

From: "Pat Schexnayder"
Subject: *THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME*
Date: Thu, 30 Mar 2006 08:49:09 -0600

Lolita copied me on an email she sent to her family and friends. I've asked her to share this with all of you because all members of LA Creole are somehow tied to New Orleans. If it is your home now, has been, or is your ancestral home, I believe Lolita captures why it means so much to all of us.
--Pat

New Orleans-My Home

Over the past 7 months, I have read many e-mails sent to me by my Creole family members and friends, many who live outside of New Orleans. Some are pessimistic for the future of my city, while others are optimistic. I now feel a need to respond:

My family has faced some tough decisions over the past few months--should we stay for the long haul or should we hit the road--pack up our bags and head for greener pastures. Yes, our city is not an ideal place to live in right now. Our homes are destroyed, our life-long possessions are gone, our families are displaced, and our people have died. Yes, our politicians are clowns and our neighborhoods look like they were bombed. Our potholes are worse than ever, and our trash continues to mount on our grassless lawns. Our street lights are still not working, and our basic services are hard to come by.

But, guess what, in spite of all this--many of us are not going anywhere. Many of us have decided to stay- Why?? Simply because **this city is worth fighting for. This is our home!! It has been not only our home, but the home of our ancestors.**

Not all of us are products of a lousy school system as the news media would have you believe. We are products of both Catholic and public schools, whose educational standards can measure up to any across this country. Our Creole ancestors, as far back as the early 1800`s, educated their children and maintained their own institutions of learning. Some of them even sent their sons to France and their daughters to the convents to continue their education beyond their First Communion. We even had wealthy Creole philanthropists who assisted in the education of poorer family members: Madame Couvent, Thomy Lafon, Aristide Mary.

We, in New Orleans, are not all poverty stricken as the news media would have you believe. Many of us are teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, engineers, pharmacists, businessmen and businesswomen. We are citizens, not residents of some 3rd world country as our President and Congress would like you to think. We are property owners, not renters. We live in Gentilly, New Orleans East, Treme, French Quarter and its faubourgs, uptown New Orleans, and not just the 9th ward. We are tax payers, not welfare recipients. Some of us live in very expensive 20th century homes,

while others choose the more quaint and historic 19th century shotgun doubles, creole cottages, or camelbacks.

We stay because this city belongs to us. This city was built from the blood and sweat of our Creole forefathers: our carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, contractors, masons, and so many others. Our artists were sculptors, marble engravers, and iron workers who created so much of our sumptuous tombs or the gates, fences, and balconies this city is so famous for. New Orleans today is a living monument to the labor and skills of our slave and free people of color ancestors (Mary Gehman). How many other places across this country can boast of such a record?

We also stay because of our secret ingredients: our people. We, as natives, simply can't stand to be anywhere else for very long. We stay because we are a community of non-conformists. We have a different attitude about the way we live. We live pretty much the way we want to live, and we don't really care whether you approve of how we live or not (Ella Brennan). We are also a hospitable bunch of people. We can greet total strangers with a simple hello and end up chatting an hour. We stay here also because we know we're unique. " New Orleans is the only city in the world that has created its own full culture: architecture, music, and festive ceremonies" (Wynton Marsalis). Many of us are also members of that original melting pot: a mixture of West Africa, Native America, France, and Spain. We stay because our neighborhoods are genuine and distinctive--not homogenized and antiseptic. We love getting to family and friends after a 5 to 10 minute drive, instead of having to drive on the interstate for 60-90 minutes in order to reach our destination.

Our old city has a mythology, a personality, a soul that is larger than life. We have our own way of talking, our own smell, and our own look and feel. We let our people and our guest be themselves. It's a "come as you are" kind of town, not a "come as we want you to be".

In the words of Leah Chase, " God threw us a lowdown slow curve, but he does not want us to strike out." Katrina has really dealt us a severe blow. We've been knocked to our knees but not to the ground. We've been soaking in water but we haven't drowned. We are sick but not dead. This city must come back--not just for my good and others like me who are returning and refuse to give it up--but also for all of you whose lives are connected in some way to us. It's often said that history repeats itself. If this city is left to die- yours may be next. If New Orleans dies, your culture dies also. The next time you second line with your handkerchiefs or your umbrellas ---think of us. The next time you hear that good old time jazz--- think of us. When you cook your gumbo or jambalaya--think of us. We need a helping hand down here, but not a handout. We need all of you to remember why New Orleans matters and why it must survive!!!!

--[Lolita Villavasso-Cherrie](#)