

New Orleans Instrumental Number 1

New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S.

—

May 12, 2017 by [Scott Gilbertson](#)

New Orleans is the last living city in the United States.

Every time I return here I am amazed that it is allowed to continue existing, that something so contrary to the rest of America has not been destroyed, locked up and disneyfied. But it hasn't. Somehow the people here manage to carry their unique way of life on day after day in this amazing place. The people here shame the rest of us with their vibrancy, their community, their music, their love.

Must be hot as hell in August though.



We came in from the east, on 90 which takes its time wandering through all the bayous the interstate passes right over. Highway 90 cuts out to the very edge where the last of the bayous gives way to the sea. The islands are thin little wafers out here, you feel exposed and vulnerable just driving them, as if at any given moment the sea is going rise up and take them back. But it doesn't. Hasn't yet. There are houses here that are obviously from at least 50 years ago. My favorite was the one with a message that felt aimed directly at today's AirBnBer: "It's a camp, not a condo."

I didn't track which bridge finally brought us into the city, but I do know that the minute we were at the high point I was hit with a smell so strong for a minute I thought something was wrong with the bus, but no, it was just New Orleans and some curious melange of oyster poboys, truck brakes, shrimp boats, fried dough, flashy new taco trucks and Vietnamese restaurants, all trapped inside a couple bends of the Mississippi by some mysterious force of voodoo. It has it's own fragrance, unbottleable and only available here.

Driving into the city in the bus was an experience I can't really do justice to with just words. People everywhere honk and wave and call out to me when I'm driving the bus. It happens half a dozen times every day I drive it, often more. But getting through New Orleans topped everything else before it and I suspect after it. The bus was especially a hit in the Treme, which I'll be honest, made me feel good. Because yeah, of course I drove right through the heart of the city. How else would you cross it? I even had one woman have a five minute conversation with me at a stop light about camping out west who ended it with a simple, 'okay, you ahright, you ahright son'. I hope so.

We stayed at Bayou Segnette State Park on the west bank, which is nice enough, but forgettable save the fact that it's a 10 minute drive from the French Quarter.

The first day we took the ferry in from Algiers in part to let the kids ride a ferry and in part because I've been curious to see Algiers ever since I heard the name in a Grant Lee Buffalo song decades ago. It lived up to my vision of it, complete with hundred year old bars possibly full of hundred year old sailors. I didn't want to spoil the image in my head so I didn't go in.





Instead we crossed the river to Vieux Carré which still amazes me because it is both itself and a parody of itself at the same time and somehow manages to do both very well. It's cheesy and full of tourists, but it's also a really part of the city and full of locals. It might be the strangest tourist destination I've ever been to and I love it.





I also love that I keep coming back here and finding a different New Orleans. All the old ones I've found are still there too, I even took a picture of the diner my friend Mike hung out at 20 years ago when we passed through. We had a huge fight about something or other and I left him in the French Quarter to stew for half a day or so. He ended up at the diner below. At least I like to think it's the same diner. Eventually I came back and found him hanging out here with the largest man I've ever met who was named Earl and rather sweet on Mike I believe. There was something about a toothless bum too. He got some good stories out of it, me, all I got was another tank of gas. This time around we got some tater tots and fries.



This was my first time in New Orleans with kids, which changed things a little bit. I like to get a coffee or a drink and just watch the people drift by on the streets, which we did do a couple times, but never for more than about 10 minutes. Because kids.



We didn't get to stay long, but we did stop in at one of my favorite people watching spots, Envie.



While sitting in one place is not their thing, they had no trouble walking. They walked the streets of the French Quarter from one end to the other and back again almost daily. In the heat the of the day. They were enthralled the whole time. And they slept well after ward. I shake my head every time I see someone with a 3 or 4 year old in stroller, what a lost opportunity . There aren't many places in America with so much going on on the streets. New Orleans is vibrant and alive, like kids.

I tried to get a little history in the kids, we stopped by the Jean Lafitte Museum and the kids got another stamp in their NPS passport books. The museum also has a small courtyard of the sort you find in New Orleans, something I'd been trying to explain for a while, but which is best understood by seeing one.



She picked up the phone to her left, listened for a minute and said, "hey, this one is just about soup".

But mostly they just wanted to hang around Jackson Square, listen to the music and watch the living statues, which the girls developed a minor obsession with for a few days, playing living statue whenever we were back in camp.



The Free Spirit Brass Band was pretty damn good. You can listen to them on [youtube](#).





For a \$1 the living statue hands out tiny messages, Olivia's said "enjoy your piece of peace".



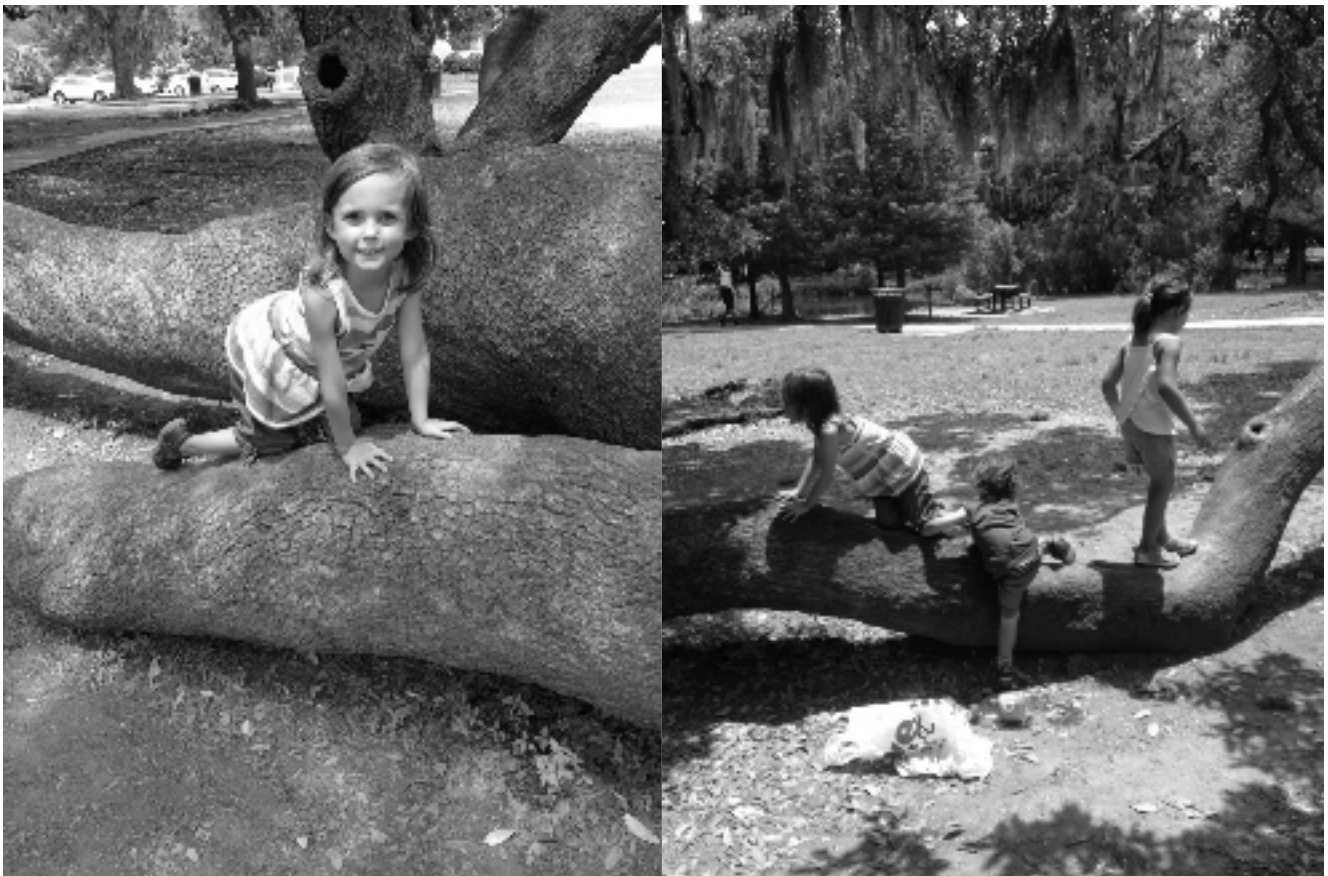
The hat is full of little scraps of paper with messages written on them.



crepes in the french market, new orleans.

The New Orleans we found this time was all over the map. Along with the French Quarter, City Park

turned out to be a huge hit as was their trolley ride up there. There was something called Story Land, which, on our initial visit was closed, which caused much gnashing of teeth, but fortunately playgrounds never close so we were able to salvage the day.



All the playground equipment in the park didn't hold their attention as long as this tree.



I carry a notebook around in my back pocket, but sometimes other people snatch it and add their own impressions.



We might be out and about a lot, but the bus bookends our days.

1 Comment



Drew Eldridge May 30, 2017 at 10:14 a.m.

Awesome. Hello, my name is Drew Eldridge and Ive never been to NO! Your story makes me want to visit. I think im the right age to soak it all in.