

New Orleans Instrumental Number 2

New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.

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May 15, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

There are thin silvery white cracks in the clouds. They burn into the backs of your eyelids when you blink. Thunder arrives before you can count to three. It's the crisp, crackling thunder that happens when you're under a mile from lightning.

The bus is a sauna, windows shut tight and fogged, air conditioner already shut off. But I like watching the beads of water run down the vastness of windshield.

I have a bag packed and a rain jacket over it and I should probably go, but there's something very peaceful about the clattering roar of rain on the roof, the rivulets of water running down the windows. The storm feels closer when you're in here, you have to confront more of it when your walls are only two inches thick. Even more of it when your walls are made of nylon, which I know several people in this campground are doing right now. Compared to them, this is nothing. But then it is a cozy 105 degrees or so, which ruins the peacefulness.



Eventually I go and find Corrinne and the kids in the bathroom with a few other people who had taken shelter, mostly because there was a tornado warning. I have my doubts about how much being in a bathroom would help you in a tornado — have you ever seen what a tornado can do to human structures, even concrete structures? — but I understand the basic human (animal?) need to huddle together in groups for some small sense of protection.

I dislike the whole notion of tornadoes. I'm from earthquake country. I like my disasters to come suddenly without warning and generally be over before you even know what happened. If you die, you probably won't even know it. Tornadoes? I don't know the first thing about tornadoes other than you get warned about them ahead of time, which, to me, is like telling some who's afraid of flying that they're statistically more likely to die on the way to airport. Thanks, now I have two things to be afraid of. I'm happy in my ignorance of pending tornadoes. I've seen what they can do and I don't think I can outrun one, so why the hell are you "warning" me about them? Where am I possible going to go?

To the bathroom apparently. Which worked out well because we met a bunch of nice people there, particularly Taylor and Beth, some fellow full time RVers who turned out to know the only other person I'm aware of that lives full time in a Travco. We chatted, decided to meet up in New Orleans at some point and then the storm was over and everyone went their separate ways. We headed into to New Orleans to wander the French Quarter some more.



More importantly though, a couple days later, we finally made it to Storyland out in City Park. It apparently has the world's fastest carousel, according to my wife, and the world's fastest slide according to my kids.









We couldn't leave without doing something that's become a pilgrimage of sorts for me — visiting Marie Laveau's grave.



The so-called voodoo queen of New Orleans has been growing in popularity over the years, but she's still a little obscure. The facts in her story are few and far between, but sometimes facts aren't the most important part of a story. If you know your way around the occult scene at all you've probably heard of Marie Laveau. She's sort of the patron saint of female occult power, because, let's face it, male dominated religions rule our era.

But Marie Laveau seems to laugh in the face of all that. Born in 1801, mixed blood creole, she became a hairdresser to the wealthy — no small part of her power I'm sure — and was the city's most famous practitioner of Voodoo. Even if you care nothing about Voodoo, and I don't really, beyond the mild respect I hold for all animist/naturalist religious systems, Marie Laveau is fascinating because she wielded power in a culture that wouldn't have otherwise given her any. But by all accounts she held considerable political power as a non-white woman in the early 19th century. Think what you will of the Vodun/Voodoo religion, it takes someone special to completely subvert their culture like that. And I have a fondness for cultural subversives.

I had been reading some books on Voodoo the first time I came to New Orleans in 1996 and was captivated by what little is known of her story. I dragged my friend Mike out to visit her grave in St. Louis Cemetery Number 1. At the time the neighborhood around the cemetery was a bit sketchy, sketchy enough that we had the only working car parked on the street. We also had the entire cemetery to ourselves. Marie Laveau's grave was clearly visited, but not often, to judge by the flowers around it.

Years later, around 2003 I came back and it was much the same, but when Corrinne and I came in 2010,

things had changed. There was a new stop light down the street with a new Valero station just past it. People walked the streets and new buildings were going up. Things were looking, if not quite gentrified, certainly headed in that direction. And now, sadly, the gentrification is complete. St. Louis Cemetery Number 1 is hemmed in on three sides by new construction and, worst part, you can no longer get to Marie Laveau's grave.

Technically you can, you just have to pay \$20 and take a tour with a guide. I'd sooner chew my leg off.

The money is a non-issue to me. Admittedly, it's a bit steep. I certainly would not have paid \$100 to get a family of five in, but I understand that part, it's the "you must have a tour guide" bit the rubs me the wrong way. I hate tour guides. I hate having my experiences mediated through another person, especially someone who's a professional mediator. I'd rather walk away and not show the kids Marie Laveau's grave (despite building it up quite a bit) than have them experience it through someone else's words. So we did. Walk away that is.

We did a bit of research and it turns out people were desecrating graves, pulling out bones and what not and the Catholic church decided that money and tour guides was the solution to that problem. The thing is, people have always done that. Depending on which occult text you trust Marie Laveau's bones may not have even been in that grave for more than a couple days before 19th century grave robbers came seeking her bones (or her family moved her, again depending on which shakily documented story you want to believe). I've also toured quite a few Catholic churches where the bones of the dead had been dug up and rearranged by the Catholic Church itself, but I guess that's out of fashion now, current hipster pope notwithstanding.

Whatever the case Marie Laveau's grave is a thing of the past for me. We opted to head to the New Orleans Voodoo Museum instead. Museum is something of a misnomer, it's really just a tiny two room building with some shrines that (I assume) are actively used by Voodoo practitioners. At least they looked fairly actively used, we let the kids add a wish to one. It wasn't quite as nice as visiting the grave would have been, but it gave them a sense of the flavor of Voodoo if you will. Or at least I like to think it did.





Back at camp we met up with Taylor and Beth for dinner. Living in campgrounds is a little odd because while you meet tons of really nice people, who are almost always in a good mood (they're on vacation after all), they never really want to hang out because, well, they're on vacation. But fellow fulltimers... we meet up for dinner. So many thanks to Taylor and Beth for having us over for some delicious food and teaching us about a million tricks we didn't know about living full time in an RV. Hopefully our paths will cross again soon.

2 Comments



Drew Eldridge June 01, 2017 at 2:27 p.m.

Your best writing to date. Great story telling. I love this blog and always look forward to the next entry.



[Scott](#) June 01, 2017 at 5:16 p.m.

@Drew-

Thanks man, glad you're enjoying it.