

The Yat is Back!

Following my last column, I had an email from her. I hadn't heard from her in over ten years. She and her husband moved away from the Bay to the Carolinas. There she resumed her work as a Mail Lady. Now, many years later after the death of her husband, she moved back to the Pass Christian area and attends church at Holy Trinity parish. She wanted to update me on what has happened with her family.

Missy is a New Orleans diehard. She is a complete "Yat" and proud of it. She is grounded in all the Yatisms of New Orleans and lives them. Her conversations ebbed and flowed with all the banter and chatter of a Yat steeped in her surrounding culture. She was proud of it and shared it with all its nuances. Now, she had returned much closer to her roots as if from a foreign country.

She was an Extraordinary Minister of the Eucharist at the parish and a frequent visitor to the office to engage in some Vatis conversations. One of her specialties was her Red Velvet Cakes, especially around birthdays and holiday times.

She is still grounded in her faith and church that continues to nourish her. Her son serves in the Navy and will retire in four years. "He is married with 2 kids of his own and raising one from his wife. Please keep him in your prayers to come back to the church, his wife has an upper hand on not being catholic. It breaks my heart but I give it to God, where all things are possible," she asks.

She ends her email by saying: "Anyway I'm glad to know how to reach out to you, I think of the old times often and smile. I also think of how you helped me when I was moving, I will never forget that. Hope all is well, you look really good as a farmer! You take care and I will keep in touch if that's ok..."

Some years ago, my niece did some research on her mother's family background and roots. She discovered some first cousins of her mother that lived in the New Jersey area and no one had known about or ever met. Through a series of exchanges, contacts were established and a visit between cousins took place in New Jersey back in 2020. Since then, communication continued.

Last week, another visit happened. This time, two cousins visited with their cousins in Ireland in Ireland for the first time. A gap of over a century was bridged as the visitors visited places that began to reconnect them with their own roots. A foreign destination became a home away from home, a place that connected families with history and places with memories to savour.

Both Missy's email and the visit of the "cousins" brought to mind a sadder chapter in the roots connection. One of my mother's brothers had to emigrate to England in the 1940's. He was to spend his working life working in a car manufacturing plant in England. He did not have the privilege of a high school education as the country was still feeling the effects of British oppression for centuries.

Yet, he married there and raised a family. He made sure that his children were given the opportunity to be fully educated. One of his sons became a University lecturer and the other the Headmaster of a prestigious high school.

One of the sons saw his father as ignorant, uncultured and lacking in finesse because he didn't have a high school education. His father was a poor but simple Irishman who lacked intelligence and sophistication because of lack of high school education. What he failed to realize was, while he himself enjoyed the privilege and opportunity of a full education; his father, while not having that privilege because of centuries of oppression and colonization, did not have such opportunities and yet was willing to sacrifice so his children could have such. Maybe, someday, education will give way to a wisdom that only history and a common sense when the latter will succeed.

My brother-in-law often asks why I never got used to drinking coffee instead of tea. Maybe, back when I was a baby, and family cows didn't produce enough milk, my mother had to substitute tea in my baby bottle rather than milk. Maybe, it has more to do with my rootedness; how and where my life has been anchored over the years.

Maybe, like my cousin, we sometimes feel disconnected and unrooted because of our biases and misunderstandings of history. Maybe, because of reconnecting cousins of last week's visitors, we feel more rooted and complete once the connection is complete and, maybe like Missy, when you are a "Yat" you might as well be a Yat for life because that is who you are.