



Sala

in **TOLEDO**

Five years ago this week, I had just returned from a trip to New Orleans, where I had been visiting friends and doing a site visit of a client's annual conference. My husband, Dwight, who had traveled there with me, had stayed an extra week to work on compositions for the album he was then recording (later released as *Ataxia*), and write music for a future project.

For nearly fifteen years, New Orleans had been our second city, the adopted home of our closest friends and a destination for us at least once every year. During his extended stay in the Big Easy, Dwight had decided it was finally time to make "Nola" our home.

But days before his departure, a storm was gathering in the gulf that would change everyone's plans.

This past week, Nola began haunting me again. Like a proper ghost, she didn't make herself obvious. It began with obsessively playing a Bix Beiderbecke album, Dixieland accompanying me to work, the grocery, the park... then street musicians echoed her voice at an art fair, and suddenly, I saw her around every corner.

Of course, it was a news story about the anniversary of Hurricane Katrina that outed her. As soon as I heard it, I knew what had been following me. And, as every artist knows, the only way to deal with a ghost is to create something from it.

Five years after Katrina, one friend has died, the other has moved... and, just like the song, I miss New Orleans. But if I open my eyes, I see her spirit everywhere around me — even here in Toledo.

This booklet expresses how that spirit of Nola, five years after Katrina, caught up with me a thousand miles away. I share it with the hope that it might open your eyes to her spirit where you are, too.

— *Paula Ashley*



Please do not disturb...

New Orleans came bursting into my mind unexpectedly, like a hotel maid catching me in nothing but a towel. A thousand miles away in Toledo, Ohio, I haven't seen here in years, but suddenly, she's everywhere I look.

It started, of course, with music.

Comparatively rare in Northwest Ohio, a chance encounter with a group of street musicians demanded a photograph.

“Laborare Est Orare” goes the motto of my home town. Few Toledoans know their city’s motto, and even fewer know what it means — but in fact work IS prayer here in Toledo, and by that measure, its citizenry is indeed pious. But every now and then, we break into song, and even produce a world-class musician from time to time.



In contrast, harmony — and rhythm, and melody, and every other element of music — are as ubiquitous in The Big Easy as the brightly painted clapboard buildings that have sheltered music-makers there for hundreds of years. Can you imagine New Orleans without music? It's impossible — as impossible as Toledo without work.



But step back, away from the music, the crowds and the cheerful merriment of tourists, and a different picture emerges. Not always harmonious. Not always easy. And not always welcoming.



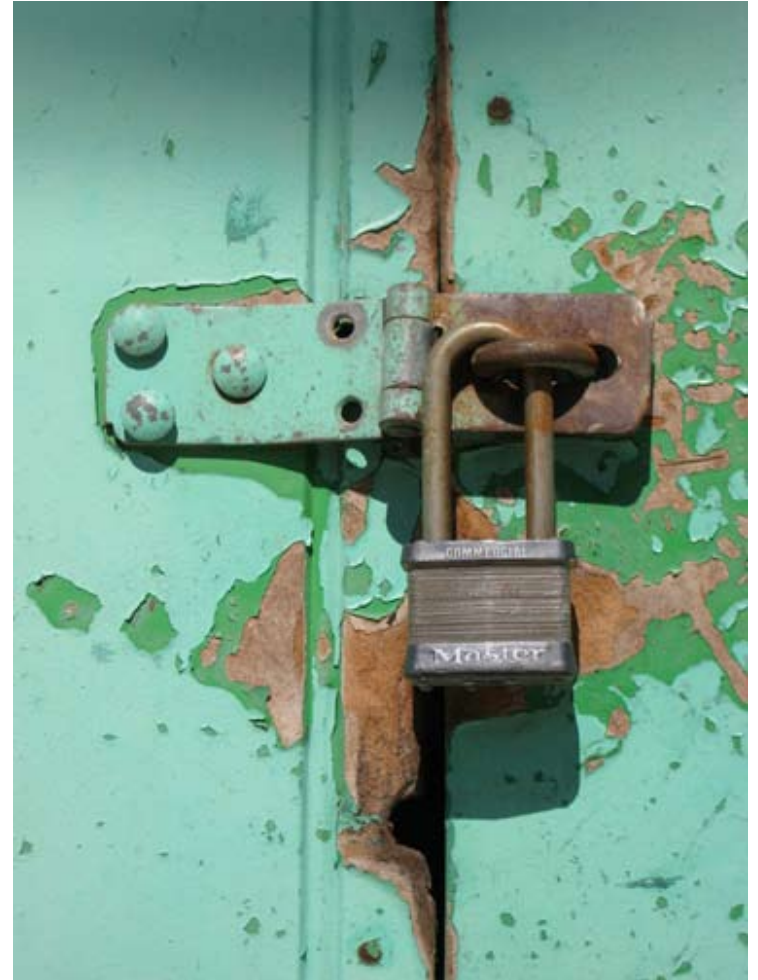


So... which is it? Welcome?
or No Trespassing?

Nola is, as her famous fictional daughter,
forever dependent on the kindness of strangers.
But even as she opens her arms wide to every
kind of misfit and miscreant, she also forbids
and dissuades.



The truth is, there will be some ground on which you can never walk in New Orleans, places haunted by ghosts of the past whose names you never knew, off limits by virtue of race, class, faith, or any of a host of things an outsider will never understand.





But no matter — follow her rules,
and Nola will take you in.

Of course, it's not always so simple.

Like the oracle of Delphi,
there is often more than one way
to interpret the words she whispers...



... and other times, she's simply baffling.





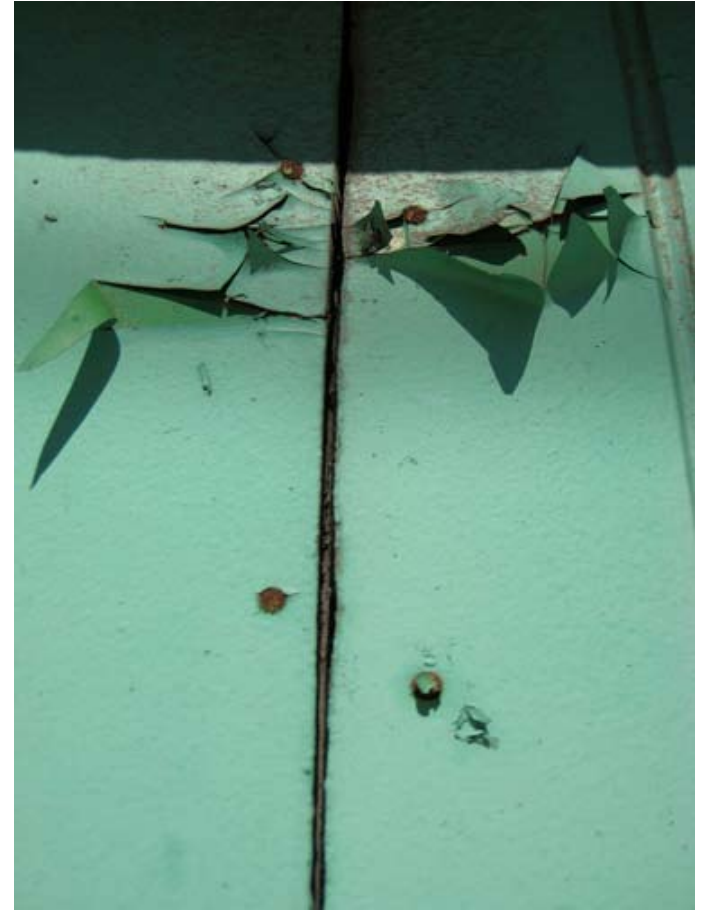
Of course, it's precisely that ambiguity, that unpredictability, that shadowiness that makes Nola so endlessly attractive to creative people of every kind — not just musicians, but artists, dancers, actors, filmmakers, authors, acrobats, costumers, chefs. At once traditional and radical, formal and free, Nola remains as she is by endlessly reinventing herself.



Past and present are
cheerful cohabitants...



... while a closer look at old surroundings
renders them strangely new again.







The stamps of freight haulers by an abandoned loading dock remind us that we're one in a long line of visitors in this town, and we won't be the last.





Toledo and New Orleans share a common fate as port towns whose great gaping warehouses were built for products and produce of a bygone day. Condos and coffee shops now occupy halls once filled with cotton, tobacco and tin.

But not all of these houses of commerce have been reclaimed. Old, empty buildings still stand, adding color and texture to what would otherwise be an ersatz historic district in each.

Vegetable Man...

You could hear his call as the morning fog lifted in Mid-City New Orleans... “Ah got watermelon! Ah got asparagus!”

In Toledo, “Garden Man” puts out a silent call to his neighbors to come and help themselves to the goodness of fresh garlic and green tomatoes from his urban garden (donations welcome).

Across the street, an enterprising restaurateur displays a menu that would be equally at home on Esplanade or Canal Street.





The curious contrast between sacred and profane is peculiarly potent in New Orleans. A bar in Uptown envelopes its patrons in walls covered with crucifixes. An author famous for lurid vampire tales makes her home in a former Catholic academy. And the Madonna can be seen everywhere across town.



Not surprisingly, religious symbols can begin appearing where you never noticed them before...



If there is one symbol that will forever evoke New Orleans for me, it's this: a fresh shock of green sprouting directly from a brick wall.

Laborare Est Orare... If Nola had a city motto, it might be Vita Est Orare — because in New Orleans, life itself is prayer, always reaching upward — even after disaster. Impossibly verdant, plants and people will both take root in the most unlikely places. Flowers spring from rocks, trees from walls ... and in like manner, her people live joyous lives in the most remarkable circumstances.



“How many times shall I forgive my brother?
Seven times?” asks Peter.

“Seventy times seven,” replies his Master.

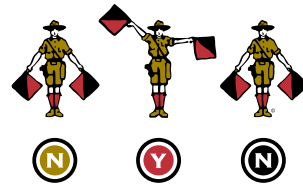
How many times will Nola weather her storms...
a dozen? A dozen times a dozen? She’s already
endured epidemics, encampment, blockade, and
defeat, returning every time to *laissez les bon temps rouler*
once again. Will she survive to weather another storm?
I’m playing her lucky number — and I’m playing it
to win.

Today, my home is Toledo — tomorrow, who knows?
I may never have an address that ends in NOLA... but
Nola will be with me regardless. Because wherever
I go, I’ll be searching for creativity, spirit, and a love
of life — and when I find it, there Nola will be.





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