



## BACK IN TIME

by Tony Beckwith  
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It was my first visit to the United States and everything was fascinating. Coming to New Orleans in the mid-1960s from Montevideo, Uruguay was like being fast-forwarded into the future. In the Greyhound bus station there were vending machines I'd never seen before, selling products I'd never heard of. And that was just my first stop. It was a very different world from the one I knew.

I was twenty years old, a 'road scholar' hitchhiking the Americas, searching for the meaning of life, or the next good time, whichever came first. I had been traveling north for several months after leaving home on a mission to see something of the world before I was too old, and had caught a ride from Mexico City to Laredo, Texas. From there I took a bus to Louisiana because my friend Keith was in New Orleans. He was studying economics at Tulane University but had a part-time job as a bartender at *Your Father's Moustache*, a lively place on Bourbon Street.

We went out for dinner to an open-air burger joint. My first real American hamburger tasted so fine I almost fainted on the spot. Later we prowled the city's nightspots, dallying at a low-down dive called *La Casa de la Marina* where they played the *Woolly Bully* so loudly I can hear it to this day, still throbbing somewhere on my mental jukebox\*.

The refrigerator in Keith's kitchen was an old, round-shouldered model with one of those little metal freezer compartments at the top. There was no door on the freezer compartment, of course, so the ice build-up was a chronic problem. One day someone (it may have been me) used a screwdriver (perhaps a little too enthusiastically) to pry

the ice off the metal surfaces, and I learned all about something called Freon. I must have been absent the day they covered refrigeration at school because this was all new to me. But that's the whole point of setting off to see the world.

After a few days I was out of clean clothes. Keith said we'd go to the laundromat, which was very exciting because I'd never seen one before. As a student on a tight budget, his apartment was in a poorer, more or less segregated part of town. The laundromat was a couple of blocks away and had a sign in the window: *Whites Only*. I said, "What am I going to do about my coloured shirts?" Keith burst out laughing as I stood puzzled, unsure why he found my remark so amusing. He'd forgotten what it was like, but said he was just as naïve when he first arrived from Uruguay, not that long ago. There were so few non-white people back home that we had no experience of racial tensions—of that particular type at any rate.

In the evenings, while Keith was at work, I explored Jackson Square and the French Quarter, and the jazz halls, and the length and breadth of Bourbon Street, which kept me busy far into the night, wandering the streets, window shopping and people-watching. A greasy spoon on St. Ann Street offered a cheap and delicious bowl of red beans and rice and a chance to eavesdrop on conversations in Cajun English, the French-influenced dialect that reflected the city's multicultural history. I had never heard anything like it. Later on, with a cup of strong

chicory coffee in hand I walked down from the Café du Monde to watch the mighty Mississippi rolling by on its way to the Gulf of Mexico.





## BACK IN TIME ...Continued

In the wee small hours I drifted back to the *Moustache*. It was nearly closing time and the crew was cleaning up, so I took a rum-and-coke and parked myself out of the way by the back door. It was a hot night, and the door was open to the alley. A handful of men were gathered out there, shuffling back and forth and talking amongst themselves like connoisseurs. "You cain't beat it when it's been a big bourbon night," said one.

"Hell no, red wine! Red wine! Gimme that good red wine!" sang another.

"It don't make me no never-mind, man, just so it don't have too much club soda. All that gas 'bout kills me."

They were winos, gentlemen of the alleys, bums looking for a nightcap. The *Moustache* had a long-standing and immensely popular tradition: all the slops from the night's business went into a tub at the end of the long bar.

Whatever came back in customers' abandoned glasses was tipped into the tub and left to ferment till the end of the night. The foaming concoction, regardless of its flavour, was called *Old Tennis Shoes* and was sold out the back door at twenty-five cents a pint. Four pints for a dollar! Sales were brisk.

The Quarter was beautiful at daybreak. The light was pearly soft and glistened off the cobbles. The air felt heavy and damp blowing in from the Gulf. As the sun came up we drove home through city streets, gleefully taunting people on their way to work with the chant, "Nine-to-five! Nine-to-five!" It was an excellent time to be an economist and a road scholar on the streets of New Orleans.

[\\*Click here to listen to the Woolly Bully](#)

## PARAPROSODKIANS\*

\*Paraprosdokian is a figure of speech, which is little known by the general public, but is well understood by satirists. The key feature is that the final words make the listener reinterpret the first part of the sentence.

- Where there's a will, I want to be in it.
- The last thing I want to do is hurt you. But it's still on my list.
- Since light travels faster than sound, some people appear bright until you hear them speak.
- If I agreed with you, we'd both be wrong.
- We never really grow up, we only learn how to act in public.
- War does not determine who is right - only who is left.
- Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit,... Wisdom is not putting it in a fruit salad.
- To steal ideas from one person is plagiarism. To steal from many is research.
- I didn't say it was your fault, I said I was blaming you.
- In filling out an application, where it says, 'In case of emergency, Notify:' I put 'DOCTOR'.

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what?

- Women will never be equal to men until they can walk down the street with a bald head and a beer gut, and still think they are sexy.
- You do not need a parachute to skydive. You only need a parachute to skydive twice.
- I used to be indecisive. Now I'm not so sure.
- To be sure of hitting the target, shoot first and call whatever you hit the target.
- Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car.
- You're never too old to learn something stupid.
- I'm supposed to respect my elders, but it's getting harder and harder for me to find one now.
- Do not argue with an idiot. He will drag you down to his level and beat you with experience.
- A clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.

