Catahoula Carnival history recalled

By Tootie Marie Guirard

Our Catahoula Lake Mardi Gras Celebration has been going on for the last 28 years. It started about the time that Royal Crown Cola was put on the market. This I remember because at that time Papa and Mama and I were in New Orleans where Papa was undergoing a minor operation. Papa was in no danger and time hung heavy on my hands and so I dreamed up our first Catahoula Mardi Gras.

Papa and Mama became enthusiastic listeners and advisers and one day I came back from a shopping spree on Canal Street with a big package of “shining things.” I was going to make our first king’s crown. I copied it from a Royal Crown Cola picture. From the very first our costumes, props, music, etc. were done as inexpensively as possible. Having fun preparing and acting were the important things. We borrowed, begged, cut up and made do and always had a most enjoyable time preparing and acting out our skits.

At the time that Papa was in the hospital (where our celebration had its beginning) there was a Doctor Vidrene who was about Ignace Doucet’s size, and so he served as my model while I fitted that paper crown on his head over and over. Also, I made a sort of gold paper shield to go with the crown. A friend of ours made costumes for the big New Orleans balls and she furnished left over jewels ... or cast away jewels and bits of bright silks which were used for decorating our “costumes”.

Mermaid’s Tail

The Rogans lived on St. John Plantation and Muriel had once been a mermaid in a Mardi Gras Ball in New Orleans. We removed the tail of the mermaid from Muriel’s costume and Ignace Doucet stretched it across his chest over the vest of Papa’s tux which Ignace had borrowed. The tux was too tight across the stomach and too big across the chest but all eyes were on his beautiful decorations (Muriel’s tail) which he wore across his front, sort of draped-like.

The following year Ignace was QUEEN of the Mardi Gras and Lloyd Higginbotham was the King! Lloyd was also, at some time or other, our queen. At least I think so but I do know that for sure but we can boast of having had some of the world’s toughest looking queens! When Ignace consented to be our queen he said “ALRIGHT but me, I want to be ‘une belle blonde’!” and he ordered for himself a long-haired blond wig full of long golden curls and he wore a short dress to show his beautiful legs. His dress was made of stiff, cheap, white satin!

Percy Bourque knew I was going to write this article and he reminded me that he had been King Pierre Dubois twice and Queen Marie once! Wilson Savoy also served as both king and queen. You can readily understand what fun it has been to be part of the Catahoula “court!”

Someone hearing us laugh as we recalled our “Climb To Fame” asked how we chose who was going to be king and who was going to be queen and who plotted the whole thing. Who plotted it? No particular person! I think we just did what came naturally. Everybody...

Borrowed Costumes

One year, sort of at the beginning, we borrowed Charles August Fuselier’s king suit! It was white satin trimmed with gold and was very beautiful. Charles had been (at age 10) king of the Children’s Carnival in St. Martinville. Charles was a husky 10-year-old and Wilson Savoy was a small man. The suit was a perfect fit. We used a succession of small kings and finally ran out.

Next we borrowed Mim Bernard’s suit. He was a Rotary King and loaned us his beautiful white satin suit. Sis took it down from their attic every year and finally she said for us to simple keep it and WE could have the fun of hauling it up and down stairs every Mardi Gras. Finally we ran out of kings in Mim’s size and so we operated on Mim’s suit. The pants still fit almost everyone and the coat has been given a widening strip up its back and every few years we add some more sparkles or some gold braid. We are about to run out of medium sized men and are hoping that some BIG GUY from a Rotary Ball will donate us his suit.

Crown Jewels

Our crown jewels are very precious to us. The King’s crown is still R. C. Cola style and the Queen’s crown for the last 20 years is simply a collection of diamond pins and earrings hooked together on a sort of wire halo. It sparkles for sure and is not so comfortable to the one wearing it.

In other words the queen does not forget that she is queen when she is wearing such a forceful reminder. However, I do think that since a year or two we have someone’s cast off tiara!

The king’s scepter is a huge double decker drip coffee pot. It is gilted up and bejeweled and sparkles as the king waves it in the air as he walks down the aisle in the procession. The queen’s scepter is an enormous cook spoon. It is all silvered up and down the handle and the cup of the spoon is filled with sparkling diamonds.

Dear Father Dion! He was with us long enough to understand and to appreciate our efforts and enjoyed everything as much as we did. And it was Father Frank who taught us how to use a loud speaker and lights and certain musical tricks. This year we are making a special effort to have them with us again.

Everyone is practicing his or her part of whatever part they will participate in and when the big night arrives we will be ready to give a great performance. One thing is sure ... we who are a part of the show will be having the best time of all.

You are invited to come and share this fun with us.