

A PLACE WHERE TIME STANDS STILL... SOUTH LOUISIANA

JANUARY 11, 2020



Naked branches draped in Spanish Moss gently swayed above the placid bayou as the cypress knees seemed to extend in devout prayer. The tranquility and presence of

nature's harmony is unmistakable. The birds feign to hide their appearance, but operatic in raising their voices in a choir of prevailing exquisiteness and grace. It is as though they sing with pride, thanking God for providing them with such a serene home.

Life here is slow. A dad prepares his boat to go fishing with his two daughters. He's in no rush. The fish will bite if they



will bite. Does time really matter? He patiently waits for one of the girls' grandmothers to bring her birthday gift. They are both excited, although the younger of the two seems to impishly tease her dad because she is ready to go fishing. He smiles, answers her with a soothing tenderness, never conceiving that "haste" might exist—at least not in his vocabulary, not in his world.

I had never been here. It is a

bayou... a swamp... marsh. These are terms my husband used for years in conjunction with beautiful, peaceful, gorgeous, and many other complimentary adjectives. He spoke of missing the bayou, the swamps, the marsh... missing his South Louisiana. In my own ignorance, the connotation of beauty and a swamp never seemed to find congruence. I'd seen swamps in movies and fell victim to the stereotype. They

were usually marshy, found as the setting of a horror movie where someone was undeniably to be brutally murdered by an unhinged, backward local adorned in a neglected beard, waiting to use his chainsaw on outsiders. There were killer alligators, or was it crocodiles? Perhaps, if I ventured into my more fictitious perceptions, I might even find a hidden voodoo queen or possibly even a zombie. That was my simplistic, callow and uneducated view of “the swamp” and any other synonym or likeness to the word.

I married a Cajun. By definition, a Cajun is, “a member of any of the largely self-contained communities in the bayou areas of southern Louisiana formed by descendants of French Canadians, speaking an archaic form of French.” Our 13-year anniversary is days away and I am ashamed to say, I didn’t discover the beauty of the bayou until this winter.





As we drove from his home town, he wanted to show me a little more of his native region. I'd seen his school, the houses he had lived in, the park he played at, but how is it I never saw this part of his home, this part of him? Perhaps he wasn't ready to share it with me until now. Or perhaps it was that once we were married, we jumped on the Autobahn of

Life and had three baby girls in quick order. Either way, I never really asked and he never really showed me, until now. I quickly found out why... This place is not to be shared with just anyone. You must be worthy to see it, open and willing to see with not only your eyes, but also with your heart, with your soul and through the historic eyes of those who came before us—especially family.

As we drove down narrow roads, not passing a single car, I came to realize quickly why he still drives like he is the only car on the road. Here, literally no one else is on the road! On a curve ahead of us stood two towering pine trees. He stopped the truck on the dirt road and dust briefly clouded the view

from my passenger window. *“Do you see the one on the right,”* he asked me of the two trees. Its appearance was similar to the one next to it, but its crest was misshapen, bushier. The branches were asymmetrical. Not truly noticeable unless your gaze chose to devote some time and analysis. *“That’s the tree my dad climbed one year when he decided to cut down a Christmas tree for us. He cut the top of it off.”* The story I had heard many years earlier was now painted alive with scenery that gave it an additional perspective. I was seeing a new dimension of my husband; I sensed he was ready to share with me something very special.



My eyes were not prepared for the romance, serenity and



implicit charm of this mesmerizing place. We had arrived at a portion of an exquisite, stunning park that nearly required its visitors to respectfully grant a moment of silence for its artistic finesse. I am not sure if there was room enough for 10 cars to park in this section of the park. It seemed the boat ramp was its most crucial asset. However, the wooden bridge that stretched itself across the bayou demanded intense and immediate recognition. This poetic bridge crowned the bayou

with its majesty and allure. It had been around since the 1800s although it had to be repaired when it became too creaky and unsafe. My husband remembers that each step would produce its own unique creak. That was what made it special. He remembers the time he went fishing with his dad and started to get bit by wasps... His father took the whole nest off from underneath the bridge and smashed it with his hand. That was what made it special. His memories relinquished to years gone by, coupled with memories of every other person who was fortunate enough to discover this place... That is what makes it special. Seeing this area is one thing, but breathing it, allowing it to enter your soul is what



makes you a part of it, as much as it, subsequently, becomes a part of you and your memories.

The bridge distends itself over the reflective, smooth water beneath it. Surrounding it

are tall, bottom-heavy cypress trees whose “knees” appear to cluster together, as if enjoying a social Sunday afternoon



gathering. Spanish moss adorns the branches—some with ample, burdensome thickness, while others with playful, flirtatious lightness. The moss lingers, drapes and decorates the trees; it dangles above the mirrored water as a reminder that it is the true ruler of the picture before you. It teases, flirts with the water promising to never penetrate its peaceful surface.



The cypress knees appear to covertly extend a small glimpse into the history of the trees they represent. Each telling a different story of age, wisdom and a portrayal of God's majesty. While a few

hypotheses exist as to what purpose the “knees” serve, the incredible, distinctive structures that grow vertically from the roots leave a breathtaking visual impression. Whatever their purpose, should Monet ever have visited this place, he would have been immersed in a lifetime of inspiration.



This was only a glimpse into the beauty of what is South Louisiana. The magnificence of this region of our country is often marred by stereotypical representations. But as with many stereotypes, all it takes is to make a small effort to unearth, peel back the formulaic façade and allow your heart to do the exploring. My trip allowed for self-reflection and education; it allowed me to see another side of my husband because I knew the waters here ran deep in his veins. Just as the

cypress roots showed only the tips of themselves but stood as



a minute depiction of the history of the trees they represented, so too has my husband’s family heritage. His ancestors settled here many years ago. What I



was allowed to see gave them life and provided them with generations of family that now continues with my three daughters. One day, I hope my girls will

have their tale to tell—a tale about the serene bridge over the bayou, about the proud, industrious Cajun ancestors whose DNA runs through not only their bodies, but their souls as well, about nature, heritage and history that unifies us more than it will ever separate us....

As we prepare to leave, the dad is still waiting. The girls are still cheerful—the younger one still impatient. The water continues to stand still as the bridge yawns across its sublime, undisturbed waters. The birds still sing. And time stands still.

