

# Chez Nous

EN LOUISIANE

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THE FRENCH  
QUARTER FESTIVAL P.6

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THE ART OF  
STREET PERFORMING P.9

## how CRAWFISH BECAME A DELICACY



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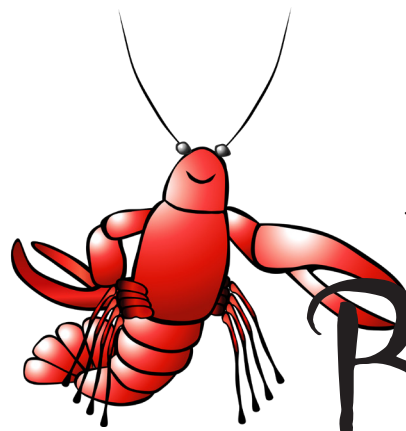
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# How Crawfish Became a Delicacy

BY BETSY DAVIS

*Nova Scotia lobsters followed the Acadian people on their way to settle Louisiana. The lobsters grew tired and smaller along the journey, so that when they arrived in Acadiana they were only 4 to 5 inches long. Messieurs les Ecrevisses were very friendly with the settlers and did everything they did. So when the Acadians built mud chimneys for their homes, the crawfish did the same.*

*However, they were so tired they couldn't complete their homes, and the crawfish did the same. They just crawled right into the chimneys and set up house.*

*On dit que (it is said that) when a bayou baby is 9 days old, if he sticks his finger in a crawfish mound, he will become a Cajun.*

Vicki Blackwell THE LEGEND OF THE CRAWFISH

That's the story, a little bit of lip service for a delicacy that's not wanting in support in Louisiana. These little red lobster look-alikes are deeply woven into the tapestry of the South. They flow by the hundreds onto tables and into mouths. People suck the juice from the heads, some go for the little morsels of meat in the claws, but the most prized of it all is the tail. That's the meat for crawfish pies, omelets, spaghetti and stews. It's the star of Cajun dishes like jambalaya, gumbo, étouffé, and of course, the traditional Louisiana crawfish boil.

"We've been having boils since I was a kid," said Lonnie Barbier, a life-long Louisiana resident. "It's always been a big weekend thing to do."

They start with a sack of live crawfish and rinse them well while the water boils in a large pot over the propane tank outside. This is where they add the seasoning, the corn cobs, whole mushrooms, garlic cloves and red potatoes—the recipe varies from person to person but it's all in preparation for the main dish, the crawfish. They take out the vegetables once they've cooked down and put the whole sack (or two) into the pot, maybe adding more seasonings like lemon, their favorite seafood boil and maybe even grabbing another beer for the wait. It doesn't take long and there's a feast for family and friends where they gather to talk, drink and indulge in a

true southern Louisiana dish.

"Crawfish boils are the same as family gatherings," said Barbier. "They serve as a way to create a good meal, as well as a time to just stop and gather to catch up with friends and family. Basically, it's a way to create a party wherever you live down here."

Come the months of February through June, the smell of crawfish is in the air and on the minds of almost everyone in Louisiana. Every seafood store advertises the goods by the pound. Restaurants boast of the in-season dishes, and whole festivals are built around the tradition.

There's the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival, the Louisiana Crawfish Festival in Chalmette, the Annual Crawfish Mambo: Cook Off & Music Festival on the lake and many more. Each give a huge dose of the culture through Zydeco and Swamp Pop music concerts, Cajun dance and cooking, but most of all, there's the crawfish. Crawfish races, crawfish cook-offs, crawfish eating contests, crawfish memorabilia and crawfish parades with their very own Crawfish Queen.

The cause for all of the celebration is centered solely around one food: the crawfish. It's an advertising gimmick, a source of full stomachs, art, music, and of course, gatherings. It's also a lucrative commodity for the state.

Louisiana is known for its wildlife and



Photo credit: Contributed



fisheries. Its home to 40 percent of the nation’s wetlands, and is an abundant source of both culture and commerce. Crawfish alone are a \$120 million industry, and the total economic impact of it on the economy exceeds \$300 million per year as reported by The Louisiana Crawfish Promotion and Research Board. Roughly 116,000 acres in the state are set aside for farms and ponds. The harvest is over 70 million pounds pond-raised and 8 million pounds of wild-caught crawfish. Other states do farming also, but according to the research board, Louisiana is responsible for 90 percent of the production in the U.S.

It’s such an integral part of the region that the crawfish was designated as the official state crustacean of Louisiana in 1963, making the state the first to designate an official crustacean. Maryland followed in 1983 with the blue crab, and in 2009 Oregon adopted the Dungeness crab. Still, only Louisiana is known as the “Crawfish Capitol of the World.”

David Dorris was born and raised in Utah, but he can remember his first time visiting Louisiana as a child and experiencing this thriving part of the food culture.

“Louisiana seemed like such an exotic and foreign place for a 5-year-old with the old houses, gators, snakes, humidity and music,” Dorris recalled. “My older sisters were creeped out by the shrimp with heads still on, and the crawfish and crab...I actually still have a small rubber crawfish that I brought home from that trip. I can remember throwing it in the tub or under the covers to scare my sisters.”

It wasn’t just the look of the seafood, but the taste that left a lasting impression, he said. One that he and his family has taken back home with him to Utah.

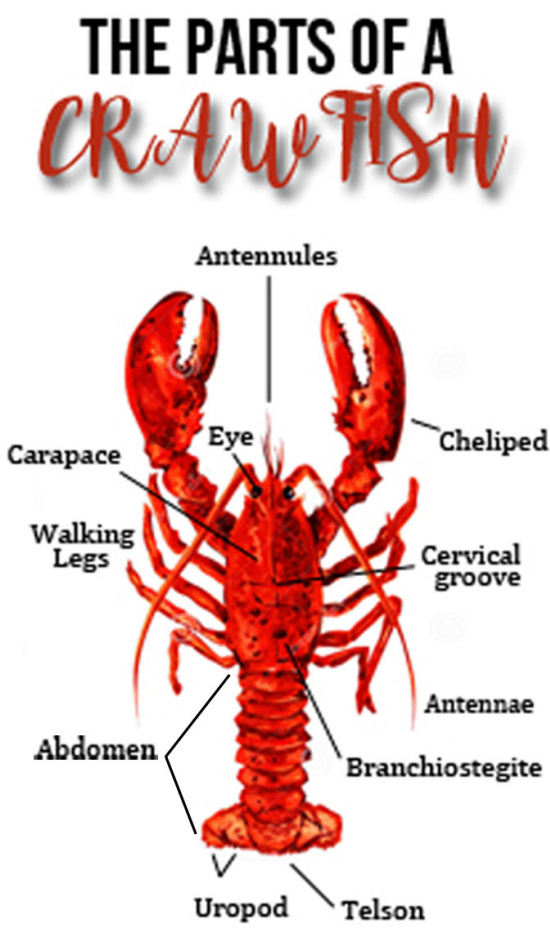
“After tasting all the good food we were all hooked... Our whole lives, my sisters and I always comment ‘These aren’t Louisiana shrimp and crab’ whenever we eat them. Each of us has always kept some Zatarain’s or Tony’s in our pantries to spice up any seafood.”

Dorris said all of the shrimp and crab where he lives in Salt Lake City are imported, and that crawfish are nearly nonexistent in Utah, except for the small relative of them that they call the “crawdad.” They’re only fished for by the very serious fishermen in the area, he said, and they are never seen on a menu in a restaurant.

“I definitely relate crawfish to southern culture,” Dorris added. “I’ve traveled many, many places and never eaten them or seen them anywhere but the South or at a restaurant that is devoted to the South.”

Unlike the folklore, crawfish were here for the reaping long before the Acadian settlers arrived. Native Americans were the first to eat these hearty little crustaceans, according to an Ag in the Classroom Louisiana factsheet, a commodity fact sheet compiled by the Louisiana Ag in the Classroom Program. They’d bait long reeds with venison and leave them sitting in the bayous for a short while, to later pull them up and harvest the crawfish clinging by their claws to the meat. In the 1800s commercial sale began, with most of the harvest coming from the waters of the Atchafalaya Basin. Improved methods, growing advances in technology and a growing taste for them over the years has helped to turn the little mudbug into a huge source of income for the state, and, inevitably, an emblem for Louisiana.

The culture has embraced the crawfish as its symbol that signifies the cuisine, attitude and abundance of its people. It’s seafood that’s not from the sea, steeped in legend, boiled to perfection and ready to be devoured. And it’s hard to imagine when looking at one with its hard, red shell, beady eyes and size no bigger than a few inches, but from the profit it brings, to the impressions it leaves, all the way back to the celebration it ignites every time it’s in season, the crawfish reigns supreme in Louisiana.



# French Quarter Festival

By Betsy Davis

## EXPERIENCE THE HEART OF NEW ORLEANS



*Tourists and locals roam the streets and dine on balconies.*

Photo credit: Contributed



A Saturday stroll through the center of the French Quarter Festival leaves no sensation unprovoked by the culture and life that has gathered in the city.

There’s the smell of food and beer, engine exhaust and cigarette smoke, urine and perfume. Even the breath of a passing stranger gets noticed because it all hangs so thick in the air of the crowd.

People are strung everywhere like the city’s own living decorations. They hang off balconies and holler at others below. They walk down the street clinging to hands they know. They stop and dance or watch and stare in amazement. Music pours from street musicians, out of barrooms, out of trumpets, guitars and saxophones on stages with tall, black amps. It bounces off white buckets that children bang on the street for a quick dollar, and the metal bottle caps on the shoes of the street dancers. Each tune has its own beat, volume and rhythm that calls people in its direction.

Local Patrice Bailey walks through it to the corner of Bourbon and St. Peter streets to a quieter spot, her eyes lit from streetlights and neon bar signs. She has a smile that’s shy, but easy to catch. She’s been here before and knows the sensations the festival stirs up and why.

“Music is universal,” she says leaning forward, dragging it out at the end and pausing. “It’s the language of love and it means something special to each individual person, so everyone comes here to this city right now

to see and hear something that speaks to them.”

And if it’s anything in the context of music, it’s here. There’s something calling throughout the Quarter for everyone, whether it’s blues, jazz, pop, country, funk or mixtures of everything in between. More than one thousand local musicians come to play 400 hours of music for this free four-day festival that draws crowds by the thousands.

“What other thing do more people gather for than to come and enjoy music?” Bailey questions. “It’s like a “soul gathering” here.” Referring to the time, money and effort of putting the festival together, she says that everyone here, from the musicians, to the street vendors, to the crowds themselves,

have to love New Orleans and the French Quarter to make this event what it is today.

New Orleans’ French Quarter Festival is second only to Mardi Gras as the biggest festival in the city. Tonight the festival is celebrating its 33rd anniversary, showcasing the art, food and music of the culture that draws hundreds of thousands of people, according to tourism officials. The festival has an economic impact of almost \$200 million for the city.

Tonight feels like the crest of it all. The smells waft through the air and are blown around by trumpets and shoulders of people laughing, talking and looking as they weave in and out of crowds. There are groups of them gathered around little stages down the streets

where bands are gathered to play. There’s some watching through windows that lead to the packed streets as they sample French cuisine. Others watch the ground so they don’t step in mysterious puddles that have been gathering in the gutters.

The sound of a lonely saxophone starts up nearby. The notes drift into the atmosphere, reaching as high as the street lamps, and Bailey turns her head toward their maker.

“I think that he’s just as important as someone who’s over there that’s making money doing that,” she says referring to the bands on one of the 33 stages scattered around or gathered in one of the dozens of barrooms. “I think that he’s someone who needs money, and that’s all he’s got to make it. That needs to be something that people care about. He has a gift.”

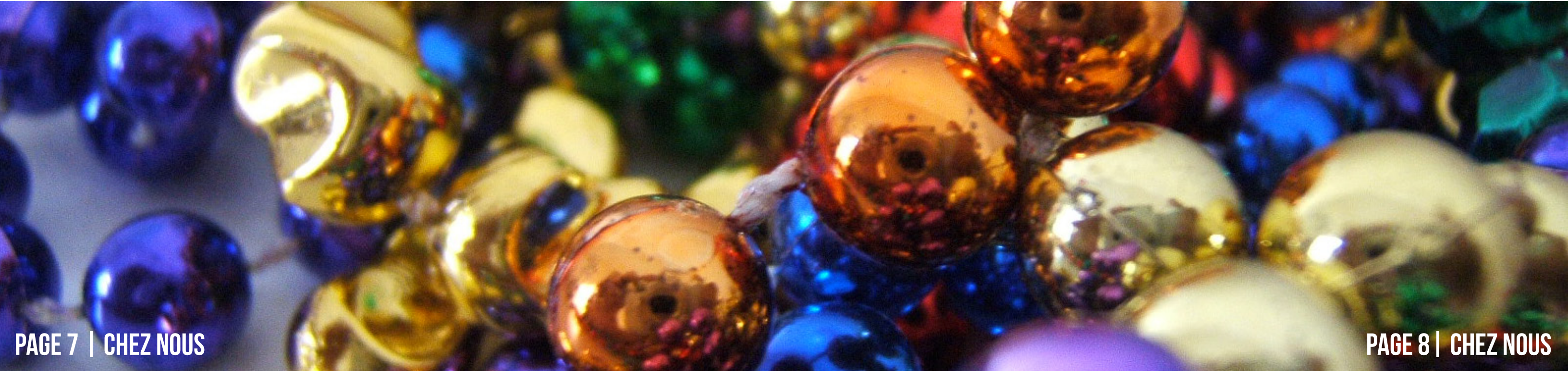
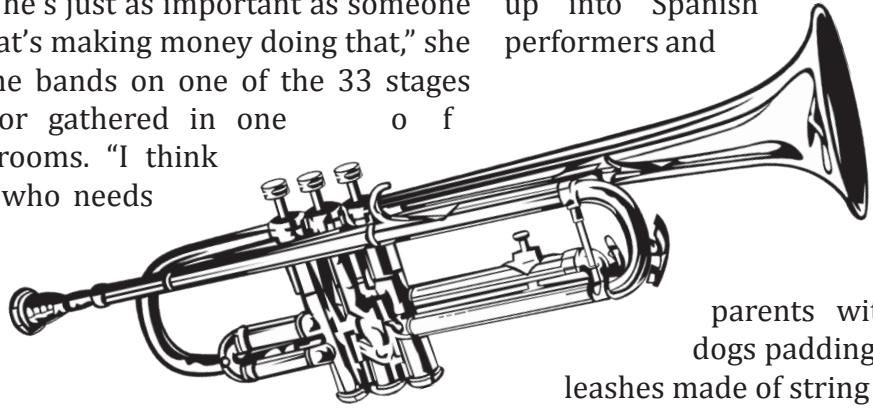
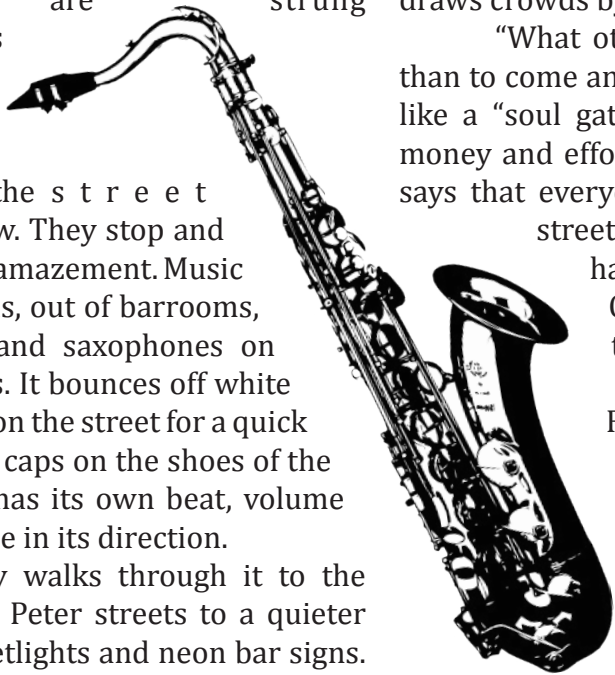
He stands a few yards down from her, alone and breathing life into his instrument. There’s something romantic about the whole scene that he’s made there in the street. He’s dressed mostly in black, aged like his instrument and the city surrounding him. There’s a bucket by his feet marked only by a dollar sign, and some people that have stopped to listen drop in change, then move on to whatever else is down the street. But he stays, and so does the source of his lonesome sounding tune.

Bailey hasn’t come for the festival, but is here because she can be, she says. She grew up here and still relishes the celebrations, festivities and just the city itself. Historic buildings almost overflow onto the city streets. Little gardens sprout up in-between them. Black wrought iron gates rim some, and tonight there are canvases of local art hanging in rows on display from them. Down an alley is a solo violinist. Off the main track that reaches from the river up into Spanish Plaza, there are street performers and bars with men standing outside, bouncing signs up and down that read “3 for 1 Beer In Here!” There are children walking past them, dangling from their parents with wide eyes. There are dogs padding across the dirty streets on

leashes made of string or rope. A smiling group of girls heads south, with the bottoms of their silk and polyester prom dresses a dingy brown from dragging along the street.

The smiles on the faces of people are the only other constant here, save for the music. The two convalesce and create the mood of the Crescent City tonight.

Bailey is close to disappearing in it, maybe called by the smell of something good to eat, the motions of a performer, or a rhythm that’s speaking only to her. Before she’s too submerged, she calls out the chaos around her for what it’s all about.





# The Art of Street Performing

BY BETSY DAVIS

SWOOSH TIPPITY-TAP TAP SWOOSH TIPPITY-TAP.  
IT ECHOES OFF HIS FEET AND SKIPS DOWN THE *Street*.  
SWOOSH TAP TIPPITY-TAP SWOOSH TAP TAP.  
HIS ARMS FLY OUT, BALANCE THE BEAT, AND SAY “LOOK AT ME!”  
TAP TAP TIPPITY-TAP SWOOSH TAP TAP.

So look. This is the sidewalk shuffle for a buck — a talent that grew from the gutter-grime into a cacophonous career. It's a trade beat by asphalt entrepreneurs, the rogue street executives that are looking through windows from the other side of the glass. Pay comes from the box at his feet marked by the dollar sign, a scene universally understood as the suggestion of a kind gesture in the form of loose bills and spare change.

Tap tippity-tap tap swoosh — clink clink falls the coins. He nods and shoots a quick glance to the box for inventory, but his rhythm doesn't falter. The passerby's loose change settles on top of the few dollar bills and coins already there, but it's not enough pay to stop for the day, and it's not even nightfall yet in New Orleans.

Terrance Pollard said he's been street performing for almost ten years now.

“I do this for a living. I just come out here when I got nothing to do and I can make some good money.”

*Street performers leave an open case or box nearby to collect tips.*

Photo credit: Contributed



He's tall, dark-skinned and skinny under his loose shirt and jeans. His youth shows in his complexion, but his eyes look older, creating a dissonance between how old he is and how long he's been around. Pollard set his scene today on Bourbon Street, situated at a safe distance of a few yards from the other performers so there won't be a battle over turf. "You have to respect the distance," he says, respect that there are others out here like him who are just trying to make enough money.

"But we're doing it for y'all too." With the word "y'all," he sweeps his arms across the panorama of people passing by in the street in front of him. Few have stopped to watch him or pay homage to his trade. In comparison, he's a blip in their peripheral sights and sounds that are caught up in the whirl of the surrounding city.

Right now, his legs are resting, quieting the tap of the bottle caps on his shoe soles and letting the other noises take over. Car horns, laughter, music from the bar and the chatter of people close in as he watches and says, "With all the tourists you can make a lot of money out here, about 10 racks a week." A "rack" being one grand.

A quick glimpse of his almost-empty collection box says differently, as do his clothes that are smeared a little with city dirt, and his money-making tennis shoes that are worn and dingy at the edges. He makes this claim with a playful grin that's coupled by a moments-worth of a glance before it fades. He leaves his statement in the air for just one second, not long enough to dispute it, then adds: "I taught myself how to do this. No one had to show me how 'cause for me it was pretty easy to pick up."

It was an opportunity offered up by the city, its

ability to draw crowds of thousands paired with his own determination to perform. He does it without music, flashy costumes or aggressive panhandling, just the bottle caps and his own choreography.

"I'm going to start trade school with this company that's about to hire me," he says. "I'll be retiring from this soon, but right now, I can come straight out here when I don't have anything to do and I don't get in trouble."

In the event of retiring, he'll be leaving his career to the others that stake a temporary plot throughout the street like Dan the Shoe Shine Man.

"I bet you I know where you got your shoes. You got your shoes on the bottom your feet, standing right cha' on Bourbon Street," and Dan laughs, raspy, loud but genuine.

Tap tippity tap tap tap tippity swoosh... Pollard's back at it but Dan leans in, legs still and eyes sparkling from his own laughter.

"I been doing this 25 years, and I started out tap dancing like him. Then I went to the other games like shining shoes and such, and this is how I make my living."

Dan says he does this because he enjoys it.

"I like to do this for a living because it's easy, fast money, and it's how I've always supported myself and my family."

Whether he means he likes the sheer hustle for cash or the freedom from a 9 to 5 it isn't clear. Dan is older than Pollard. His demeanor is softer, his moves are slower, and his stance is a little off, like he's being tugged in two directions at once.

"To stay on top I change up every year to something different," Dan says. "I been selling beads for the last seven months and made some

pretty good money so far but I'm gonna switch it up again soon."

He carries a plastic bag of Mardi Gras beads. Every color is shoved in there, mixed up like broken rainbows.

He looks around. Pollard is still tap tapping away and the city movement hasn't slowed.

Just like the echo of the taps, Dan unknowingly echoes Pollard saying, "I do this to stay out of trouble. It keeps me out of trouble to keep me out the jailhouse. I went from being out here with nothing, to being out here and making something."

The two men aren't standing far apart but their future prospects are polar opposites. Pollard says he's looking forward to a different career, whereas Dan couldn't be more content with

what he makes on a day-to-day routine of tapping, shoe shining, bead selling or whatever else he thinks will draw a customer. Their similarities are in the veins of performing, hustling and trying to avoid the trouble that calls from the city streets.

"Now, you can get arrested doing this," says Dan, a little quieter. "They've thrown me in jail a couple of times for 20 or 30 days for it. Oh yeah they have."

Pollard overhears and nods.

Tap tap tippity swoosh tap tap.

In the New Orleans Code of Ordinances under section 30-1456, street performing is stated as legal on Bourbon Street. What technically is unlawful is for any person to perform street entertainment on the street or sidewalk of Bourbon Street from the uptown side of Canal Street to the downtown side of St. Ann Street between the hours of 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. Technicalities in the French Quarter, however, are, well, just technicalities.

"It just depends on the situation. They can be arrested for numerous things," said Officer Davis of New Orleans Police Department's Eighth District Station. This is the district that's filled with street performers with almost every talent,

here to profit from the flocks of people that come for the city's bars, concerts, Cajun restaurants and festivals. "Public intoxication, aggressive panhandling, disturbances, noise issues...those are the reasons any of the performers would get arrested. Besides that, we don't usually bother with them—unless, of course, they are attempting to perform during the hours they are not supposed to. For them to perform, they don't need a permit but need to adhere to the ordinances."

Performing may have gotten Dan arrested, but conversely it's also kept him away from the more serious troubles like theft, drugs or other options that promise quick money offered by big cities like New Orleans. It's a trade for the lesser of the two evils.

Ordinances and regulations on street per-

formers can be confusing for both law enforcers and the performers themselves, making it complicated for the two to mutually coincide. In 2015, the Uni-

versity City Center and the Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans created the "Guide to New Orleans Street Performance in the French Quarter and Marigny," in an attempt to clarify things for both sides for just that reason.

The coalition compiled a handheld-sized pamphlet containing a street performer's code of etiquette, sound limits, list of law enforcement officials and a breakdown of what's allowed and what's prohibited by law for each side to have a quick reference. Copies were distributed by the thousands in October of that year to both performers and law enforcers.

"[A] key part of the guide is the street performer's code of etiquette which was created in 1996 by the Coalition to Preserve the Art of Street Entertainment," reported Richard A. Webster in The Times-Picayune. "It was developed to help performers regulate themselves, keep the peace and provide an enjoyable experience for residents, businesses and visitors."

Of the codes, there are things like don't block doorways, respect fire lines and emergency

**"I DO THIS TO STAY OUT OF TROUBLE. IT KEEPS ME OUT OF TROUBLE TO KEEP ME OUT THE JAILHOUSE."**





vehicle lanes, solve disputes reasonably, share space and clean up after the act. Included at the very bottom is: "Respect the right of others to live, work, visit and perform in the city."

A man painted as a statue stands still in the middle of the street in a mock stance for passersby. There are children in groups that bang on white buckets belting out their own beat. One woman has set up a magic act and has drawn a crowd of onlookers full of smiles and intrigue. Each performer accepts donations, which is how they legally conduct their trades on the streets. There is no price to walk by and take a peek, be entertained or divulge in their talents, just that lingering suggestion to offer them something to get by on.

Some have day jobs at offices or stores and are relishing in the art of performance. Some have aspirations like Pollard for a higher education and a trade in another field. And some, like Dan the Shoe Shine Man, are happy doing it for a living.

"I'm a street performer," says Dan, "and that's what I do."

He's not performing today, but instead grips his bag of beads and watches for customers to sell them to. They are plastic, various sizes and colors and two for \$5.

To sell handmade artifacts, a \$125 permit is required in accordance with section 110-78 of the city's ordinances, but Dan didn't make these beads. He walks around the streets as a mobile shop for anyone who wants add an extra something to their New Orleans experience with a genuine Mardi Gras bead from Bourbon Street. Maybe next month he

will have switched to yet another trade, but for now he's happy with his bag of broken rainbows.

Aside from the threat of possible altercations with the police, Dan said there is a more dangerous side to performing on the streets.

"Sometimes taxi cab drivers won't pick us up at night, and we have money," he says raising his eyebrows high. "It's too easy to get robbed on these streets 'cause somebody might recognize you and know that you been out here making money all day!" And with that his brows furrow back down, casting a shadow over his eyes.

Dan's fear is a viable one in a city that is reported by the New Orleans Uniform Crime Reporting as having 18,983 crimes in the year 2015 alone. These include murder, rape, armed robbery, assault, burglary and theft. When the sun goes down, walking home is a challenge with a day's earnings of cash and loose change that calls attention to itself with loud jingles from their pockets.

It's a challenge Dan and Pollard accept, though. They take it so they can do their grind against the grain, shuffle through the grit of the streets and make a beat for some spare change. The city feeds them, cherishes them, ignores them and maybe even locks them up, but it's always their stage. These avenue artisans that dot the streets, foot percussionists that keep the beat and unorthodox entrepreneurs live on it, either surviving or thriving depending on the day's donations. Some might even say they are the pulse of the city itself with their tap tap tippity swoosh tap — *clink clink*.

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