

Tuesday, May 1st – Day 10th

07:30 a.m. – casual getting up, coffee from a coffeemaker, enjoying looks down at the hotel atrium. It was a beautiful, warm morning, about 79 F.

09:00 a.m. – „Knock, knock ! ... Boo !!!“ Ah, we fools ! We took the bait ! Yes, we got scared again ! „Zuzanka, Zuzanka !“ ☺.

We went to the Petunias restaurant for ‚eggy‘ breakfast. When we came, there was a short line in front of the restaurant so we had to wait for some minutes. But it was worth waiting for. It was another really shi shi old time place. And what delicious breakfast we had ! ‚Eggs Benedict‘ for me and ‚Cream Eggs and Broccoli‘ for Hana. Yum, yum ! I cleared even Hana’s plate ... „Mirek, you are really the good eater ! You remind us of one of our friends who is also the very good eater. He is a slender man but he can eat really big portions ! When he was at us last time he had problems with his wisdom tooth ...“.

From the restaurant we took an overlooking tour around French Quarter, we peeked in all corners and were relishing that special morning casual atmosphere. We had also a stop at a souvenir shop. „Traps for tourists !“ We bought T-shirts and postcards, Dan was making funny faces with Mardi Grass glasses ☺. Then we turned our steps back toward the hotel, had a brief break in rooms and prepared for our that day’s trip.

11:00 a.m. – we set out of the town, passed by Superdome and headed for bayous and swamps of Mississippi.

01:15 p.m. – we reached a place of our adventure, a sail by boat down the bayous of the Mississippi river.

„Ah, no, no Hana ! Don’t worry about the sail. It won’t be so wild jumping as on the Dry Tortugas trip. It will be a quiet sail.“, Zuzanka calmed Hana.

We bought tickets and made our waiting for the start of the cruise shorter by talking with captain Ron „Black“ Guidry, an older charming and peculiar man. (<http://www.cajunman.com>)

From Susie and Dan we learnt that Guidry is the right Cajun, it means descendant of the French Acadians who fled Canada in the mid-1800’s and settled in the Louisiana bayous. So he could speak French as good as English. Our friends also told us he was a former member of Green Berets and in his old age he lived in the bohemian life style as a captain of a bayou vessel, a guide and a performer.

While talking we were swinging on a wide porch swing and the captain in his swing chair : „Swinging on the chair, it’s what I’ve been doing almost my whole life !“. Yes, our captain was a good guy and a joker with a roguish smile. To Dan’s question where his dog Gatorbait is, he only shrugged : „His time came ...“.

We also visited a shop with souvenirs, where we spotted a head of a boar hanging on a wall and Dan remembered my story that I told him during their time in Chotebor : „Bekky and the boar ! But bigger one !“.

Even before the time to sail came, our passanger group expanded for a bunch of french speaking Canadian students, trainees for cooks.



02:00 p.m. – we boarded an about 50 feet long motorboat with a flat bottom, a laminate roof and a metal railing around its perimeter. In the next moment we sailed out down the bayou.

Those water canals are lined with a special kind of cypress trees that are able to live in water and swamps. They are called Bald Cypresses. They are tall, deciduous conifers with a thick trunk at the bottom but very quickly narrowing in its middle and high parts. The impression of their majesty is increased by leafy plants climbing the trunk even by veils of spanish moss hanging down from their branches. Yes, those trees together with the water canals, swamps and other swampy greenery formes the really strange landscape, something what we had never seen before ... again.

The captain expertly led the vessel along the bayou, over a muddy, brown water and he called attention here to a turtle, there to a heron and there to bald eagles ... But his number one performance was calling for alligators here and there. He used a special shout and every gator had its own name ! And when they swam to the boat, he fed them with raw chicken meat fasten onto a long wooden pole with a metal hook at its end. Nice creatures ! Only at those moments when we could see them during feeding we realized how agile and lively they could be ! And those their teeth !

Guidry explained us that only he was allowed to feed alligators, because bayous are unapproachable over a dry land in that area so gators did not connect food with people, only with his boat. Wow ! The really good performance with alligators he did !

So we cruised from stop to stop and the captain had always something to show us and we were savoring that odd, mystery beauty of that special area. In the hindmost point of our sail Guidry stopped the engine, showed us his last play with the gator and then he took his guitar and accordion and played and sang songs in English and French for our fun. Wow ! What a singer and player he was ! AMAZING ! Dan with glittering eyes sang along as well as many other passengers. It was really the very pleasant event. I especially liked the *'Jambalaya'* song. It constantly echoed in my ears long time after we started our back, much more faster sail because without any stop.

Then we thanked Ron Guidry for the great experience and said our farewells to that charismatic man. The trip was a success ...

04:00 p.m. – we got in Toyota and hit our back journey toward New Orleans, still full of atmosphere of bayous and melodies of songs. We felt casually and easy. I asked Dan for words of Jambalaya and after a short time we already were singing together :

*„Good-bye Joe, me gotta go, me oh my oh
Me gotta go pole the pirogue down the bayou
My Yvonne, the sweetest one, me oh my oh
Son of a gun, we'll have big fun on the bayou“.*

Afterward I asked Dan who learnt him all that old songs which he sang with Guidry and Dan answered that his Grandfather did the main job and of course his Mom. Once, when he was a boy and he was in a hospital, he had Mom sing him his favorite song *'Danny Boy'* over and over. And Susie rushed to explain it :

„About Dan's car accident: There was a wooded area by their house where they would play normal children's games. Dan ran out of the woods right into the street that runs along the beach along the Gulf of Mexico (the same street that we drove along when we were in Pascagoula). A young woman, in her teens was unable to stop and hit him. Dan was taken by ambulance to the hospital and had surgery to put pins in his leg. He was in the hospital at least a month and had to have therapy for some time after that. He got an infection in his leg and at one point they thought they would have to amputate it. His mother sat up with him and he asked her to sing the song 'Danny Boy'. She said that was the hardest song she ever had to sing. But, as you know, all came out well. It was while Dan was in the hospital and a short period after that, that he was first introduced to racism and the wrongness of it. But that's another story. Dan still has some nasty scars from the surgery.“

06:00 p.m. – finally back in the hotel. The ride through the suburb and then through the center of New Orleans in the afternoon rush hours was really nothing to shout about. Dan had hard times ...

We all took a brief break to freshen up in our rooms.



06:30 p.m. – we left the hotel for dinner in Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville Cafe. (<http://www.margaritaville.com>)

We casually walked down early evening French Quarter, relishing that magic atmosphere of New Orleans ...

Margaritaville Cafe sits in Decatur street, in an old, two storey building with an outside terrace above a sidewalk.

And just right on that terrace we chose our table and chairs. It was so romantic ! There we could enjoy not only delicious sea food but we could also overlooking that special scenery all around. Those old houses that had all their years written on their nice and interesting faces that were liven up by plants growing in balconies. It was almost like in a picture gallery with pictures of old masters. Soften and weathered colors of wood and metal ... brown, black ... and also bright colors of palm trees, climbing up plants and flowers. Yes, it was another special experience. Laid back time again ...

Sipping Coronas and Margaritas we went through that day's events ... *„Good-bye Joe, me gotta go ...“*. We also talked about Jimmy Buffet, the owner of Margaritaville Cafe, that singer, whose songs also belonged to our vacation, especially our favorite one about New Orleans 2005 : *„Breathe In, Breathe Out, Move On‘*. Our friends kept talking about Buffet family : *„Jimmy Buffet is a singer and he also run the whole chain of Margaritaville Cafes. And yes, there is a relation with Warren Buffet from Omaha. Jimmy is his nephew. Yes, he is the nephew of this Warren Buffet who is now the world's richest man (Bill Gates is now #3). And more about ,our‘ Omaha Buffet ... even though Warren Buffet is the richest man in the world, he lives a middle class lifestyle. He and his family live in a regular house in a regular neighborhood. He doesn't put on any airs. His joy is finding ways to make money, but does not have the same joy spending it (I'd get joy helping him spend it). His three children each have foundations for helping people in different ways. Warren gives them 1 billion dollars each year for their foundations. He gives them ideas on how they should spend it, but doesn't tell them how they must spend it. They have charities around the world for various causes, all of them great. So he is a good man with good, well, balanced children that will continue to help others long after their father is gone.“*

07:30 p.m. – we ended up our dinner, took a short sightseeing tour around the cafe and slowly walking we set out toward our hotel. Walking back we savored intoxicating magic of that very old town, full of an evening bustle, full of scents and sounds ...

08:15 p.m. – back in our room. We found out that there was a wedding feast and celebration with music down at the hotel atrium. For a while we watched and listened to it with Hana from our balcony then I went for Susie and Dan to share that event with them. It was something out of movie. The brightened up atrium and swimming pool, a bride and a groom and other wedding guests dancing among palm trees and other greenery ... so we found inspiration from that event below us and start dancing in our room too. What a joy and fun we took from it ! It was the great conclusion of that splendid day.

When our friends left us alone, we were reading books for a while in bed, because there still was a lot of noise of wedding party in our room.

10:15 p.m – Hana was already sleeping, me is going do the same, wedding feast was over ... ☺