

Day Trip to Paradis

By

David Myers

Chief Parfait took the Huey Long Bridge and headed west out Highway 90. He passed the circle that would have taken him along the river to Westwego. He passed another turn that would have taken him upriver past Avondale Shipyards to Waggaman. As he drove further out 90, he glanced to the left to where he used park his truck and take the short walk to Bayou Segnette, years ago. There had been a spot where he'd catch as many green trout as he wanted. He would keep a few of the bigger for dinner and throw the rest back.

The drive down Highway 90 west took him to Cajun country. After coming to a sign that marked the town of Paradis, Chief came to a road on the right that he knew well. It was a rough road surfaced with clam shells, but it offered a convenient place to cross the railroad tracks. He took it. Finding Dale Aupiéd's place would be no problem now. All he had to do was follow the road until it ended at the bayou. He eventually turned into a driveway bordered by palmetto and a privet hedge. The potholes forced him to drive slowly and as he did, he glanced to his right. Just beyond the hedge he spotted Aupiéd's wife, Rose. What he actually spotted was Rose's head moving slowly, behind and along the hedge, parallel to the driveway. Her head would rise and lower, slow and speed up as she traversed the length of the hedge line.

"That old coonass was telling the truth!" Chief thought, incredulously.

His mind replayed a story the old Cajun had told the crew on the Luling Bridge job earlier in the week.

"Donald Denise! Let me tell you dis and see what you tink," the old Cajun said, winking at Buddy. "I was workin' dat job at Monsanto and I come home and when I pass by the hedge, I see Rose head movin' along the yard behind the hedge. I say "What dat Rose doin' behind da hedge?" Before I pull in the driveway and while I can see just her head, I notice she go slow, then go fast, then go slow again. When I pull in the driveway, I see Rose done taped up a alligator's mout wit duct tape, put the pony saddle on dat gator wit a rope aroun' his snout and is ridin' dat ting in the front yard!"

"You're full of crap, you old coonass."

"No I ain't, Denise. About the time I got out the ole truck, dat gator flipped Rose off its back and slap her wit his tail. Man, I never see Rose so mad. She go on ova to da porch and get her twenty-two. She walk back and choot that alligator in da head."

"Den she say, "I was gonna put yo ass back in da bayou but now I'm gonna have you for suppa."

"Den she look at me and say, "Hey Aupiéd! You cut off dis alligator tail and get it ready fo da fryer!" I did what she say."

“And one mo ting. My wife given name is Rosemary. Don’t ever call her dat, no. She’ll whoop you good. Just call her Rose.”

Clearing the hedge line, Chief got out of his truck, walked to the edge of Dale’s yard. He stood laughing, hand on hips. He watched in amusement as Rose methodically traversed in even rows across the length of the yard on a lawn tractor, blades obviously cutting, with its traveling horsepower delivered by one of the stout Aupiéd sons. The young man pushed steadily, his oak-stump legs churning powerfully and almost effortlessly. Rose sat atop the tractor wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat and sunglasses, shouting commands in Cajun French. She steered with precision and purpose, and with each pass another of the Aupiéd sons would appear out of nowhere and relieve the previous. This scene continued, repeating itself with each strip of mowing, three big Cajun boys each pushing for one pass at a time. On seeing Chief, Rose smiled broadly and waved. She yelled to Tee Dale, and pointed at Chief.

“Plus vite!” she shouted.

Tee Dale smiled and continued pushing. Within seconds the mower was moving so quickly that Rose began having trouble steering.

“Trop vite, Tee Dale! Trop vite!”

The boy continued churning his big legs. He gave one last shove and relented, allowing his mother to eventually coast to a stop.

Chief lifted Rose, who was barefoot, and carried her across the shell driveway to the front gallery of the house. He set her down and, in return for his effort, received a kiss on the lips. Rose, or Rosemary as she had been christened, was taller than most Cajun women. She had the dark features and slender build for which French women are so often admired. Dale called from inside.

“Rose! You done with dat lawn, you?”

“Yeah Aupiéd. Votre ami est ici.”

“Who dat?”

“C’est Chief.”

At this Dale came out to greet his friend.

“Hey Chief. You come fo dat flatboat, you?”

“Yeah, Dale. Is that it?”

“Yeah, dat’s it. I’m giving you dat trailer as lagniappe.”

“Thank you, my friend.”

“And you know dat flatboat all welded – no rivet in it.”

“I know, Dale.”

“Go catch you some big fish in dat lake, you. Some shrimps, too.”

“I will. Hey Rose, what’s up with them boys of yours. You tryin’ to get them in shape for football?”

“No, Chief. Ma mower drive shaft broke. Dose boys earnin’ their keep.”

“Good idea, Rosemary.”

“You call me Rosemary again; I’ll whoop yo ass. I know Dale put you up to dat!”

“Sorry. I meant to say Rose,” Chief said, winking at Dale.

“Ha! I saw dat and I knew I had dat right! You betta watch yourself, Aupiéd! Anyway, I got étouffée on da stove. You come in here and eat.”

“I love you, Rosemary,” Chief said. She ignored him, trying to hold back a smile.

After supper Dale hooked up the boat to Chief’s truck and Chief gave him five hundred dollars. The men shook hands and Chief pulled out of the driveway and back onto Cajun Paradis Road. He turned on his truck radio and dialed it in to 870 A.M. hoping to catch Hap Glaudi talking Saints football.

Day Trip to Paradis is an excerpt from the novel *Page Thirteen – Chief* by David A. Myers
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