

A Word from Woody . . .
“Finding Our Way Home from Nostalgia Lane”

When you grow up in New Orleans, you get used to the phrase, “ain’t dere no more”. That has been my experience with disturbing regularity. Admittedly, sometimes it is nice to take a stroll down Nostalgia Lane.

The list of the “ain’t dere” artifacts is legion, so this could be a long stroll. Remember K & B? I loved their store brand ice cream. Remember Schwegmann Brothers Giant Supermarkets? I loved the smell from the shoe repair shop inside the store on Chef Manteur by the Industrial Canal. Remember Maison Blanche? I used to spend a day of Christmas shopping on Canal Street when school let out when I was in Junior High, and I shopped also at D.H. Holmes and Leonard Krower. Then I would meet my Dad with one of my sisters for lunch at a place like the Italian restaurant Tony’s on Bourbon Street. And yes, Tony’s is among the “ain’t der”. And since it is Christmas this month, Maison Blanche reminds old-school New Orleanians of the beloved Mr. Bingle, a snow ball puppet with a funny cone-shaped hat. Mr. Bingle even had his own television show! I read recently in the *Times Picayune* that a couple in the Lake Vista neighborhood have a Christmas display in their home featuring a 50 year old Mr. Bingle doll!

In truth, our Nostalgia Lane goes much further. I could also mention Morgan and Lindsey dime store, White Castle, Burger Chef and Jeff, McKenzie’s Bakery (thank goodness for Tastee’s bringing back their goodies!), and Lawrence’s Bakery (the *best* king cakes, in my opinion!). And the restaurants-- Fitzgerald’s, Masson’s, Martin’s (I loved their Bear Plate), Sieben Kettle, Tony Angelo’s, La Cuisine, Chicken Delight, Teddy’s Grill, Luigi’s Pizza (where I had my first date), Pied Piper’s (home of the square pizza, where Elena and I had our first date), P.O.E.T.S., Farrell’s, and The Beverly Dinner Playhouse. We are now approaching a smorgasbord of various old places: Paillet and Penedo jewelry store, American Bank & Trust (where I used to work as a bank teller), Pap’s Grocery (where I was a bag boy), Canal Villere Grocery, Time Saver stores, Tulane Stadium, Lake Forest Mall, The Pitt Theater, Robert E. Lee Theater, The President Riverboat, and of course Pontchartrain Beach. As you can see, I have some emotional claim to a number of these landmarks, and I am sure you do, too.

It is easy to get lost on Nostalgia Lane. The past was so good, and we feel blessed to have lived knowing such places. But it is unwise to live in the past. We do well to heed the advice in Ecclesiastes, “Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this” (7:10). God wants us to appreciate the past, and enjoy the present, and all the while knowing that time is fleeting and heading inexorably for the future. And Scripture tells us that is where our true home is (Philippians 3:20).

So I encourage us this Christmas to be thankful for the good things in our past, even take a stroll down Nostalgia Lane. But don’t stay there. We should also enjoy the memories we are making in this present. And realize that we cannot own these moments; we cannot put them in a bottle and cork the opening and possess it. The Lord wants us to have a thankfulness for our earthly memories, but always know that the joys we have here are but a foretaste of the joys for believers in His Kingdom when we celebrate Christmas there! For the promised Christ child’s “authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:7).

Love in Christ,

Woody