

The Sweetness of Youth

by Sandy Ebner

On my twenty-second birthday, in the spring of 1979, I had a crawfish boil, my first. Ninety pounds of red mudbugs on a picnic table spread with newspaper, my birthday cake sitting at the end of the table like an afterthought.

I hadn't been raised in Louisiana, but no one cared about any of that. My friends treated me like I was a local. After we ate we played pool at a bar downtown. Full of crawfish and Dixie beer, I drank shots of peppermint schnapps and flirted with the boy at the next table, telling him yes when he asked if I'd like to go to the city.

We drove uptown, to Tipitina's---this in the days when tourists hadn't yet discovered it was the best place in town---and later, long after midnight, to the Dungeon, just off Bourbon, where I would navigate the steep wooden stairs on my way up to the bar, trying not to fall, drunk with desire for this boy I barely knew.

When the sun came up we took the old Hammond Highway home, driving through the bayous with the car windows open, WRNO cranked up loud, taking our youth and freedom for granted because we didn't yet know any better.

