



Killer Rubboard

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ISSUE 6: Rejoice When You Die

EDITOR'S NOTE: The infectious drum beat and sassy blare of a trombone signals that a brass band is heading down the street. In New Orleans, there is a unique tradition called the jazz funeral, melded from the drum circle of the African slaves in Congo Square and the marching military bands of Spanish and the French. "You cry when you are born, so rejoice when you die!" an old New Orleans phrase goes. This week's literary selection explores that tradition in a post-Katrina age. And if you are hungry and having a bad hair day, we have just the restaurant for you. Enjoy!
-- Aileen McInnis, Editor

Featured Writing

Jazz Funeral By Aileen McInnis

*Aileen McInnis is the editor of **Killer Rubboard** and the author of **Killer Rubboard** Mardi Gras Mystery Series. She plays clarinet in the award winning Bossy Pants Brass Band. She also is co-owner of the bass drum.*

The day was already muggy. Slow, lazy humidity painted the air. Eustace stretched his arms and flexed his hands open and shut, his skinny, knobby arms poking out from a dirty undershirt. His hands didn't feel as stiff as they usually did first thing in the morning. He bent back each of his fingers until he felt the joints cracked. "Gotta work for me today, old man," he said to his bony, arthritic hands as he tried to coax some flexibility into his knuckles. "We sending Tubs over today."

He rubbed his hands over his black pockmarked arms. He hadn't used for a long time and the scars on the inside of his arms were nubs of scarred flesh, useless and uncomfortable. He still craved it every morning at this time, especially when he sometimes forgot why he got up in the morning. But today he had a reason to get up. Today they would cut loose Tubs Monehan.

There hadn't been a decent funeral in New Orleans since Katrina ripped through the city. But the town would do it right for Tubs. Eustace straightened a bit and peeked out a quarter-size hole in the cardboard covering up his busted out window. He do it straight for Tubs. Tubs had often come through with a gig for Eustace for the funerals he got as leader to the Brass Knuckles Marching Band. Eustace knew that Tubs would want him in the First Line, playing trumpet. He do right by Tubs, just like Tubs had done right by Eustace

He rubbed his scars again. He felt bad looking forward to something that meant Tubs had to die, but that's what jazz funerals were-celebrations, dancing, sadness to see someone go, but joy to know the person in the box was going to a better place. But Eustace knew what he was really looking forward to was the high he'd feel playing his piece. It was the same high he got from the smack.

He put a hand on his chest and gingerly took a deep breath. He wasn't feeling too good this morning, and it wasn't just his jones. These past weeks, he had this nagging pain in his chest. Like a wooden board pressing down on his sternum. Like Fat Janice hugging him way too hard. He hoped he could still play, hit the high notes, take a riff, wail it good. He looked once more out his peephole and turned to get ready. He didn't bother to wonder if there was any chicory in the kitchen. He already knew the answer. He couldn't remember the last time he ate. The windows in his little shotgun house were still boarded up and swathes of the floor had rotted out. Eustace had stepped around the gaping holes so often that he didn't even notice them anymore. His kitchen still smelled of spilled fuel and heating oil and he never got around to filling the cupboards back up, like Mary would have done. The waters had ruined everything. Katrina had been the most bad ass woman in his life, and he had known quite a few.

But his trumpet was sweet to him. He'd make her sing like a woman getting loved good. Maybe there'd be an envelope of cash from the family as thanks. He'd get a bite then. Maybe the young guys might share their stuff. It had been so long.

Eustace was afraid of some of the younger players. He didn't understand their jumpiness and that rap crap. Some of the neighborhood gang bangers were taking over the tradition of funerals parades, putting on elaborate displays for fallen leaders and towing the body through the streets accompanied by music, dancers and menacing young men playing some rock 'n roll tune or rap or a movie theme song. Eustace knew things always changed, but it didn't mean he had to like it.

Lewis would be there. Eustace would bet on it. The call had gone out to all musicians to show up to honor not only Tubs, but all the musicians that had died in the storm's aftermath and who didn't get the honor they earned and deserved. It would be a funeral parade to beat all funerals. Eustace knew that a player like Lewis, one who respected the old ways, would be there to show his respects for the tradition and for all the deceased players.



He could almost hear Lewis going on and on about the "Grand Tradition", as he called it, back when they still were friends. "It's a goddamn gumbo," he used to say, waving his finger in the air like some nutty professor. "Slaves would be sitting in their Sunday circles in Congo Square and banging on their drums. They's look over and the French and Spanish would be marching their bands down through the Quarter honoring their generals and soldiers and like a goddamn gumbo, they began to mix it up and soon you got the circle joining the line," Lewis would say and wag his finger again like a Baptist preacher making sure you got the point about hell fire coming right for your soul, "and pretty soon they come up with the funeral parade with a fat brass band escorting you into the next world. Leave it to New Orleans to turn your passing into a party."

The pain in Eustace's chest pressed hard down, like the fat tires of a city running him down. "Sure hope I can breathe enough to play." Eustace said aloud, his voice croaking in the empty, waterlogged house.

He picked up his trumpet, worked the keys a few times and tentatively blew a run of notes, carefully at first as is not to trip up his heart, then a bit more forcefully. The pain was still there, but it didn't hurt his playing no mind.

His mind wandered as his fingers automatically pressed the keys, picking out the notes for "Didn't He Ramble!" He and Lewis were part of the old guys who remembered working in the traditional brass band before the Seventies hit and gutted the old tradition out. Lewis played the trumpet, too, and got the gig with the Hurricane Brass Band back when they were just getting started.

Eustace was invited to audition for the same band. But he lost track of time that day with a woman other than Mary his wife, who promised him an afternoon of pleasure and a ball of heroin. Lewis made the cut and Eustace didn't. He rubbed the scar on his lip again, a souvenir of their fight after Eustace found out that Lewis got the gig. Lewis went on to travel to New York, Atlanta, Memphis, even Toronto, Montréal, and Europe. He even recorded an album before the band broke up.

Lewis had the chops and the discipline and an arm clean of scars. But Eustace had the soul. They both knew that it. Eustace blew it, his passions directed in the wrong place. "Water under the bridge," Mary had said, waving her hand, used to dreams going up the holes in her husband's arms.

It took a long time, but eventually Eustace stopped caring that he alone had ruined his one shot at the gold ring. He worked as an occasional day laborer, had four kids with Mary and a boy by Fat Janice named Eubie who died at sixteen with a gang fight with a gun. Every Thursday night, he would show up at Daltries Lounge over off Basin Street where he would sit in the jam there and try to pick up a little extra in tips. Tubs asked him regularly to play for occasional funeral. He earned enough to buy this tiny house in a quiet neighborhood where Mary fixed up a little garden in the back. She left for Baton Rouge long before the rest of New Orleans had reason to evacuate. Eustace figured it was a good three years since he had last seen her. His daughters had come back to New Orleans about two years ago bringing a handful of scrubby hair kids who called him Grandpa and looked bored. That was all back before Katrina had blew into New Orleans and ended life as he knew it.



Most of his clothes had been lost in the flooding, but Mary, bless her heart, before she left him must have wrapped his funeral suit in thick plastic after its last cleaning so it was hanging in the closet, waiting for some event. It smelled old and musty, but it was pressed and sharp. He washed his face and armpits, and oiled his hair with a little of the grease left over from a tincture in the medicine cabinet. The suit was a little big, but as he put it on, he tried to straightened out his arthritic back as tall and as proud as he could.

He gave himself one more look in the cracked mirror in the bedroom, then slipped the worn corded rope that snaked through the valves and workings of his trumpet around his neck to carry his trumpet without a case. He left the house, walking into the morning sun, his eyes hurting from the bright light of day, his instrument gently swinging and bumping his chest like a heartbeat.

As he walked toward the gathering at Rampart Street, he kept his eyes to the ground because the light was hurting his eyes. It had been so long that he had been out among other people. He felt out of place and strange. He felt old. What bothered him most about getting old was feeling invisible. Back when he was in his prime, when he was fully a young man, ripe and full of it, being a musician had some respect to it. Fine looking women openly flirted with him, and the younger kids, with all their pep and sass, looked up to him in awe for playing in the band. It was that look of respect, that look of invitation that he missed so much.

He didn't get nothing from the young musicians these days. They acted like he wasn't there, like he was invisible, inconsequential, gone, like he didn't matter, that he was some dried up old guy that wasn't happening any more. It bothered him, infected him, making hide in his moldy smelling, beat up house.

But today would be different.

Today, with Tubs Monehan being honored, all the stops would be out. The city was using his funeral as one of the many ways it needed to heal. New Orleans was going to honor Tubs and all the musicians who had died, either literally in the storm, or figuratively by being banished to places like Texas and Nevada and Minnesota and it was going to do it by bringing back one of the most unique of their city's traditions --- the jazz funeral.

Eustace had decided to play the best he ever had, He wanted to honor in his own way Tubs and all the musicians who had ever walked beside him, ever exchanged riffs, ever share their stuff. Eustace had played for plenty of funerals in his day, and knew most of the old guys. He usually got the call from Tubs or from the funeral director down at the Sweet Jesus Funeral Home that some musician had died or one of the Societies were looking to gather a band.

Most of the Pleasure and Aid Societies, like the Zulus and the Poydras Club started out as poor man's death insurance. While there was plenty of partying and celebration going on, every member knew that this was going to be the group that made sure he was buried in fine style, that would send him over in style to the other side and celebrate that once he had lived. Eustace hoped someone would do the same for him, so he always said yes to the call, always participated in the brass band assembled to take the body in slow dignified style to the cemetery and then cut out after the body was buried, with a quick, lively tune leaving the cemetery, often with a Second Line of partiers, mourners, and hanger-ons dancing and celebrating that they was still around and alive and anything but dead. That's how he wanted to go.

The funeral for Tubs was being held at the Glory Baptist Church. From there it would work its way down to St, Louis Cemetery #1. Eustace hadn't been to the cemetery since Katrina has rolled in but he knew it had survived despite being flooded. He thought of all those old dusty bones rising to the top of the flood surge like specks of bad milk in chicory. He wondered if the bones of the poor people got all mixed

up in those walls when they buried you. They put out you in a home in the wall, waited until your bones turned to dust, then shoved another soul next to you to share your spot in eternity.

"Lewis would call it 'goddamn gumbo', all those bones mixed up," Eustace blurted aloud as he walked, startling a small boy walking with his dog. Eustace wasn't much of a religious man. He had left that all to Mary during the years they were raising the kids. But the thought of all those poor people's bones mixing it up after death crept him out. He wasn't sure how that would all work out in the final judgment if everyone's bones were all mixed up, good people wearing the bones on the bad ones and vice versa.

"Well, God sent the storm," Eustace spoke aloud again. "He can damn well sort it out."



The funeral was already over by the time Eustace reached the church. A group of mourners had carried the large casket out and placed it in the black Cadillac hearse to be part of the parade to the cemetery. A large horseshoe of flowers splayed across the hood of the car spelling out "TUBS" in carnations. Other mourners held similar flower arrangements with pictures of other departed musicians. Eustace worked his way toward the hearse, pushing past a crowd of folks in fine suits and bright printed dresses and waving fans and memorial programs to brush away the heat.

Eustace recognized the Grand Marshall of the March as Cab Daltman, a drummer from the Brass Knuckles Jazz band. Today he fit the part perfectly, dressed up in a fine double breasted suit, with a wide yellow sash crossing his chest, a black bowler atop his head and wearing a solemn face. As would be tradition, the parade would wind by Tubs favorite places, Marie's Red Beans, the café he'd visit every Monday for lunch, the Delta Billiards Club, the Red Stripe Barber Shop. The last two were still boarded up from the hurricane, but they were still on the route because Tubs was a regular there.

It took awhile for everyone to get settled and for Cab to take his place at the front. He signaled to the band and called out, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus!" A trumpeter from Brass Knuckles, picked the key and started playing. Little by little, the rest of the musicians gather joined in. There had to be close to 50 different drummers, trumpeters, clarinetist, saxophones, tubas, euphoniums, and trombonists gathered and it was a mish mash of rhythms and harmonies until the band got moving and began to pick up the groove. Eustace pushed past the many mourners and found himself an impossibly tiny spot near the rear bumper of the hearse, right where he thought he belonged. He fumbled with the cord holding his trumpet and started in on the second verse, fumbling for the key.

Cab started out the parade with a slow rhythmic strut, motioning the band to start. The paces was slow, mournful. The music was almost painful to listen to. On the way to the cemetery, before the burial, it would be a dirge on the way in to express this sorrow and the pain of death.

Eustace was grateful for the slow pace. The pressure in his chest kept pounding against his breastbone and he was only able to push out some rhythm notes. But the spirit was alive and picking up steam. He knew he would come through when it counted. He had to do it for Tubs.



Cab led the crowd in some hopping sidesteps, then a series of halting steps forward. Tradition was all around them. The Zulus were there. Tubs would often march for them at the St. Joseph's celebrations and they would always there in their strong, black pride and their fine mustard suits and black sashes. The Podrays Social Club and the Carrolton Street Club were there, dressed in smart greens and scarlet suits with sashes slashing across their chest. The Fairview Baptist Church Gospel Choir was also marching today in their bright, blueberry choir robes, adding a vocal line on some of the gospel numbers. Eustace got up on his toes as he played to look ahead. He could see that Lewis was about eight guys ahead of him, right in front in the place of honor. Lewis was all grey now and looking about a hundred years old.

The parade passed all the places that Tubs frequented and loved. Because this was an event honoring all dead musicians, the crowd was thick and enthusiastic, pressing against the marchers, slowing down the progress. Cab didn't seem to mind. As soon as one tune would play out, he'd call out another slow dirge and nod at different player to take leads. Because there were so many trumpeters and trombonists saxophones, the musicians had to battle to get a solo and to the crowd, it was just like a cacophony of sound until the victor landed on top and the tune emerged victorious.

There would be no Second Line and no celebrating until after the body was dropped off at the cemetery for burial. Only after Tubs was laid to rest would the beat turn upward and celebratory, out of earshot of the family. Only then would the snare drums hit a more funky rhythm, and the bass drum would

hit on the back beat, and the trombones would let loose with the sassy slides. Only then would the observers on the sidewalk jump in to a Second Line behind the First Line of Mourners, and all would dance, play and party all the way down the road. Away from the specter of death.

Then Cab shouted out "Just a Closer Walk B flat!" It was one of Eustace's favorites. Cab seemed to be ignoring Eustace in the back line, so Eustace decided to be ballsy and just go for a break. He let the tune get passed around a few of Cab's favorite soloists and he waited for the saxophone player to come to the end of the phrase. Then he grabbed his chance. He ripped that high note and held it until all challengers dropped out then riffed his favorite line coming down off the peak.

He felt it then. The rush he always felt when he was just about to take off. Something moved him that he hadn't felt in years. The pressure on his chest seemed to lift and he feel young again , before life, before his habit, before Katrina ended life in New Orleans, before he ruined his life with Mary, before his lost his chance to play with the most successful band coming out of New Orleans, before heroin took his soul. Eustace, with all the balls he could muster in his skinny body, hit that high C sweet and straight on, then flowered it with a run of notes, slow and showy just like Tubs would have like it. He felt the pressure in his chest waver a bit. But it was his time, his moment. He'd go out with a broken heart if he had to, for just one more chance to play like he was young and yet unbroken.

The young musicians around him stopped playing and looked around to see who was playing. "Who's that?" one trumpet player mouthed to a nearby tenor sax, as if noticing Eustace for the first time. Lewis, out in front of the Cadillac also heard the ripping trumpet and also startled. He didn't have turn around to know that it was Eustace, come to play in the band for one last time. It surprised him and saddened him at the same time. "Damn," he said aloud, thinking that Eustace sounded like he did back when he was at the top of his game, back when they were both young and hungry and competitive. He heard that biting trumpet sailing up high and mourning the loss of a friend, of a life. The cascading ribbon of blues notes bent just right brought tears to Lewis eyes. Damn this dying, he thought. It's all fucked up.

The chorus of singers from the Fairview Church joined in at the chorus, covering the last notes of Eustace's solo, but the plaintive quality of his break sent a shiver of gloom over everyone. Eustace himself was feeling the buzz of hitting it right, of making the trumpet cry out to the boxes in the wall and the bodies in the boxes, mixed up in the death which seemed to reach into every corner and crack in New Orleans.

Cab timed the music perfectly, getting the front of the band right to the gate of the cemetery as the song began to wane. The crowd of followers poured into cemetery, squeezing themselves up against walls and mausoleums, some sitting up on the tombstones like they was sitting on a friend's couch or the nearest levy wall in their high backyard neighborhood.

Eight pallbearers carried Tub's casket over to the mausoleum designated as his final resting point. Pastor Williams from Glory Baptist Church stepped forward and began a psalm from the Bible

"Your thunder resounded in the whirlwind;
your lightning illumined the world
The earth quivered and quaked
through the seas was your way
and your path through the deep waters
though you footsteps were not seen
you led you people like a flock under the care of Moses and Aaron."

The minister preached and everyone witnessed. "Tubs led our people through a sad, and difficult time." He continued talking about his generosity during life with younger musicians, talking about how he came back to New Orleans after Katrina, and how he helped raise money to get two houses built back up in his devastated neighborhood and took the time to teach music lessons to some of the children. The crowd punctuated his sermon with "Amen!" and "Praise the Lord!" like a rhythmic, well choreographed performance.

"But lest we forget, others that have passed, too," The minister shouted, shaking his head in sadness and mourning. "Many fine musicians struck down that we honor here today."

"Amen!" the crowd shouted. "Yes, brother!"

"Tubs was just one of many. Those struck down by the she-fire winds and rains of Katrina who we will give the kind of burial to Tubs that each and everyone of them deserved."

"God rest their souls!" "Uh huh!"

"Musicians like Skip Carty...., Jackson Forcheaux..., Daniel..." He began listing names, all of them familiar to Eustace. Another trumpet player. A drummer. The minister kept talking.

But Eustace had stopped listening. He felt that pain in his chest again, It had come back fierce and hard. He grabbed his chest. It was hard to breathe. He dropped his trumpet and it banged hard against his chest, still hanging by its cord.

"Lewis!" he cried out to the only one he knew in the crowd. Lewis turned his head slightly at the call of his name, but continued to look forward. Eustace grabbed at a young trombone player next to him, but the young man didn't seem to notice and turned to talk to the trombone player to his left. Eustace couldn't get a good grip on his sleeve and the musician moved over, as if anticipating the exit, anticipating getting back to the business of living.

Damn, I'm dying here and no one seems to notice. Eustace was thinking, the pain on his chest unbearable. Lewis! He tried to say it again but he wasn't sure if the words came out of his mouth.

The preacher kept reading his names.

"John Johnson...Sammy Jones...Eustace Baudine...Tots Mulgrave..."

Eustace grabbed his chest in horror at the sound of his name. His shirt was drenched. Suddenly a smell of sewer and old toxic shit rose in his nostrils and overwhelmed him. It was the same smell New Orleans stinked of for months after the big storm. He started to choke.

He lost track of time and suddenly Pastor Williams shouted, "Amen!" and the crowd shouted "Amen!" back and it was the signal to guide Tubs' coffin into the mausoleum and the signal to turn around and get back to the business of living.

Eustace hear Cab's voice shouting, "Fly Away in G!" A trumpeter jumped right in and sang out a four bar introduction. The band stuck it lively, as if they couldn't wait for this part, for a chance to let it rip, a chance to assert that they were still alive. The band turned suddenly, now without the weight of the Tub's coffin, and headed back to the street. The young folk, so fast, like lightning, seem to be coming right at Eustace armed with life and youth. Eustace was shocked at their rudeness, their utter lack of respect, their failure to notice he needed help bad.

He saw Lewis turn and pull out to the side, letting the young ones pass.

"Lewis..." Eustace croaked out once more, this time he was sure he said it aloud. This time, he know that Lewis heard him. Lewis looked in Eustace's direction. Then he called out over the music and the excitement of the crowd.

"Cut her loose, old man." Lewis started shouting, "You gots to stay here now, Eustace. You gots to stay here." He was looking in Eustace's direction, not really at him, but through him. "Cut her loose," he said. Eustace heard his voice waver and saw tears in his eyes.

The young musicians were walking right at him dangerously close with trombones and drums and tambourines flailing and dancing. But Eustace realized he wasn't getting knocked over. He wasn't getting jostled, or pushed. They were passing right through him. He looked down and realized his pants were drenched. He could see water was rising around him and the vise grip in his chest was now spreading toward his throat.

Lewis said again, his voice choked, "You stay here now, Eustace. You died in the storm. You just don't know it, cap. You gots to stay here now."

Eustace didn't understand. Why was Lewis refusing to help him? Why didn't anyone care that he was having a heart attack?

Then he remembered.

Eustace remembered being trapped in the house. How the water had risen so fast that he had to scramble up to the second floor, only enough time to grab his trumpet, even as he knew that Mary would give him hell for not grabbing their picture books of the grandbabies and the family Bible. Then it came up the stairs and he was forced to got into the attic and claw at the roof, his little house, so proud of it and the little garden in the back.

The water pressing in pressing against his chest, his lungs pressing against his chest until he thought they would burst. Until they did burst and the water came rushing in, and as he yelled for help one last time, he gulped mouthfuls of reeking, brown water.

Eustace stared at Lewis, unbelieving, but remembering every moment of his drowning, trapped in his own house, his own life. That horrible, horrible day. The day that hell visited him, visited New Orleans. He couldn't stand living no more. He understood now. This was his funeral, too. The finest New Orleans had ever seen.

He took one last deep and painful breath and held his trumpet tenderly for one last time before letting it drop, yanking on the cord that hung around his neck. He let it go, cut it loose. He felt an old familiar feeling, the same he felt every time he plunged a needle in his arm. That warm place of pleasure where poor people go to feel no pain. He let go, let all his hurting sink into the walls of the cemetery, mixing sorrow with the flecks of bones of the other poor people left in the walls. He heard whispers of everyone who had gone before. He could breathe again. A warm rush flooded his body, this time filling him up with peace, not fear. It was the score he was hoping for today. The sweet release.

The band moved forward and the onlookers now joined in a Second Line, ready to dance and party and sing back the route they had come from. Lewis got caught up in the movement of the tide. He let himself be carried forward, away from where he had heard Eustace. He felt old and tired. Bone tired.

His day would come, he thought. Some day they'd be toting his dead body through the streets, mourning, playing, dancing. He hoped they would play his favorites, like "Didn't He Ramble?" as they marched. He hoped they would spell out his name in a bright carnation flower arrangement and the Baptist Choir would sing and mourn and sway while the trumpets shouted and the trombones brayed.

But not today.

Lewis shook off his dread and forced himself to listen to the jumped up rhythm the younger players were giving "Fly Away." He found the beginning of the phrase and joined in on his trumpet, marching forward, joining the living, matching step for step, playing note for note, glad to have his feet on dry, black pavement.



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[The Bossy Pants Brass Band Picture Album](#)

Alaska's own Brass Band goes after first prize in the Homer Winter Carnival Parade... and wins! Pictures from the Award Winning Bossy Pants Band and the talented Bossy Panty Twirlers are located on the website. But here are a few for your viewing pleasure!



Krewe Du Review



Eating Establishment Reviews
By Steve Montooth & Christy Williams

February 13, 2006.

Fire and Ice, 401 W. International Airport Road in Anchorage

RATING: 

Where else but Alaska can you find a combination Cajun/Creole café, hair salon, beauty school AND tanning salon? This place has it all and is hands down the most interesting establishment the Krewe du Review has visited to date. We had swung by the restaurant several times before, hoping to try their gumbo. Gumbo is only served on weekdays, so we picked some up as take out (smoked pork and alligator sausage) to share with the Krewe on a Saturday afternoon.

Alligator gumbo sounded a little scary, but our fears were allayed with our first bite. The broth was thick, dark and creamy with a great smoky flavor. We closely examined the alligator sausage---it tasted good but to be quite honest I wouldn't have guessed it contained reptile meat. Peppers, celery and onion were plentiful and the spicing was a little different but great. The menu notes that they like to be creative with their spices. I guess if they can be "creative" with hair-dos they can certainly take an artistic turn with their cooking, too! The meal came with a good little corn muffin and a side of red beans and rice. The red beans were kidney beans, not my favorite, and were spiced quite differently-lots of cumin and spices that I couldn't quite determine.

On the following weekend, we were able to visit the restaurant for a sit down meal. When we had popped in before (yes, the Krewe has done a lot of scouting out of restaurants around town), we had always seen a colorful fellow with curly gray hair and a groovy crocheted hat, involved in lively conversation in one of the booths. There he was again, and we learned that he was Sigel, the owner and cook (plus beautician and beauty school instructor). In this visit, he was helping his daughter Aly (the waitress) with her studies (yep, they home school right there in the restaurant), and assisted a few young women studying beauty school stuff. Aly took our orders and talked with us about learning to play the piano, viola, accordion and guitar-all of the instruments are sitting out, ready to play when the spirit moves. Steve and I ordered sandwiches, a Creole dip and a jambalaya sandwich.

While waiting we explored the restaurant-there's lots to look at. The walls are painted in bright, bold Mardi Gras colors, and there are five roomy booths. A long table runs the length of the room with colorful outdoor umbrellas perched above it. The table was jam packed with different beauty supplies that looked like someone was labeling or sorting. Each booth has a large, glass topped table, and underneath the glass are all sorts of Mardi Gras and New Orleans memorabilia-"throws" of all sorts, beads, coins, photos and prints of New Orleans scenes, travel brochures, restaurant menus and matchbooks from Louisiana, etc. Beads, masks, pictures and original art adorn the walls. A large wirework alligator hangs on the wall near the doorway, and we counted at least three REAL dried alligator heads here and there. One

particularly festive one held their business cards and loads of Mardi Gras beads. A wire shelving unit holds large jars of pickled okra and Café du Monde coffee cups. Odd items are stacked or hung here and there.

When there was a break in the action, Sigel came over to chat with us. He talked about how he and his wife Sue had started the restaurant. They had moved to Anchorage from Seattle where they had both worked in the beauty industry and he had done professional cooking. Upon arriving here they began to miss one of their favorite restaurants, one that served Cajun and Creole food. When a space became available next to their salon they decided to start up a restaurant of their own and cook the food they love- Cajun ("Fire") and homemade ice cream ("Ice").

Sigel brought out a few delicious pieces of confection for us to try, "it's something we're playing with". The squares were made of fudge, malted milk, pecans and Grand Marnier-WOW! About then Aly brought out our sandwiches. Steve's Creole dip was a meaty roast beef sandwich with melted gouda cheese. Mine was jambalaya, topped with melted gouda cheese on a toasted hoagie roll-it was spicy and good, and Steve kept wanting more "tastes" of it. Get your own, buddy!

We decided that we couldn't do a full restaurant review without sampling the ice cream too. Steve tried the coconut jam ice cream, loaded with tiny chocolate chips and coconut. I tried the "shipwreck" which was a combination of cocoanut, mango, guava and other tropical fruits. Both flavors of ice cream were out of this world good. All of the ice cream is made fresh at the restaurant, and Sigel showed us the machine he uses. He also talked to us about how he juggles starting up his roux in the mornings (he uses rice cookers!) and gets the salon up and running. About then a pleasant young woman came in to tell Sigel that his beauty shop customer was ready for her color. He laughed, bid us adieu and zoomed off to the salon. Sue, Sigel's wife, took us into the shop to show us around a bit and to take our payment at the cash register. One wall of chairs was filled with teen girls waiting to get their hair done for the prom that night. What an adventure! We plan to go back for the "surfin' gator-doggie", gator sausage with gouda, red beans and gumbo---now that's getting creative!



Food:



Atmosphere:



Mardi Gras Spirit: *They have far more beads and Mardi Gras décor than any other place we've visited so far.*



Lagniappe: *This place is friendly, interesting and funky beyond belief!*