

Survivor's Notebook

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A WEEKEND IN THE OLD NEW ORLEANS

IT WAS A WEEK after Mardi Gras. My four year enlistment in the Navy was almost over and it seemed like a good time to do something special with our good friends, Dick and Trudy Lippard as a sort of last fling before we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways; a sad but common part of military life for many. We decided to go to New Orleans for the weekend.

Pensacola in those days of 1955 was a sleepy town where the hustle and bustle of a large military complex seemed to have little effect on the peace and serenity of the city itself. The small park adjacent to Palafox Street near the old pier was one of my favorite places to sit on a bench in the shade and watch the world go by. New Orleans was a mystery—none of us had been there before.

Well before dawn on Saturday morning, we piled into Dick's new Ford sedan and headed west on US 90. It was almost noon when we parked just off Canal Street and found a place to have lunch. A few trappings from Mardi Gras still adorned the street lights, but the street had been swept clean of litter. We ate, then went in search of a policeman for his suggestion as to the best way to see the city in our limited time there.

As luck would have it, we picked a policeman whose brother owned a cab—and would gladly be our guide on a tour for the afternoon. His fee was less than the cost of a regular guided tour, so we hired him and off we went. He took us to Jackson Square where we began a tour of the French Quarter, and it was quickly obvious that this cabbie was an expert tour guide. We saw all those historical places around the park, then we covered Bourbon Street and visited a few of

the well known bars in the area. Our afternoon was non-stop tourism, but we enjoyed it and our guide had advice to offer should we decide to dine at certain famous restaurants or take a ride on the river. By six o'clock we were ready to find a motel and take a break before dinner.

We selected a small motel in the Gentilly area and took a much needed nap. By eight o'clock we were having steaks and planning our evening. The women wanted to do a little shopping, of course, so we opted to avoid any late activity and then wound up in a theater on Canal Street to see "The Racers." I saw the first ten minutes and was awakened by the lights as the movie ended. We headed back to our motel, stopping at a few stores on the way. I remember the traffic and that I was appalled by the speed—these cars were whizzing by at 40mph!

We slept late the following morning, then had a leisurely breakfast and voted to head back to Pensacola—we were all still tired from the intensity of our Saturday afternoon. In less than a month, my wife and I said farewell to Pensacola and to our good friends, who promised to visit us in Americus, GA on their way home to Michigan two months later. Fifty years passed before I saw New Orleans again. I drove through the city on Interstate Highway 10 traveling from the AAPA convention in AZ to my home in Orlando. It is difficult for me to imagine the water that covered so much of that city after the hurricanes of this year—and so much of the Gulf coast as well.

I doubt that the New Orleans of my 1955 trip will ever exist again—and certainly not as it was then. The city will revive, of course, but it will be changed. It remains to be seen whether a place of such dusty history can reclaim the unique spot that it once held. Whatever its future, I am glad to have seen so much of it in a time when life was less complicated—and when a speed limit of 40mph appalled me.

