The Best Of 'Sweet Lips' Now Between Covers

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Sweet Lips is now between covers. If not all of him, then certainly the best of him. The funniest "macqueries" (monkeyshines) of the irrepressible "Bee Doux et Ses Amis!" (Sweet Lips and his Friends), the syndicated Cajun comic strip by Ken Meaux and Earl Comeaux have recently been published in a paperback book, "The Best of Bee Doux: World's Only Cajun Comic Strip." It is available in New Orleans at Best of Books, 400 St. Charles Ave., and at similar bookstores everywhere.

The book contains over 80 strips of Bee Doux's adventures with his friends. Selections of the cartoons were supervised by Bob Hamm, former editor and radio and TV commentator, and well-known writer on Cajun lore, including "What Is A Cajun?" which describes many a wall plaque in Acadiana homes and offices. The recent "Bob Hamm's Cajun Nursery Rhymes," and other works.

The anthology of sly goings-on in bayouland is published by Blue Elf Publishing Co., a Baton Rouge firm whose president is Marilyn Moore, the former Marilyn "Boo" Domingue, of Lafayette.

WHIMSICAL AND AUTHENTIC

Comeaux and Meaux began the comic strip, whimsical and authentic, in the Kaplan Herald over 10 years ago. Comeaux, then a school teacher, and Meaux, a photographer, were met with skepticism when they broached the idea of a comic strip to the Herald's publisher, Conrad Kaplan. After explaining to Kaplan that what they had in mind was a Cajun cartoon strip, something never tried before, they were given the go-ahead and volla! "Bee Doux" was born.

Today it runs in four Acadiana newspapers, including the Advertiser's Sunday editions.

Comeaux is now a supervisor of the Vermilion Parish School Board. He writes the dialogue for the strip. Meaux, who runs his photography studio and draws the cartoons and also doubles as an amateur magician and ventriloquist. As friends the two go way back as life-long neighbors. Also, Comeaux taught Meaux French at Kaplan High School.

In the book's foreword Comeaux points out that the reader may find Bee Doux somewhat "schizophrenic," alternating from Cajun French to standard French. But there's a reason for the bilingual ambivalence. When Bee Doux began his Cajun-style shenanigans in the newspaper, there was no model to follow in producing a bilingual cartoon strip.

TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

Problems existed with translations of Cajun French and the use of colloquialisms, regional variations and archaic expressions.

"The Cajun French language is somewhat deficient in being able to express itself in modern times. I'd say the overall vocabulary for Cajun French is around a thousand words. It's really 18th and 19th century French that was kept alive by an uneducated people." Comeaux explains. "Still, Cajun French, as any language, has its own rules about grammar and I try to apply those rules."

He also states, "But I did try to make Bee Doux look like what most people think a Cajun looks like." He explains, "And quite a few Cajuns men are small, wiry and scrappy."

Comeaux, who grew up in Kaplan, feels that Cajuns have been laughed at and put down enough. He would have preferred that the strip's star be drawn in a style more akin to "Prince Valiant." "But," he adds, "Ken feels that the character is all right as long as the strip conveys the right idea.

Meaux, on the other hand, says he had in mind a funny character, a "swamp Cajun." "A lot of the words are in rich Cajun idiom, with English translations at the bottom of the cartoons.

One of the first strips published depicts Zirable, in the classroom learning how to count in English. It goes like this:

School marm: (old and crabby looking) Zirable! Count for me in English!
Zirable: (flustered) Er. Er. Er. Er.
School marm: (shouting) Say two!
Zirable: (Putting on his hat and getting up to leave) Mais si c'est tout. J'm'en va.

(From the strip, says they have watched Bee Doux go through many changes since he was created over 10 years ago.

SETTING NOT RESTRICTED

Setting the strip in the past or the present was another consideration to be met. Bee Doux has not been restricted to one mise en scene. One day he might live in a modern house and the next he might be a marsh Cajun living in a hut in the swamps.

"The Best of Bee Doux: World's Only Cajun Comic Strip" is available by mail from Ken Meaux, P.O. Box 138, Kaplan, La. Cost of the book is $9.95 plus $1 for postage. The book is also available in New Orleans at Dallant's and in Baton Rouge at Clairet Printing and Bookstore.