WHAT IS A CAJUN?

By: Bob Hamm

According to the history books, a Cajun is a descendant of a hardy group of Nova Scotian exiles who settled over 200 years ago along the bayous and marshes of south Louisiana. The name Cajun (they tell us) is a contraction of “Acadian.” As much for the textbooks!

Little Cajun children are made of gumbo, bouillabaisse, and sauce piquante . . . crawfish stew and orelles de cochon. A Cajun child is given bravery to plow in, marshes to trap in, room to grow in, and churches to worship in. (In other parts of the world, little girls are made of sugar and spice and everything nice; while little boys are made of snips and snails and puppydog tails.)

A Cajun likes fiddles and accordions in his music, plenty of pepper in his crawfish boil, shrimp in his nets, speed in his horses, neighborliness in his neighbors and love in his home. He dislikes people who don’t laugh enough, fish enough, or getaway enough of all the good things God has given to the Cajun country. Also, he dislikes being hurried when he is working and distracted when he’s working; seeing people unhappy; and he’d do all he can to give all he has to bring a smile to a face stricken with sadness.

A Cajun likes to dance and laugh and sing when his week of hard work has ended. And just as Saturday night at the fais-do-do represents his store of energy, Sunday at church reinforces his spiritual and moral values and keeps strong his always sustaining faith.

A Cajun is a link with a great past. He is a glorious remnant. He is a man of tolerance who will let the world go its way if the world will let him go its way. He is a man of great friendliness who will give you the crawfish off his table, the sea cock off his back, or the shirt off his back.

A Cajun is a complex person, with as many ingredients in his makeup as the gumbo Mama makes. He has a tolerance for those who earn it, charity for those who need it, a smile for those who will return it, and love for all who will share it.

If a Cajun likes you, he’ll give you this whole wide, wonderful world; and if he doesn’t, he’ll give you a wide smile. When you cross a Cajun he gives you the back of his hand and the toe of his boot, for he has been stubborn as a mule and ornery as an alligator. If he sets his head on something, he’ll take it to the navel before he’ll yield to your opinions — you’d as well argue with a fence post as try to convince a Cajun.

And, as fun-loving as he is, a Cajun can work as hard as and as long as any living man. He carved out “Acadiana” by hand, from the swamp and marshes and uncultivated prairies. But when the work is done and argument is ended, a Cajun can sweep you right into a wonderful world of joie de vivre with an accordion chorus of “Je Ne Crie” and a handful of happy little words . . . five little words to be exact: “Laissez le bon temps rouler.” Translated: “Let the good times roll!”