blue Heron winters near our pond. We awoke on frosty mornings to see him standing majestically in the shallows at the edge of the pond, an eye cocked for an unwary fish that will be his breakfast.

Monarch butterflies in the depth of the pond and occasionally a muskrat with a heavily decorated coat. A heavy, beautiful garden that springs from the rich soil with little human help.

The dream was realized when we finally decided to abandon all other pursuits and return to Acadiana, hopefully to live out the rest of our lives here. We built our house among lowing oxen and pecans, facing a little pond at the foot of the slope. The dam which forms the pond is our bridge to the world.

Our oak and pecan support a large colony of squirrels and a variety of birds. The population of deer fluctuates with the seasons. A Great Blue Heron winters near our pond. We awoke on frosty mornings to see him standing majestically in the shallows at the edge of the pond, an eye cocked for an unwary fish that will be his breakfast.

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