

**Baton Rouge Parish Folklife Survey
Louisiana Division of the Arts**

**March 25-April 3, 2015
June 3-4, 2015**

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FIELDNOTES

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2015
Getting Started**

Knit Wits Revisited

On a hunch, I went to CC's this morning, as I thought the Knit Wits might be there. It occurred to me they might have information about cakes . . . which they did. Right off the bat, they told me about a young woman who makes cakes out of her home, Theresa Brown. Her business is Mama T's and it is in Denham Springs. Jane Garrison—who is also a Knit Wit and who recognized me from last year, when I visited the Remember Me Quilt Guild—was Theresa's teacher. Theresa Brown has had the business for two years, but she has been making cakes a lot longer than that.

The ladies also mentioned Ambrosia, which is already on my radar.

Since I was there, I took a few photos—some of the old guard were there, including Brenda, Louise, Birdie, and Becka. Tanya is out in California for a few months, accompanying her husband for work. They are still making items for the Family Resource Center, the outfit in Denham Springs that provides training and handmade incentives for young women to keep or adopt out their babies, as opposed to having an abortion. The young women who participate in this program first receive a diaper bag made by another group, but the bag stays at the center. Each week they come to a class, the young women go to the “store” at the center and pick out another item—booties, hats, blankets, etc. to go into their diaper bag, which they eventually take home full, pending their completion of the classes. The Knit Wits make booties, hats and blankets.

They are also making chemo caps for the Baton Rouge Cancer Center—they started out with Lady of the Lake, but saw that this unit already had a whole closet of caps, that they didn't need any more. Now they make it a policy to check first—to visit a potential recipient and see what the need is, before giving them any goods.

They make hats for the homeless, through Bishop Ott (now deceased) at St. Vincent de Paul.

They talked again about the “trunk yarn,” which is often given to them by the family of someone who has passed away. Someone in the group brings the yarn to CC’s in the trunk of her car. They all gather around and each person picks what she wants. Since they need light yarn for baby things and chemo patients, any yarn that is not suitable for those purposes goes into the hats for the homeless.

Then, they also make things for “anybody in need,” as they say.

Last week, 16 of the group went to Diamond Point, Mississippi to visit a yarn shop.

I sat next to Birdie Sandifer—she was one of the first people I talked to last year at the Knit Wits. She brought up her husband’s carving group again. The larger group is the Pelican Woodcarving Guild, which meets at the BREC Center (Thursdays, 9:00 am) on Sharpeau, but this is a smaller group that meets at Birdie’s husband’s workshop ever Wednesday morning. Birdie dialed her husband, Clyde, and I talked to him from CC’s for a bit. He told me that it is Audrey Kirk to whom I should really talk, as she started the group. She has been a guild member for years, and is also the liaison with the VA system. The canes are made upon request—they receive a request and then make it and deliver it to the veteran. I didn’t ask whether the vets are always wounded. Clyde said I wouldn’t get to see many canes if I come to their meeting next week, as they are all given away. They might have a few on hand, just in case.

The smaller group consists of about 8 9 people who get together to work on independent projects—but this is the group who carves the eagle heads. Clyde explained that this is a small group activity, as not everyone in the larger guild has the skills to make these. He said that he has only been carving for five years. He told me, “What I do is remarkable. God gave me a gift when I desperately needed a gift.” He is a retired chaplain and engineer. He has become pretty good at carving, he told me, and has taught classes. He said that I was welcome to come to their meeting next week. He gave me his number, so I will call. It’s their land line.

Jane Garrison, also at the table with the Knit Wits this morning, told me an interesting story, about how she has had four brain aneurisms. She said for a while, she was really incapacitated, not really able to do much of anything. Her quilting friends picked her up and brought her to guild anyway, tried to keep her involved with things. She told one of them at one point that she thought she might be ready to knit. They were skeptical but she insisted. She wasn’t ready to cut out fabric yet. So one friend drove her to a yarn store, and she bought some yarn and needles and was able to do it. Long term memory, she said—knitting was something she has learned to do long ago. This was her first footstep back to any kind of normal life.

She eventually began cutting 4” squares for quilting. It took her a very long time to cut one out, but it was a start and she kept working at it, with her friends’ encouragement. “My friends saved my life,” she told me.

Jane told me this at lunch—the group invited me to join them for lunch at Jasmine’s, so I did that. When I drove into the little strip mall where it is located, I saw a doughnut shop, Mom’s Donuts, which had a giant photo of a purple, green and gold doughnut in the window. That was a first for me, but I later learned that this is nothing that unusual—there are green, gold and purple everythings everywhere around here—according to Maida.

After lunch, I stopped in at Mom’s Donuts and talked to Sun Kim, who owns the shop. I told her about our project, and she showed me photos in her cell phone of Mardi Gras doughnuts, LSU doughnuts, King Cakes she has made—which are baked, not fried. She was sold out of the Mardi Gras and LSU doughnuts, but she said if I came early tomorrow morning, I would be welcome to take photos of her making them, that there would be plenty. She said I could return at 4:00, after she closes, to interview her. I showed her the LFP Baton Rouge Survey website, so she could see what the project was about. She makes the Mardi Gras and LSU doughnuts every day, not just at Mardi Gras time. She showed me a photo of her King Cakes—she puts the baby in there if people request it. I told her I would come early tomorrow morning, around 5:00, 5:30. She has several regular customers who come in early, then there are more who come later. Another doughnut shop has opened up in the neighborhood and is cutting into her business, so it has been slow lately.

She told me some about her life—she is having a hard time lately. She has three children, but their father died about ten years ago. She works seven days a week, from 4:30 am until 4:00 pm or later, so is very tired. She talked about the Korean community here in Baton Rouge, how they used to have a crawfish boil every year—local business owners contributed. But they haven’t done it for the past two years. I could tell that she missed it, that she likes to be with her community. She moved first to Hawaii from South Korea, then to New Orleans, then to Baton Rouge in the 1980s. Previously, she had a seafood shop with her children’s father (as she called him), before opening the doughnut shop.

From there, I went to the Jones Creek Branch Library, as Birdie had said I would be able print copies of the fieldwork letters of introduction. She and Jane Garrison would be teaching a free knitting class there. I arrived at the library and was referred to Joy Ferrara, the reference librarian, who turned out to know Maida. She was extremely helpful, allowed me to make copies for free, which was very nice. She was previously married to an Italian man and was actively involved in the Italian community in New Orleans, where she is from, so took interest in helping me to find contacts for St. Joseph’s altars and cakes. The leads she gave me are the same that Maida gave me—Cypress Springs and the Grandsons of Italy.

Joy talked about how in New Orleans, people tend to hold the St. Joseph’s altars in their homes, as opposed to in a public place. The idea is that, if you are poor, then you come eat for free. If you are of means, then you make a donation to help others. The idea is that the food and a tableau are gifts to thank St. Joseph. Joy talked about the two oldest Italian delis in Baton Rouge, Anthony’s Italian Deli and Pocrella’s. She thought they might have a connection with St. Joseph’s Day.

Joy talked about the tradition of putting a dry fava bean in your purse or wallet—it's not about getting rich, but always having enough to get by. This is a St. Joseph's Day tradition.

We talked about groom's cakes and Joy looked up a bunch of places—I'll put them in my contacts. These were in addition to the others I had learned about from Maida and include Cake Goddess Bakery—A Sugar Art Studio, Fairy Dust Cakes (which turned out to be documented in Cherry Levin's article about Groom's Cakes), and Sweet Impressions Bakery and Café on Greenwell Springs Road.

We talked about the groom's cake tradition. We looked at photo galleries for some of the shops mentioned above and I was blown away by them—many just don't even look like cakes. She talked about the armadillo groom's cake in the film, *Steel Magnolias*, which had red frosting on the inside, to look like blood when you cut into it. Joy's colleague in the library is from South Carolina and says that they have the groom's cake tradition there—they think it might be a Southern tradition.

Joy said that the groom's godmother cuts the groom's cake, that that is part of the tradition. She told me about cutting her godson's cake.

Joy told me an interesting story, about how when her mother was in a Catholic nursing home, Baum's came for a special wedding day event. Evidently, the grandmother from the Baum's family was in there at the same time. They were holding a "wedding day" activity, so the residents' families were encouraged to bring wedding memorabilia. Joy brought her mother's wedding dress and some photos. The Baum family decorated a cake for the residents to watch the process and then they ate it. Evidently, they were there for hours working on it.

Joy also looked up panaderias—there are a few here in town.

I noticed a flyer for a group that meets at the Jones Creek Branch—Crochet Compassion with Plastic Bags. This is a plarn making and crochet workshop—and the teacher is Geri Stark, one of the people I learned about last year, in connection with the plarn and The Red Shoes. But she is not my current contact for the project—I was told by an associate of Geri's to go to the source, the First Baptist Church, where they have a ministry for this. So that is on my radar, too, to call Kathleen Carroll to go document that. The Jones Creek group meets from 1:00 3:00 pm the first Tuesday of every month.

Jones Creek branch maintains a very busy schedule—Joy said that they are scheduled out for the year, practically. There was a very interesting lecture taking place on jazz in the room next to the knitting class. The knitting class is just taking off, but was quite full—there were people there of all ages.

I emerged from the library and called Susan Thornton, Mom's friend. She had wanted to set me up with a group that gathers in a community center to do hand quilting but I missed them last year. When I called, she remembered me from last year. She perked up when I told her about

the hats—she knows people who wear them to church, and in fact she wears them, too—but not the big ones. She was at work—she works at a school. She said that someone had just walked out wearing a big hat, she said! I am going to go visit her tomorrow morning, for a face to face visit, and she is going to try to connect me with people who wear hats. She was going to her church this evening—so she is clearly active in her church, or so it would seem. So that is promising.

On a hunch, I called to check in with Maida. Glad I did! We talked about the doughnuts—they are getting far afield of the cakes. Maida said that a lot of people make cakes in their homes—so Theresa Brown is not unique, and not a priority for the survey. It's not about the newcomers, but more about longevity. Maida mentioned that the LoC is especially interested in intergenerational and longstanding businesses—and definitely storefronts, not home based businesses. So I will not go to Mom's Donuts in the morning—I'll be in touch with Sun Kim to let her know. If need be, I can talk to her before I go, but this is not a priority. We also talked about the panaderias—since the New Pops project covered so many ethnic cultural traditions, that is not a focus this time around. It was helpful to touch base with Maida and hone the focus for the research.

Baum's is the oldest bakery in Baton Rouge. Ambrosia's is *the* place currently—it's where the society ladies go for their wedding cakes these days. And Gambino's began in New Orleans and has opened a shop here, is very well known.

Another Piece of Cake in Denham Springs is also a priority for the survey.

THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2015

Susan Thornton, Church Hats

What a day! It's been a full and productive day. I began by visiting Susan Thornton at the ICARE Educational Annex on Tunica. We sat in a little conference area and probably talked for about an hour. I told her about the work I am here to do and she mentioned that I just missed Mardi Gras, and talked about what a big deal it is here. They had an event for the school children, they had a parade and the focus was on education. She had to get up at 4:00 am one morning to get her daughter dressed for that, as she wore a costume. She said it's a great time, people just relax, have fun, take the day off, don't sleep much. She said that I should put it on my bucket list, that everyone should experience it at least once! She mentioned that in New Orleans, they take a full week off.

She mentioned Mikey's Donuts, on Airline, where they make the best doughnut king cake, she thinks. They are a family owned business and she thinks there is only one, that it is not a franchise. I asked Susan if she got her king cake there and she said no, she got hers at Ambrosia's. She also told me that her niece is getting married in July and that is where she is going for her bride's and groom's cake. I asked if she knew what the groom's cake was going to be like and she said she thought it had something to do with music, as her niece's fiancé is a musician. She called her up on the phone and asked her. We learned that it was going to be a

double stacked sheet cake with a photo of her fiancé's bass guitar on it. There is a process, I guess, for transferring photos to the fondant.

Susan asked me how she could help. I told her it would be great to get her thoughts on the best places to buy hats and to talk to people who wear them. She made a few calls while I was sitting there, and the people she called—Millie Green and Jescenia Crenshaw (Susan's biological mother)—said it would be fine for me to call them. Susan gave me their phone numbers—and so opened those doors for me. She also called someone named Betty who has a daughter who sells hats out of her home, does showers and such. Betty seemed not to be in good health at the moment, it didn't seem like a good time to call on her.

We talked about how Easter is coming up and that ladies have to have a new Easter outfit every year. Susan's daughter lives in Atlanta and will be working on Easter Sunday. I don't remember just where she works, but she'll be alone, in an office of some sort. But she told Susan she was going to dress up anyway, just because it was Easter.

Susan told me to text her if I need contacts for more hat ladies. She called her brother and said, when you think of *hats*, who's the first person you think of? At one point, she said he seemed to get a little offended, because he thought that their mother was the biggest hat person, but Susan had to qualify that by saying, the biggest *living* hat person. This is serious business!

Susan attends the New Home Worship Center, at 3000 Tecumseh. She said I was welcome to come—there may or may not be hats there that day. But she thinks that Millie Green's church might be a place to see hats. Millie is the First Lady (pastor's wife) of her church. It is a Southern Baptist church. Millie used to work with Susan at ICARE, where we were meeting. She is retired now.

Susan's "mom"—the person she refers to as her mother—is someone other than Jescenia, her biological mother. Susan said that her mom adopted her out. Susan's mom wore hats and Susan has photos her wearing them.

We talked about the generational changes—how hats were really important for her mother's generation, but less so for Susan's generation and her daughter's generation. Susan sometimes wears small hats, but they are mostly for practical purposes—when it is cold out. She had some interesting things to say about the reason for these generational shifts. She said that there was a cost factor for her mother's generation. Her mother was a housekeeper, who never learned to read. She didn't have the money to get her hair done, to go to the beauty parlor. So, if she was having a bad hair day, which was often, Susan said, then she could cover her hair with a hat. In contrast, Susan's generation spends a lot of money on going to the hairdresser—she has a standing bi weekly appointment—and there is no way she is going to cover her hair with a hat after spending so much money on having her hair done.

For her mother's generation, your hat became a conversation piece, a statement piece. The bigger and shinier, the better. There was a saying, "The bigger the better, the longer the

feather.” Also there are a lot of unspoken rules about hats. You don’t want to wear the same hat twice—you need to leave some time in between, before you can wear the same hat again. This was where you got your pride and recognition in church. Where you got that good feeling. Her mother cleaned houses. No one looked at her in her uniform. Sundays, when she wore her good clothes to church, was the time when she could shine.

Susan said that Hilton, on Government Street, is a well known place to get hats. They have dresses, too.

Susan said that she would be shopping with Jescenia (her biological mom) on Saturday, for Jescenia’s Easter outfit, and that I was welcome to meet them. They would be starting at Sears at Cortana Mall at 10:00. If they didn’t find what they were looking for there, they would continue on to the Burlington Coat Factory.

Also, Susan told me that on Tuesday, at the Dr. Leo S. Butler Community Center, the seniors would be meeting and they would be having Hat Day. This was the same group that she wanted to connect me with, with the quilters. Susan said that she would be happy to introduce me to the people at the Butler Center.

She got pretty nostalgic, thinking about the hats, saying, “Mama wore some fine hats. We kept her in hats.” I found it really interesting, hearing what Susan had to say about hats, the historical/social angle, and asked her if I could interview her. She agreed, and gave me her schedule—she works in different locations throughout the week as a counselor specializing in addiction. So she is at McKinley Middle School and High School, ICARE—she splits her time among these places.

She gave me directions to Mikey’s Donuts. So, I stopped off there and ended up having a little breakfast and a cup of coffee there.

Mikey’s Donuts, King Cake Doughnut

I spoke with the woman behind the counter—she and her husband own the shop. She is originally from Opelousas. She used to work at Meche’s Donut King in Lafayette, and that is where she first encountered the king cake doughnut. She thinks that that is where the idea started. They are still making the king cake doughnut there—she doesn’t know who/if anyone else makes them.

She found a photo to show me of their king cake doughnut. They only make them at Mardi Gras time. She described the process: they first plait the dough, then fry it. Then they fill the cake—they use an “injection” process that they use for filling doughnuts, and then frosts it with doughnut frosting in the Mardi Gras colors, not with the granulated sugar that is used on regular king cake. I have noticed that some of the bakeries advertise that their king cakes are “hand filled”—that they don’t inject the fillings this way.

It was definitely a community doughnut shop—there was a group of men sitting at one of the tables, drinking coffee and visiting. But I don't think this is a priority for the survey, other than knowing that king cake doughnut is an interesting variation on the king cake, and that it is a way for the doughnut shops to get in on the act, in addition to making the purple, gold and green iced doughnuts.

Baum's

From there, I drove over to Baum's on Florida. I talked to a young woman behind the counter—someone who was new, not the same person I had spoken to last year. But she told me the same thing, that I need to talk to Kelly, the lead decorator. She went back to talk to Kelly and came back saying that Kelly asked me to leave information and my card with the clerk and she would get back to me.

They decorate the cakes at the Florida store and then take them to the Perkins store. They move things back and forth between the two stores, the clerk told me.

I took the opportunity to take more photos, as the store was decorated for Easter. I also shot photos of brides' and grooms' cakes in the bridal consultation area. As ever, there was a steady flow of traffic!

Bold & Sassy

From there, I headed to the Bold & Sassy hat shop. The shop was closed, so I went next door to a beauty shop. They were very friendly and took my information and said they would give it to the owner. They weren't sure whether Bold & Sassy still sold hats. They said that she has a wedding chapel now. I asked whether that was a good thing for their hairdressing business. They said that they hoped to develop that angle. They think that the Bold & Sassy staff comes later in the day.

Hilton

From there, I headed to Hilton, one of the shops Maida and I had visited during my February 2014 trip to Baton Rouge. Sheila Hilton, the owner, was not there—she was expected later. The clerk, who has worked there for a month and came to this work from medical records, took my information and said she would ask Miss Hilton to call me.

I noticed that there was a portrait of Michelle Obama in the shop window. I think it had been inside the shop last time we were there. I asked about the photo of the First Lady and the clerk told me that she came to shop at Hilton one time. The clerk didn't know how the First Lady knew to come to that shop, in particular.

Variety Fashion

I walked two doors down to Variety Fashion, where Maida and I had visited last year, as well. The proprietor, Tony, is from Korea. She has lived in Santa Fe (!), Virginia, North Carolina (Boone), and has been in BR for over twenty years. Her husband works for the federal highway department, which is why they have moved around so much. It wasn't long after I arrived that a

customer came in, who was looking for a dress to wear to church that evening, and I lingered and waited while she took care of her. It was a very lengthy process! The customer had an idea of what she wanted, a white dress for Easter, and Tony clearly knew her, knew her size, her taste, and so began pulling things for her. She was not going to try anything on, she knew her size. Every so often the woman made a comment about the price, “You’re going to bankrupt me!”—something along those lines. Seeing that it would be a while, and not wanting to hover or interfere, I stepped out to the car to make a few outreach calls, and then came back in. But then another woman came in and the process began anew.

Between the two customers, I had a chance to talk to Tony a little bit. She thinks that the hat wearing tradition will die out with the older generation. She talked about how it is important to take time with her older customers, you can’t rush them. Some come in knowing just what they want, but others need to take time. And she said, you need to take time with them if you want to make the sale. She is clearly very fond of her customers. She said, you need to take care of the ladies. Her first customer was there for close to an hour, deciding which dress to buy (ultimately, she bought two dresses and put a hat on layaway). When she left, Tony walked out with her and watched her to her car, so that she would feel safe. That is one of the ways she takes care of her customers.

The dresses are all kept under plastic, to keep them fresh. Tony knows what she has in stock, knows how to find things, and pulls them out for the women to see. She seems adept at helping her customers pick out what they like. For example, she said something like, “I don’t think you will be happy with this one.” to that first customer.

Tony lamented the “come as you are” attitude (and aesthetic!) that now prevails in dressing for church. Young people now wear jeans and whatever they feel like when they go to church.

Variety is closed on Sunday—Tony said that that is her day of worship. She does not wear hats to church—of course, I had to ask!

I asked about coming back to do an interview. “Haven’t I told you enough already?!” she asked me. She remembered when Maida and I came last year. Tony thought that if I came first thing in the morning, that would be best—around 10:00 or 10:30. I told her that I understood that her customers had to be her first priority. She said it is going to be a very busy week, leading up to Easter.

Reconnecting with Chaneyville

While I was out in the car, waiting for the first customer to finish her business, I called the Chaneyville Community Center. I got to talk to Anne Cox. She was not feeling well, was getting over some kind of virus or something—she sounded pretty miserable. I told her what I was up to, looking at hats. She said that people still wear hats at some of the different Baptist churches.

I asked her about Dafiney and she said that she would be in the next day at 9:30 to teach crafts. So I called Dafiney and talked to her for a little while. She wears a hat of some kind to church every week. She doesn't sell her hats—she gives them as gifts. She taught herself to make them. She was going to be teaching a spoon doll class at the community center the next day, and she said I was welcome to come and interview her about the hats. So we set that up.

Dafiney makes a kind of headband hat—a closed loop of crochet with a flower or some decoration on it. This hat design is great for hot weather, it is more comfortable to wear in church, as it is open. Her grandmother taught her to sew. Her grandmother sewed on a nineteenth century treadle sewing machine. Her mother still has the machine. Dafiney was in high school when she learned to sew from her grandmother. Her mother hand quilts. So, I look forward to making it out to Chaneyville tomorrow.

Anthony's

I stopped off at Anthony's, since Joy Ferarra thought that they might have a connection with St. Joseph's Day altars. It is a sweet little place that sells some Italian groceries and has a counter where you can order a meal. They don't make their own cakes for St. Joseph's Day—they get them from Jumonville's Bakery in Gonzales. They told me, though, that Anthony's has the best muffaletta sandwiches on the planet!

Gambino's • Angella (Angie) St. Romain, manager

My last stop for the day was at Gambino's. Angie, the manager, remembered Maida and me from our last visit, so that was nice. Luckily, I stopped in at kind of a quiet time, towards the end of the day.

Angie learned to bake from a third or fourth generation baker who had a business in Breaux Bridge, where she grew up. She told me a wonderful story about how she had a paper route and how the gentleman who owned the bakery was sitting on his porch one day when she was delivering the paper and he said that he had noticed that she was never late with the paper, and wondered whether she would like to come to work for him. He asked how much she made on her paper route and was able to match that in one day of work at the bakery—she came in one day a week, at first. She ended up working there for a long time. The owner's wife was the decorator and she showed Angie how to do this work. She also learned to “scratch bake,” as she called it (bake from scratch). She said it was really an apprenticeship over time. Eventually the son took over and she kept working for him. She said that the man who hired her had a wonderful work ethic and he passed that along to Angie.

She took a five year break from the bakery business, during which she worked for MetLife—a very different work experience! Although she no longer had to work weekends and evenings and holidays, as she had in the bakery business, she found that she really missed working in a bakery.

She's been at Gambino's in Baton Rouge for 15 years, and still really enjoys her work. “It's been a life!” she said.

We set up an interview time for Monday—yippee! And I bought a coconut cream pie to take to Maida’s for dinner—so it shouldn’t be a total loss! Angie told me to keep the pie in the fridge till I left for dinner. Luckily, the little fridge in my studio was big enough to accommodate the box.

Dinner at Maida’s

I had dinner at Maida’s—a sumptuous meal in the company of Carolyn Ware, Joyce Jackson, and Helen Regis—who teaches anthro at LSU and has been very involved with documenting the Jazz heritage festival in NOLA every year.

A couple of things came up—Joyce mentioned a “Millionaire Cake” that is very rich! Ha ha! But I will look into this.

And someone mentioned a Debris Cake—made from pieces left over from other cakes, maybe from when people cut up whole cakes to sell from the case? I will look into these.

Also, Joyce mentioned a film about women’s hats—she was going to look into that for me. Joyce also mentioned Hattitude—an event they hold at her church, a fundraiser, I believe, when people wear hats.

FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2015

Dafiney Self

I spent the morning at the Chaneyville Community Center—nice to reconnect with those folks. Dafiney had brought a selection of her hats and headbands/fascinators, including the one I saw and photographed last year. She was an art teacher for many years, and now in retirement, she shares her gift with others at the community center. There was a small group there today. The sisters—Mabel, Dorothy, and Sarah—had lost a sister, and so they were not there. Mr. Joe Kelly was there today, working on a quilt, so I took the opportunity to get a release form from him—as I had photographed people working on his quilt last year. He wasn’t there at the times I visited. He had the quilt laid out on the ground, and he and Pearlene were working on the color placement, along with a community staff member. So I documented them while I was at it.

Dafiney kindly took time out of her lesson on spoon dolls—dolls made with the head of a wooden spoon as the head, used for a “toilet paper concealer”. I took photos of those in progress, too—it was very clever the way she designed this piece.

We set up in the conference room where I had interviewed the others last year, so we had a quiet place in which to talk, and I photographed the hats Dafiney has made, and took some portraits of her wearing them, as well.

I got to see Anne Cox, the director of the center, just briefly, as she was sick and getting ready to go home. They were preparing for an Easter Egg Hunt for the children the next day.

Telephone outreach

After the interview with Dafiney, I returned to my room to do some outreach, follow up on some of the leads I'd been given.

First Lady Millie Green, New Salem Missionary Baptist Church

I began by reaching out to First Lady Millie Green, of the New Salem Missionary Baptist Church—who formerly worked with Susan Thornton at ICARE. Millie was referred to me as a “hat lady.” I spoke to her for a bit—she expected my call. We set up an interview for Monday morning, at their church.

She recommended Four Seasons Hats & Wigs as a good resource for my research, a place where a lot of people go. It's on Government Street—I found it easily online.

We talked briefly about hats these days. She said that there has been a lapse in wearing hats in her generation, but she said that these days, “The hats are so cute, you can't help but want to wear them.” The young women today are not wearing hats as much.

We talked about the more recent culture of “come as you are,” the newer philosophy of welcoming people to church dressed more informally, so as not to exclude those who don't have the money or desire to dress for church. Millie feels that when it comes down to it, if it's a choice between them not coming or coming, she would rather have people come as they are. She told the story of one young man who didn't want to miss church but had a basketball practice, so he came to church in his shorts. She didn't want to say no to someone who had such a strong motivation to come to church.

At her church, they have a Hat Day fundraiser. There is a secret judge who selects the top three.

Millie gave me directions to get there on Monday.

Monday 11:00— New Salem Missionary Baptist Church; 318 Eddie Robinson Senior Drive 70802, near downtown, off of Government Street, in the middle of the block

Go West on I 10, exit Government Street, turn right at first light on Government, next left onto Eddie Robinson.

Red brick church, in the middle of the block, New Salem Missionary Baptist Church.

When I asked her about attending a service where women would be wearing hats, she said that I was more than welcome to attend their service, but she didn't know how many hats I would see, as they were holding their Easter Drama for Palm Sunday, so not too many people will be wearing hats. She recommended that I check into going to the church down the street, Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. She told me to call them and tell them that she sent me. She said that Reverend Fred Smith is the pastor, and that his wife is Demetris Smith. It's a large congregation, and I should see lots of hats there. She gave me the phone number,

225.343.4326, and told me that the church secretary is Mrs. Fuller. She said to call after 9:00, and that it was okay to say that Mrs. Green from New Salem up the street sent me.

Since it was Friday afternoon, time was of the essence, so I called the church and talked to Miss Leslie Vincent—Mrs. Fuller wasn't there. I explained the project, mentioned that I had been referred by First Lady Millie Green, and offered to send information—the letter of introduction and the link to the Baton Rouge Survey website. Miss Vincent was very nice, said that she would call Reverend Smith to seek his permission, and would get back to me soon.

[REDACTED]

Miss Vincent called me back and let me know that Reverend Smith said that I was welcome to join them, that it was too late in the week for him to do any kind of organized outreach to his congregation, but that I was welcome to approach people and get their permission to photograph them wearing their hats. Miss Vincent told me that there would be Sunday School that morning at around 9:30 or 9:45, before the service, so she recommended coming early, around 9:15, so I can be directed to where I need to go. So, I'll plan on attending the Sunday School class—this is for adults—and the 11:00 service.

Directions: Take I 12 to I 10 to 110; see Millie Green's directions

I asked whether there was a coffee after the service, when I might meet people. She explained that this is Fifth Sunday, so the kitchen ministry takes a day off. Also, since it's Fifth Sunday, they only have one service instead of two, and it will be the 11:00 service this time.

She said that up to 300 people attend Sunday School. The Sunday School is for adults, and I can be directed to a class when I get there—so it sounds like there is more than one class that morning.

Leslie Vincent will be in the office, or milling around. Pastor Smith won't have time to introduce me to the ladies, but I can introduce myself. I should feel comfortable approaching people. People love to have their picture taken, she said.

To do

E mail/call Judith—DONE

E mail Kelly @ Baum's—DONE

E mail Angella @ Gambino's—DONE

E mail Susan Thornton—interview on Tuesday? —DONE

E mail Millie Green—DONE

Call Clyde Sandifer—DONE

Call Susan's contact—F.

Call Reverend Smith—Shiloh Baptist, @ Sunday and hats—DONE

Ambrosia's

Another Piece of Cake
Mercederian/Cypress Springs
Grandsons of Italy

I called the number I found for Carolyn Musso. I talked to Carolyn's husband, Anthony, and he said he would give her the message, and gave me their e-mail address, so I could send more information about the project.

████████████████████

I called the Immaculate Conception Church in Denham Springs and talked to Elaine in the office there. She gave me a phone number for Elizabeth Schoettle, ██████████ and said I could tell her that Elaine at Immaculate sent me. Elaine said that the cakes are made by hand and they are made by more than one person. People work on the cakes for several days of activities leading up to the event, including making a lamb cake.

Church of the Immaculate Conception Facebook—there are photos of their altar there.

elamath@icc msh.org

Elaine also gave me the name of Henry Pulizzano, ██████████—he is involved with making cakes for Church of Immaculate Conception, should I want to talk to someone else.

I sent Elaine more information about the project, for her reference.

I got through to Betty Schoettle and we talked for almost an hour! It turns out that, although she is not of Italian descent, St. Joseph and the altar tradition became very important to her, her father, her husband Milton. And she remains very involved in the tradition. She is a Katrina evacuee, and told me about that experience, as well. We set up an interview time for next week—I'll go to her home in Denham Springs. Earlier in the week, she is hosting a china painters group—that is another one of her passions, china painting. Below are notes on our conversation.

Notes on telephone conversation with Elizabeth Schoettle

Originally from New Orleans, not Italian; father was Baptist, not Catholic, very devoted to St. Joseph, mother prayed to St. Anne. Father prayed to St. Joseph every single day.

When her mother passed away, an Italian family lived next door—the wife/mother was Mary. Mary's husband died, and so Elizabeth's father helped her with the *pignolatas* (traditional St. Joseph's Altar cookies, and got more involved after he retired, worked on St. Francis Cabrini's altar for many years in New Orleans. When he died, the church asked Betty to bring photo of her father, so they could dedicate their altar to him that year.

When Betty and her husband, Milton, grew up and went to college, they both got involved with St. Joseph's Day for some reason. His mother was very sick, went with them to St. Joseph's.

Everything revolved around St. Joseph, she said. She and Milton got married late in life, and both had lots of cancer in their families. When it came time for them to get married, they couldn't come up with a date. Milton had worked for hospital, and Betty does evaluation/accreditation work for schools, and so they both had very busy schedules, it was hard to find a time when they were both available. They looked at each other and couldn't figure out a weekend when they were both free.

They had a joke that getting married on a holiday would ruin the holiday for them both if the marriage didn't work out!

Finally, their best man, Donald, told Betty to pick a day that is important to her. She chose St. Joseph's Day—which fell on a weekend that year. So they got married on St. Joseph's Day.

Since Betty worked in the schools, Italian cafeteria workers made Italian wedding cookies for them.

Betty's devotion to St. Joseph really started when mother died. Her mother died in Betty's arms. Her father had been an embalmer, but couldn't do it any more, it got to him. Betty prayed to St. Joseph, "Give Mom a happy death." [I learned later that St. Joseph is the saint to pray to for a happy death.] She told her father this and he told her that there was no such a thing. Fourteen years later, her father died with a smile on his face; was embalmed with smile on his face. A tribute to St. Joseph.

Milton and Betty married in 1991.

They stayed faithful to St. Francis Cabrini; Mary had her help do the figs through the meat grinder, process them, with her direction. These go into the fig cookies for St. Joseph's Day altars. Betty said, "All I do is decorate cakes—oh my God!"

She said, it started out with me doing the hearts, bibles, lambs—something that celebrates life renewal.

We thought we would branch out a bit, serve to kids—did angel cakes for them. Started out with a few cakes. By the time Hurricane Katrina was finished, Milton and I were making 35 cakes. They would trade their cakes with other churches—2 redfish traded for so many of Betty's cakes. It was a hairy situation, no sleep. All the cakes were made fresh. You don't want to freeze it, because if somebody makes a donation for the cake, they can't go home and re freeze it. So this is thinking ahead.

It was a mass production procedure—Milton would come home from work and help.

St. James, St. Raphael affiliation.

Betty said that the St. Joseph's Day tradition is very important in the Black community. She got connected with Black lady in a St. Bernard housing project in New Orleans, whose husband had diabetes—Betty delivered several cakes to her, since she couldn't make it to the altar.

St. Joseph is very important to Mardi Gras Indians; have a Super Sunday celebration.

Katrina wiped out everything; Betty's house was damaged but was one of five in the neighborhood that survived.

Betty shared her experience of Hurricane Katrina, in 2005. Katrina happened at end of August; she couldn't move back until after Thanksgiving, it wasn't safe. They came back at Christmas. They were in 7 different houses in the interim. Milton and Betty were overseers for two little girls, daughters of widow. Now refer to them as "grandchildren." Were with us when Katrina hit. Milton worked in hospital records management; when they evacuated, had extended family. Betty couldn't leave till her husband was released from his work at the Hospital, he had to be there. When they could finally leave, they went to Lake Charles.

From there, they moved around.

Unlike a lot of people, they got to go back to their own house to check on it and they even stayed there. Her husband had hospital badge, so he could get back into town, the police let them in. The National Guard allowed them to go their neighborhood, but they had to be gone by dark—they could work on house from 8:30 am 4:30 pm.

But then, her husband lost his job—he found out on a little blip on the television screen—all the doctors and nurses lost their job that way.

From there, they rented a ten room house in _____?, stayed there for 15 months so that the boys could graduate from high school. Then they all dispersed within ten days of the graduation.

Milton and Betty settled in Denham Springs on March 27, 2007.

Church mission: we are a welcoming community.

Has a china painting retreat Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday next week; women will come stay at her house and paint china.

I mentioned my work with church hats. Betty said that Catholics dress modestly; Black Baptist ladies are the ones who dress up. In NOLA, ladies used go to Krauss to buy hats. That store is gone now. One of the oldest stores in NOLA—had wooden escalators. Magnificent fabrics.

Directions to Betty's: I 12 East—get on going East. Take the Range exit in Denham Springs. Go north, Towards Watson. Go down there through commercial area. As you turn and come, you

will see on the right a shopping center with Rite Aid. Keep going down that street until I get to McDonalds Restaurant. McDonalds is on Florida Blvd/Hwy 190. (Denham exit is HWY 16). RIGHT on Florida. About a mile down the road, I'll see a stoplight with Subway. Pass that up. Two way traffic. Right after that light narrows down into two lanes, there is a little bridge. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

■ You can tell the culture of Denham Springs is changing.” That was a front headline in the local newspaper—all these people from NOLA coming up, the community was seeing statues of Blessed Mother showing up on doorsteps. The largest parish is in Baton Rouge. “I wonder how many have water marks [on their Blessed Mother statures] like ours?” she once asked her husband, Milton.

If I hit cul de sac, too far.

Bingo Hall on right.

[REDACTED]

■ mentioned Another Piece of Cake, and Betty said that they may have given cakes to Mercederian Center. The flowers were given by local florist.

“We all give what we can. My crew actually gave 31 cakes.”

Five of the cakes went to Sister Dulce; the rest remained with our altar (Immaculate Conception).

A lot of people made cookies for the altars.

Donations must go to the poor in some way—the money or the cake. If someone really wants it, they can tag the cake if they give a donations.

Betty could donate to another altar, as long as what is earned from the altar goes to the poor. She tagged the cakes for some people, but somehow, the tags were removed.

So, she baked more cakes, in spite of going on an accreditation visit. Betty talked about crumb icing. She explained that to “Crumb Ice” means to put a thin layer of butter cream icing, keeps it fresh. Betty has taken two Wilton cake decorating courses, including a fondant course.

Betty also talked about bread that looked like sandals, something that had made by Betty and Milton for earlier St. Joseph’s altars.

Betty had a funny story about her first encounter with the Cypress Springs Mercederian Center. When she first went to Cypress Springs, she thought she was going Mary Grizado's sister's house—that kind of "sister." But it was Sister Dulce. Later, after Betty had brought them St. Joseph's cakes, when Betty's husband was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, Sister took the pain out of him. When Milton was dying, he told the people at Cypress Springs, "My wife is grateful. She will keep you in donations for Mercederian Center."

Now Betty has a wonderful crew—only decorated two cakes this year. Very God inspired, the cakes. Some of her crew are members of the church, others just passing through the church when they were working, asking, what are you doing? I want to help. Youngest member is in 6th grade.

Betty told the sixth grader, "Honey, I've got about ten years left in me, you need to learn so you can take it on." The girl learned how to crumb ice—Betty didn't have to ice over it, she did such a good job.

The cakes that are chosen to go to Sister Dulce, there's always a story behind it. One time they had AA at church.

Betty has been sending cakes to Sister Dulce since 2009, 2010. She initially went there not knowing that it was a healing place.

Later, she called up and said, "My husband's very ill with pancreatic cancer, it doesn't look good. We would like to have an appointment with Sister Dulce." Sister Dulce knew who Betty was, "the cake lady."

Betty took over making rosary cake when another lady stopped making them.

On [REDACTED] [REDACTED] 2011—Milton passed away.

It all revolves around your life.

Carolyn Musso, Grandsons of Italy Altar

Carolyn Musso returned my call. She told me that she has books on altars in Louisiana—has a whole collection. She agreed to an interview, and so we set up a time for next week.

1:30 Carolyn Musso

[REDACTED]

BR

Oak Hills subdivision—take Siegen past interstate, go under that. After you go through the interstate and the mall stuff, after the overpass, turn right on Perkins.

Go down to Oakdale—second light. There is a filling station. Go left on Oakdale.

Go down two blocks. Turns to the left automatically, you can't go any further. That road leads into Oak Haven.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]—best to use land line.

Carolyn explained that she is not Italian. She married an Italian (Italian American), but wanted a history to pass on to their children and grandchildren. She is in the process of writing a cookbook with family recipes. She will give one to each of her children and grandchildren.

She didn't want this lost, this tradition. "I think it's very important."

She has a special rolling pin—for making fig cookies? She has seven granddaughters—but grandsons wanted that too, the family things relating to the family's cooking heritage. So, she is making cookbook for everyone. She said, "Our traditions are getting lost, and I just hate to see it. In fact, my husband is getting ready to take a third group of children to Italy, to know where they come from."

"I'm a retired teacher. History was always my thing. My family's been in the U.S. for a long time, Scots Irish, so it's hard to connect with that heritage." So she tries to preserve her husband's culture.

* * * *

I called and left message at Cypress Springs—they are not open until Monday.

I left Message for Eddie DiMaio

Ambrosia

It was getting late, but according to the website—or what I thought I saw on the website!—I still had time for a reconnaissance mission to Ambrosia, so I hopped in the car and headed out that way. Alas, I had misread the hours on the website, but all was not lost. I found the door locked, but a young man inside came out to talk to me—they had just closed for the day. I explained my mission and the young man kindly recommended how best to connect with the owners, the Sherman family. So, I decided to return on Sunday morning for breakfast, before heading to the church service at Shiloh, and would try to talk to one of the sons, Mr. David Sherman—as he does a lot of the PR and marketing work.

SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2015

Jescenia Crenshaw, Easter Hat Shopping

I met up with Susan Thornton and her biological mother, Jescenia Crenshaw, at JC Penney's in Cortana Mall, to shop for an Easter outfit, including that hat! Jescenia had driven in from Denham Springs.

We arrived at 10:00, right as the store opened. I found them in the hat section—there was an area in ladies' apparel, with a few stands or racks with hats. Jescenia was looking and trying on when I arrived. She told me, "You've got to have the hat, the dress, the shoes, and the purse—it's very important." She tried on a number of hats, but wasn't quite sure which one she wanted, didn't settle on anything, but Susan had them hold a promising hat behind the counter, so we could circle back. Jescenia told me, "I like a hat with a rim. I don't like the little bitty one that sits on top of your head."

While we were at Penney's, we looked at dresses. Susan and Jescenia were both discouraged—they just didn't seem to have what Jescenia was looking for, a modest dress (i.e. neckline), preferably a dress and little jacket to go with it. We all looked and looked but didn't come up with anything. Susan said, "They just don't have it this time." She knew exactly what Jescenia wanted. Making reference to the dresses we were finding on the racks, Jescenia said, "People are going to be talking about you, so you want them to say something, good, not, 'Look at that old lady—what is she wearing?' I guess I have to start wearing what they are carrying in the store, or wear what I've got at home."

Jescenia explained to me that you don't want your neckline on your dress to be too low—the preacher will be thinking about you instead of the Lord. She prefers a longer dress, because she has skinny legs. If she had big legs, she would wear shorter dress.

We will talk on Thursday.

Jescenia has lived in Denham Springs her whole life. She goes to church there, the one she has gone to all her life.

Susan reminded me about Hat Day, Butler Community Center. She said she would meet me there, make introductions, etc. That sounds promising!

We went to Macys and to another shop just outside the inside entrance to Penney's, in the mall. They had some hats, but it was kind of a glitzy place, more geared to younger shoppers, I think—Jescenia made some comments about the things there being fancy. We didn't find anything anywhere else, so we went back to Penney's and Susan bought Jescenia the hat that they were holding for her—kind of a sparkly beige with a wide brim and an embellishment, kind of a sculpted ribbon around the base of the crown. They subsequently went to the Burlington Coat Factory and found a dress and another hat, I later learned. So, as we say, it was not a total loss!

While we were rambling around looking for hats and dresses, Susan told me she had thought of another place I should check out—Nomzamo’s. She said that would be a good place for me to check out.

While I was in the mall, my cell phone rang a few times. When I retrieved my messages, Kathleen Carroll had returned my call. She wants to show how to do the plarn mats—I think she thought I was someone looking to learn the technique. I’m not sure that the plarn mats are a priority now—seems like I need to prioritize the hats and cakes this time, we’ll see. Perhaps she will be coming to Glorieta again.

Eddie DiMaio also called back.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Four Seasons Hats & Wigs

I decided to head over to Four Seasons, the shop that Millie Green told me about. I found it in a shopping center on Government Street. It is a beautiful shop—has a very open, airy feeling. The hats were prominent, artfully arranged on stands—in the storefront window display, on island style shelves, on the walls—they dominated the front of the shop. There were so many, I walked around and around, waiting to talk to the shopkeepers, and kept seeing new ones each time around. There were dresses on the wall—with a hook where you could try a particular hat with a particular outfit. Towards the back were racks with dresses, clothing. And then there were also wigs on mannequin heads, on the wall, and a consultation desk at the back of the shop. The wigs seemed to be for both Black and white customers, with different types of hair. In the cases that formed the counter where the cash register was, etc. was jewelry and accessories.

The store is owned by Kay, a Korean woman who is not of the culture, so deferred to Sarah Leonard—an African American woman who was also working there today. “Sarah can tell you,” Kay said. Of course, it was a bustling Saturday with a steady flow of customers coming in and out. Both Kay and Sarah were very open to what I was doing, and as new customers came in they would say, “Okay, now here is another usher!” The customers also became interested in what I was doing.

Easter and Mother’s Day are the big hat buying and wearing holidays of the year, although I could see that people were coming in for particular occasions at the church. Lately, the Kentucky Derby has become a big deal in the area, and people buy hats for that. [Side note: during Kentucky Derby time, my mother was traveling from Houston to New York City and back, and noticed many women traveling with hat boxes.]

Since they were busy, Sarah said that Kay has been in the business for 20 years, and knows it well. She told me to look around, and then ask questions.

One of the customers told me that she is a deacon's wife, a first lady, at St. Luke's Baptist Church, at 240 Van Buren. She told me that she has a walk in closet that holds her hat boxes. The hat boxes are marked with the color and season, for example cream for summer, etc. She said that she has a deal with her husband—she has to get rid of two hats when she brings in two new ones. What does she do with the hats she gets rid of, I asked her? She gives them to the church. They have a room where they keep donated clothing and hats. People can come and take what they need. I thought that was an interesting economy within the culture.

I learned that Fifth Sunday, which was coming up tomorrow, is a special time in the churches, a time that has implications for hat wearing practices. If you are an usher or sing in the choir, you don't normally wear a hat. So on Fifth Sundays, the ushers have a break, and it is a time when they can wear hats to church.

There was another woman who was trying on blue hats—she needed a blue hat to go with a particular outfit. Sarah gave her a shower cap to put on—this is protocol, to put on a shower cap before you try on a hat. Makes sense! Like those little footies they give you when you are trying on shoes. Since I was hanging out and talking to people, this woman asked me which hat I liked best! Sarah told me that Kay has taught her not to give an opinion. If you do, people might come back and say, "You told me to pick this one out." This particular customer was a cancer survivor, and her hair was still growing back. We looked at which hat looked best, but also Sarah told her that one of the hats was cheaper. The customer said, "You shouldn't tell me that!" But Sarah told her that if she helped her in that way, she would come back. So there was almost a sense of service or loyalty there, taking care of the customer, not just being about money—or keeping people's business for the long haul through building relationships based on trust.

While this transaction was taking place, Kay was helping another customer, a white woman, pick out a wig—this woman was clearly a cancer patient. Since my mom had recently had her first visit to the wig shop to pick out a wig, this hit close to home, felt familiar. The woman was talking to Kay about the hair, that it might be too long, and Kay told her she could trim it for her.

I had an education in lap scarves! Someone came in and asked if they had white lap scarves. They explained to me that this has to do with modesty. The lap scarf is a large square of fabric—it seems to come in different colors. The woman who was buying it seemed to be in her sixties, I would say. In addition to the "come as you are" philosophy about dressing for church, younger women are also wearing clothes that are too revealing—on top, at the hemline, etc., by older women's standards. So if the ushers feel that a young woman's outfit is not sufficiently modest, they have the wherewithal to cover her with a lap scarf. The women gathered in the store at that moment said that the young women don't have a choice—"we are teaching them."

The women thought this practice came about when women began to serve as preachers. Since they were sitting at the front of the church, facing the congregation, they had to cover their

laps. I asked what they did in the case when someone was not sufficiently covered on top as well? They told me they could cover someone, the upper body or the lap. They said that if someone goes into a rapture and is not aware, if her movements reveal too much, you can cover her up then—almost as if they are protecting her dignity. Also, she won't be able to object that way.

This led to a whole discussion of modesty in general—how younger women have a different sense of propriety in their clothing style and what is appropriate for church. They talked about the importance of closed toe shoes.

There was another woman shopping for a hat to go with a silver outfit to wear to a wedding. She tried on several hats and decided to put one on layaway. That way she could “recycle” her silver outfit and then come back and get that hat to complete the outfit for church.

These women also told me to check out Nomzamo's, near Broadmoor, that it is a great place.

Hilton

Since I was right there on Government Street, I decided to stop back over to check in at Hilton and Variety. I caught Sheila Hilton just as she was leaving the store. I explained the project, and she said she had seen the information I had left for her, but hadn't had time to call me back, that it was a very busy time. She told me to come back at 2:00 on Friday. So we made an appointment. I went in and talked to the woman who was in the store. She was arranging clothes for the wall display. She said that not only is it Easter, it is also prom season. So young women come in to buy their outfits. Having just come from the discussion of modesty, I asked her about that. She told me that since it is most often the mothers who are buying their daughters' outfits, they have the final say so about what the daughters end up wearing to the prom.

Variety

At Variety, I found a similar scene to the one I had encountered at Four Seasons. Women were there, shopping for outfits and hats. I explained what I was doing and the customer talked to me about her hats. She told me that she takes good care of clothes and hats—she probably has ninety hats in her closet. She keeps them in boxes, and switches out different dresses with different hats and accents—people think she has a new outfit, but she doesn't. She just strategizes. She takes good care of clothes, so that when the styles come back, you can wear them again. Her son has joked, saying that when she dies, everyone is going to come asking for her clothes and he is going to auction them off!

Tony's husband, Arturo, was in the shop, sitting by the counter. Evidently, he often does this, hangs out at the shop at the end of the day or on Saturdays. They joked about his being a bodyguard. Since Tony was busy waiting on customers, I ended up sitting and talking to him. Arturo is from south Texas and he works for the federal highway department, and has for many years. He now works especially on bridges. I never thought much about bridges before, but it was interesting to hear about the need for caring from them, how it is normal to be driving

across the big bridge on I 10 that crosses the river from West to East Baton Rouge and feel the “rumble” that I felt when I was stopped in rush hour traffic there. I am not the only one who worries when that rumble happens! He told me that his department is doing a special project in collaboration with Historic Preservation on historic bridges in the state, which sounded very interesting. I remembered the bridge in Shreveport—I remember it had Huey Long’s name on it. He reminded me that that was the Texas Street Bridge.

Arturo said that Tony really cares about her customers, looks after them. She has a special fondness for the older women. He told me that if someone doesn’t show up to pick up her order, she worries about them and has him drive her over to the customer’s home to see if she is okay. I think that, given the amount of time (and money!) her customers spend in her shop, she really develops close relationships with them. I am sure this is true in the different hat shops—that these relationships have a degree of intimacy or at least familiarity, are important.

Clearly, this was not going to be a good time for an interview, so I said I would come back. Tony said it was bound to be a very busy week, but if I came first thing in the morning, just after she opened, around 10:30, that would be a good time.

Another Piece of Cake

I tried to find Nomzamo’s just by driving up and down Florida in the area where I was told to look, but didn’t find that shop.

Since it was open until 6:00 according to the website, I decided to drive out to Central to visit Another Piece of Cake. My arrival coincided with that of a family who stopped in to pick up a cake order. I drifted over to a little room off of the main area, where there was a table and four chairs, a photo album of wedding and grooms’ cakes, model cakes, etc.—the wedding consultation area. A poster with an excerpt from First Corinthians, which begins, “Love is kind . . .” was on the wall—seemed very fitting.

But I heard people oohing and ahing about a cake, so I had to go look! And what a cake it was. I heard someone say something about the cake color matching someone’s dress—it was a double decker cake, round, with a smaller round on top. The bottom layer was all roses on the side. Just one color, kind of an apricot color, with sculpted roses completely covering the side of the cake. I’ve never seen anything like it. I wasn’t sure what the etiquette is as far as taking a photo of someone’s cake, so didn’t ask to take a picture, but should have! I hadn’t connected with the business owner yet, so I would have had to explain the project with the customers there, it just didn’t feel like the right time. This was a family picking up a cake for a niece’s engagement shower. Debbie Daigle, the baker, said she was going to stop by the party on her way home—evidently, it was at a plantation. She gave them instructions about how to handle the cake so that the top layer didn’t slip off, or the cake off of the plate.

When the family left, Debbie came to greet me and see what I needed, so I told her about the survey, and she readily agreed to an interview. We have one set up for Thursday afternoon. After that, she’ll be going a little crazy with Easter cakes, etc. Her quiet days are Wednesday

and Thursday. She is closed on Mondays, but comes in—but our schedules didn't jibe, so Thursday it is.

Debbie is former military. She had been working with cakes for about six years before opening Another Piece of Cake. She previously worked at Ambrosia—this was part time, as she had other jobs, too. She said that her husband tends to pick up something, gets excited about it, then puts it down. He got into “carving cakes”—I had never heard this before, but Debbie explained that it is the process through which the groom's cakes are shaped, or the cross shaped cakes, etc. When he got into it, Debbie said, “What am I going to do?” So she began doing the decorating. She said she started with the little stars at the corners of the cakes and on the edges, but found that she had a knack for it and took off from there. She said she wished she had discovered it a long time ago, as it seems to be her calling. In addition to working at Ambrosia, she did cakes at home, as well, before starting her own business. She is about to celebrate her first anniversary in business as Another Piece of Cake. Over the first year of her business, she has had one or two days off—at the holidays. And she was so exhausted, she just slept through it.

I told her that I found her because of the St. Joseph's Altar at Cypress Springs. She said that she herself is Italian by descent, but has just been getting into her Italian roots lately. She said that the rosary cake she did this year was a first. She called it a “mystery.” She put special lighting with the cake, the little battery operated flames. She was happy with how it came out.

We talked about how a bakery is a good business to be in, that people always need cakes. With the tight economy, people might cut back on a lot of things, but they still need cakes—there are a lot of “bakery holidays” on the calendar. I thought that was a really interesting term, or way of thinking about life, through cakes.

I asked Debbie about groom's cakes. She said she thinks that grooms cakes are a Southern thing, but that they are not everywhere. She thinks a lot of things are unique to Louisiana. Debbie is an Ohio native. She left home when she was 17 and never went back. She really feels at home here. Debbie feels that the groom's cakes steal the show. She has a binder full of amazing photos. There was a dumptruck one that was really mind blowing.

There were photos on the walls of this little room, showing past cakes, along with dummy cakes. There was one of a Brides and Groom's cake—this is a cake that is half and half—so half of it is the bride's cake and half is the groom's. This couple came in together, and the husband wasn't that engaged in the transaction. But when Debbie realized that he was military, then they talked all about their military careers, to the point where the bride was losing interest! Debbie went the extra mile to put special things on the groom's side of the cake, like medals, etc.

We talked about different cycles in the year—they've just come through Mardi Gras season.

I asked her about regular customers. She said that there is a group of older retired men who come and sit and eat and drink coffee. Debbie makes them welcome to sit in the little wedding consultation area. The staff knows what they like and so when they see them pull up outside the shop, they have their orders all ready. She said that the men are really sweet, that they do chores and things for local women who might be alone—they have honey do lists for these women and go out and help them.

I look forward to coming back and talking to her in more depth. She is a high energy person! And passionate about what she is doing.

A full day! I feel like I got some good outreach done.

SUNDAY, MARCH 29

Ambrosia Bakery

Following the tip from the young man who talked to me at closing time on Friday, I decided to go have breakfast at Ambrosia before heading to the church service. It was pretty quiet when I arrived—there was a group of older men holding a coffee klatch at one of the outside tables, and a few people inside. The display stands or tables were full of Easter cookies and cupcakes and such. The counter area ran along one wall—huge and bountiful, with lots to see! I ordered coffee and an omelet, and asked to speak to the manager, Mr. David, and took a seat. While I was eating, David Sherman—one of three sons of the owners who work at the bakery—came and sat down and talked to me. I explained the project, and he told me that he would be off during the following week, but that I could talk to his parents and his brother, Felix Jr. He said it would be a busy week, but that he would let them know and encourage them to talk to me—he thought we could work something out, although it might be a short visit. I told him that would be fine.

Palm Sunday at Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church

From there, I navigated my way to the Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. I followed Millie Green's directions and jumped on I 12, but missed an exit, ended up crossing the bridge to West Baton Rouge, then had to come and find my way back from the other direction, and got totally turned around. I called the church, but didn't get an answer. I was driving in the neighborhood and saw another little church, so pulled in and asked for directions. There were two women getting ready for church and one said it would be easier for her to lead me there than to try to explain it, so she hopped in her car and led me there! I will always be so grateful to her for that!

Not knowing any better, I parked in the parking lot just next to the church. I later realized that there is a bigger lot across the street, and that a lot of the congregants take a shuttle, too. When I arrived at the front door, a young man greeted me and I explained what I was up to. He led me to the Sunday school class, was so nice, saying, you're not late, etc.—because I had hoped to get there in time to find Leslie Vincent and connect with her. I took a seat in the Sunday School class and people were very friendly and welcoming, and I explained what I was

up to. So, I was in plenty of time—we sat and waited and visited. Eventually, a guest preacher came in to conduct the class, which turned out to be very interactive.

Not surprisingly, the theme for the class was The Road to Calvary. The title of the Quarterly Topic was, The Spirit Comes. I have included the handout/class out the preacher shared in the ephemera. The instructor/preacher focused on particular lessons from Scripture—people had their own bibles with them, and then there was a handout with particular references in it. One woman reached over and lent me her book.

Talking about the Crucifixion, the preacher talked about how, that's the way the crowd is—first they are with you and then they turn on you. He said that Jesus had to die to get the message across. Ultimately, love is what it's all about, referring to First Corinthians. Love doesn't keep a record. Love is an action verb. It's not what you are, it's what you *do*. We are all here to witness. How do we get the message out?

The feeling was pretty informal—people would chime in, respond, share their own thoughts. One woman in attendance made reference to books she had written. With the question of how to get the message out, there seemed to be concern about the way of the world today, how to share the important messages with younger generations, how to navigate the violence of today's world.

There was a story about turning loose the colt. The Spirit is in the colt. They talked about humility, and about riding in on a donkey, and being left there to tell the story.

The preacher talked about fear—about not being fearful, as He supplies all our needs.

Verse 8—Palm Sunday.

God pardons all things. The Kingdom of Peace is in God. Be whole, at peace, keep your connection with God. These were some of the messages of this lesson. And that everything, everybody becomes new at this season, it's an opportunity to become new.

From there, we headed into the sanctuary for the service. I stopped off in the ladies room, and heard someone talking about me, i.e. that there is this lady coming to learn about the hats . . . and I assume it was Leslie Vincent, but I was not able to catch up with her.

I took a seat towards the back of the sanctuary. I did see women wearing hats, towards the front of the church. Behind the altar, there was a large painting of Jesus on the cross, with five other figures looking up at him, expressing sadness. In this image, both Jesus and those below him on the ground, are Black. There were two large monitor screens mounted high up on either side of the altar area, posting what was happening in the service, and the words to hymns as they came up. There was also a paper program which I am submitting with ephemera. The theme of the main sermon was 'Give us Barrabas.' This was about the decision to spare the life of another who was scheduled to be crucified, rather than Jesus. Reverend Fred Smith, the

pastor of Shiloh, said that the same decision is being made every day. Reverend Smith is the son of Reverend Charles Smith, who was the pastor at Shiloh for fifty years. There was a choir and praise team, whose music and dancing were incredibly beautiful and moving. One of the hymns was “Break Every Chain,” which I later heard on my car radio as I drove around.

Normally, there are two masses on Sunday, but since it was Fifth Sunday, they only have one. They go back and forth between holding it at 8:00 and 11:00 each Fifth Sunday, and there was no coffee service after church, as Leslie Vincent had told me ahead of time.

When the service was over, people got up to leave the church and I had to act fast in order to get hat photos. I talked to a young man outside the church and he said it would be fine to approach people. People were boarding a shuttle bus, so I just began approaching people and talking to them. I first photographed two sisters, Myrtis Piper and Bernice Carter. One was especially eager to leave, so they filled out the paper work and took off. I had little time to talk to people, as they were in a hurry to go home.

Next, I photographed Elouise Stanley.

Next were three generations of one family: Brenda Gautier, her daughter, Hilda Trenise Gautier, and Hilda’s son _____. They were all dressed in black and white, and Brenda told me that this had to do with it being Easter time and her mother always wore white at that time, so they were wearing white to honor her memory and black might have been to honor their heritage. Brenda knew who I was because she had talked to Sarah Leonard from Four Seasons—so that was nice to have a personal connection. Brenda’s daughter Hilda played the harp for the service, stunning. They cut a beautiful figure, all dressed in black and white. Brenda said that she had a friend, Dolores Watts, whom she recommended that I contact about that hats.

As I was taking photographs and such, one of the young men seeing people off invited me to come back for Good Friday services at noon next Friday. He told me it would be a short service. I appreciated the warmth and hospitality extended to me.

After I took their picture, there were very few people milling around outside the front of the church, so I went back in, in part to see if I could find Miss Leslie Vincent, and in part to see if I could take any more hat photos. No one knew where Miss Vincent was, but there was a mother and daughter dressed in pastel colors and they were happy to have me take their photo. This was Melodnee O’Connor and her daughter Virginia Wilson. It so happened that at that moment the light was coming in through an amber colored stained glass window and the light was really perfect for the photos. We also shot some photos outside, as they were going out the back. They are both longtime members of the church, and talked about borrowing each other’s hats.

Everyone signed the release forms, but I would love to call them and just get a little more information, since everyone was in a bit of a hurry to go home. I never did find Miss Vincent in the church offices—she must have left. So I will call her to follow up.

Photographs

From there I drove back home via Government Street and local city streets—I'd had enough of the interstate for one day! I drove right past the New Salem Baptist Church, which is where I will come tomorrow for my interview with Millie Green, so it was good to have a visual reference. As I was driving around the nearby Garden District, I noticed signs for an upcoming Hat Run, coming up on April 25th. Of course, that got my attention. I looked it up online, and it had most to do with a skin cancer awareness campaign; on the website, I found the story of a young woman who died from skin cancer, and she was the inspiration for his event. The moniker was, "Protect the skin you're in."

I spent the afternoon downloading and managing files, etc., learning to use my new camera, which had arrived to the motel via the mail, did some background reading, worked on formulating interview questions, etc. getting a little caught up on things.

MONDAY, MARCH 30

Millie Green, First Lady, New Salem Baptist Church

Today began with an interview with First Lady Millie Green of New Salem Missionary Baptist Church. We met in a little room adjacent to the sanctuary. Miss Green had brought a collection of her mother in law's hats—her mother in law had passed away recently, so the hats had a special and bittersweet feeling for Miss Green. We sat at a table in a smaller room adjacent to the sanctuary, just inside a side entrance to the church, and conducted the interview there. Miss Green talked about her own childhood and background, about the role of hats, about hats at New Salem, trends in hats, what they mean to her. She modeled one of her mother in law's hats for photos that I took in the sanctuary. I also photographed the hats she brought, she put them out on the table where we conducted the interview.

Miss Millie's husband's father had been the Pastor at New Salem before her husband—so this was an inherited position, like at Shiloh.

Miss Green also showed me the inside of the sanctuary, which was lovely. The exterior of the church was red brick. The sanctuary had paintings of biblical scenes featuring Black figures. These were done by Margaret Leonard of New Orleans, who had come to Baton Rouge at the time of Hurricane Katrina. She has since gone home to New Orleans, but she gave the paintings to the church in thanks for the time she spent as part of this congregation.

There was also a quilted banner in the church that was apparently donated to the church by a member of the congregation who had moved away. Since Miss Green had an appointment, I didn't have time to photograph these art pieces, but I thought they were interesting. Miss Green talked about little lace coverings that young girls wear on their heads, in lieu of hats—she took those out to show me.

Debbie Grimes

I had left a message for Debbie Grimes at Cypress Springs, and she called me back today. I talked to her briefly, as I was on my way into the interview with Miss Green when she called, but the gist of it was, she said that anything we did about Cypress Springs had to be run through her. She was hoping I could come out there to visit the place. I would love to have done so, but it couldn't be a priority for this trip. I later clarified that Debbie was particularly talking about writing about Cypress Springs, not necessarily about the St. Joseph's Altar, so that was fine—she didn't need to see my writing before it went out. We agreed that I would get out to Cypress Springs when the time was right.

Nanette Mayhall

I stopped into Circa 1857 to get a bite at Yvette Marie's. I stopped and talked to my friend Dianne at the front desk—she remembered me from last year and was very friendly. She told me about making her own homemade king cake with a boudain filling and that it was awesome.

She said that one of the vendors at Circa 1857, which is kind of an antique mall type of place, specialized in vintage hats. She gave me her name and number, which I'll include in my field report. The vendor is Aline Glaze.

I went to Yvette Marie's and as I was placing my order, I happened to notice some beautiful, very tall cakes sitting on cake plates under glass "domes." Of course, I had to ask about the cakes! They were made by someone called Nanette Mayhall, who apparently has something of a cult following. She works out of her home, and sells her work to some area restaurants and individuals. The young woman who took my lunch order and who was telling me about Nanette Mayhall turned out to be a student of Helen Regis, whom I had just met at Maida's home a few nights earlier—small world! She told me that Nanette was featured in a film about New Orleans. She has been making cakes for around 30 years, and doesn't give out her phone number. The young woman wrote down her number for me. I found her online, along with her phone number! There is supposed to be a film online about her, but I have not been able to find it. I called and left a message for her, but did not hear back. I had left a message saying I would try again, and it was a busy week. I would love to interview her!

Angella St. Romain

My next stop was at Gambino's, where I interviewed the manager, Angella St. Romain. I could tell when I arrived that they were having a busy day, and I wondered whether I would be able to interview her. She told me that several people had not shown up for work that day, that she was having one of those "unexpected" days. She asked Paul Scelfo to show me around the kitchen. He brought several cakes out of the case for me, so I could get better shots of them—including a smurf blue layer cake called an Easter Parfait cake. He took me back to the kitchen where I got to watch Pat Glover making doberge cakes. She was fast! The cakes were crumb iced—a first "gesso" layer of butter cream—and then she was pouring a poured fondant layer of icing, it looked molten. I took quite a few photos back there.

Then I went out to the front again—Miss Angie said that she would grant the interview, so I set up my gear in the wedding consultation area. She was expecting a bride, so I knew we had limited time. But, as it turned out, the bride came very late, by which time Miss Angie had given up on her. When the bride arrived, Mr. Paul took care of her, and Angie and I got to talk for close to two hours, which was great! It was a wonderful and inspiring interview, during which Miss Angie told her story of getting started with baking, growing with the business over the years, a good disaster story or two about cake emergencies—all relating to the transport of cakes to weddings—and about the business itself, what it means to people, about the way to take an order, customer relations, changes in technology, trends in cakes, and more. I am so thankful we ended up having time together. It was a very inspiring interview.

I put in an order for a few things to pick up on Friday evening, and decided to get a little treat for the road. Miss Angie had told Ashley—one of the sales clerks at Gambino's—to load me up with free things, at it was the end of the day. Oh dear, what a delicious and fattening assignment this is! I came away with at least two or more of each thing I ordered!

I had found a video online about Eloise Jones, who currently works for Gambino's in Baton Rouge and whose first baking job was with Beulah Ledner, who invented the doberge cake and sold the recipe to Joe Gambino's in 1959. Since the video was a couple of years old, I asked Miss Angie whether Eloise still worked for Gambino's—which she does! She just works a few days a week, as she is in her seventies now. Angie was going to look into getting me an interview with her—I am to call her on Wednesday to see whether I could talk to Miss Eloise early on either Thursday or Friday morning. That would be great!

From there, I headed to the main branch of the library, which is just up the street, to take a walk in the gardens there, and then settle in to work. What a beautiful place, the library and surrounding grounds.

TUESDAY, MARCH 31

Today was a blockbuster day, as I began to gain a little traction!

Susan Thornton

The day began with an interview with Susan Thornton at McKinley Middle School. She is a drug and alcohol counselor for young people in the schools, so she moves around, works in a different place each day of the week. We sat in a small room and talked—it was a relatively short but rich interview. She brought photos of her mom—the mom who raised her, as opposed to her biological mother, Jescenia Crenshaw. The photos were older and in plastic sleeves. I did my best to photograph them, but the photos to begin with were not in such great shape and not too well focused, and my photos did not come out too well. Maybe Susan could scan them for me—I can ask.

We focused on how the hat was so important for women like Susan's adoptive mom, who never learned to read and write, who worked as a domestic all her life—so church was her day to shine and feel beautiful. Susan talked about the hat shops where they were not welcome to

shop during Susan's childhood—mostly they shopped at Penney's, etc. because they weren't welcome in the boutique types of places. Since her mom didn't read or write, Susan often accompanied her to go shopping. Susan showed me a photo of herself in a hat, an image on her iPhone. She mostly wears hats to keep her head warm in the winter, not like her mother's generation wore hats.

Butler Community Center Seniors

From there, I followed Susan's directions to the Dr. Leo S. Butler Community Center. They were expecting me there, and Miss Carolyn Williams welcomed me and got me situated in the room where the Sensational Seniors were about to meet. There were already several women gathered, so I began taking photos. Carolyn was so helpful with this! Some of the women were dressed up but not wearing hats. She asked me to photograph them too, so that everyone would feel special. So of course I took their photos. At one point, Carolyn took me out to the hallway and showed me a photo of her mother in one of the cases. Her mom had passed away not long ago. I believe that is how Carolyn got involved with this group of seniors.

The first person I photographed was Evangelist Lydia Tucker. She was wearing a very striking black and red outfit. I asked her to tell me about her outfit and she said that the red was for the blood that Jesus Christ shed for us and the black was for mourning his death. So, like the Gautier family, the colors of her dress had symbolism. Wow. I had not expected this—it opens a whole line of inquiry.

I photographed a few more people before the program began, and then Carolyn ushered me to a table where her daughter was sitting, and asked her daughter to write down the names of all the people I'd photographed, so I would be able to identify them in the photos. They gave me a program, which I am submitting with the ephemera from this project. The formal part of the gathering was called the Devotion, and there were prayers and songs. Evangelist Tucker played the piano and sang at one point, and the music was pretty extraordinary. She has a voice like a hybrid of Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey, so rich and deep. It was one of those moments when I felt so privileged and awed to be where I was.

Several of the people there announced where Good Friday services were for their churches—quite a few, at different times! There was also a man playing the piano at one point, a younger man, and I believe he was affiliated with the Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church, or said that his pastor would be there on Good Friday.

At one point, Susan Thornton came in to greet everyone and to introduce me to them, and then she had me get up and explain my project. She had hoped I'd get by to talk to this group about their quilting when I was there last year, but that hadn't worked out, so she explained that I was back. Very nice of her to do this! She clearly knew a lot of the women there.

Along with the spiritual component of scripture and music was an Parade of Easter Fashions. Today was Hat Day for the group. So the MC for this segment invited each of the women wearing hats to come up and talk about her hat. It was kind of like a runway walk—priceless!

First up was Gwen Carriere, whom I had photographed. She said, she *loves* hats. She said, I'm here to talk to you about hat hats. She always wears a hat. She said, "I do believe that when a woman wears a hat, it gives her stature, to me." She wears a hat every Sunday for church. "Anywhere I am, any time I see a hat that is appealing. It has to fit just right on my head."

She is wearing red, white and black (blue?). "I coordinated my outfit with the hat. I coordinate with that hat, not the hat with the outfit. You've got to look good when you go to church. If you can look good to go to the clubs, you can look good to visit the Lord."

Next up was Aldreamer Smith. She had come in later and sat right next to me. She was sporting a very nice looking beige/pink pants suit with a matching hat. The MC asked her, "How do you describe a hat?"

Miss Smith got up and said, "I'm the hat lady. I am never without a hat. The saying is, and it's true, 'A lady is never dressed without a hat.'" She said she never was without gloves. She has over 100 and some hats in her collection, hats and caps. "I have a way of making them fit." She said she was wearing taupe with pearls, and there were pearls on her hat.

Next was Barbara Berry wearing a black and white outfit. She said, "I'm a hat person." She has been wearing hats since she was nine years old. She remembers shopping in a catalogue.

Next was Evangelist Lydia Tucker. She said that her outfit represents what He [gave for us]. The sky turned black for three hours, when Christ was on the cross. "We are free because he lives."

Someone said to her, "Girl, you lookin' beautiful."

Next up was Miss Rosa Pugh, who was wearing a pastel green outfit with a silver hat. She said that looking decent was important. She also said, "The problem with us, we don't see the beauty in ourselves." She was wearing a mint green two piece suit and a silver hat. I have to say that she did look beautiful from within.

There were more songs and prayers, and then they began serving lunch. Miss Williams seemed concerned that I wasn't staying on for lunch, but I told her that I hadn't planned on being there as long, so I had scheduled another appointment too soon to be able to stay on for lunch. I promised that I would stay for lunch the next time I came.

From there, I stopped in the office of Miss Helen Rutledge, the director of the center. She signed the release form on behalf of the group. I told her I would send her and Miss Williams a link to the LFP Baton Rouge website. While I was waiting for her to fill out the form, Mary S. Hawthorne came in to tell me about her business, Itty Bitty Sweet Shop—I had told someone I was looking at cakes as well as hats, and they had her come and talk to me. Her business is called "itty bitty" because she makes cupcakes.

She brought an iPad on which she had absolutely beautiful photos of her work. She has made all kinds of innovative cupcake flavors, including:

Sweet potato casserole, triple chocolate mousse, peach cobbler. Strawberry cheesecake, strawberry lemonade. She also does pies—pecan pie, crawfish pie, peppermint. She works with her daughter, Kierra, who is getting a degree in business management. She has brought samples of her sweets to the community center for all to taste. I explained to her that we were focused on longstanding cake/bakery businesses, but thanked her for the info and told her I would share it with the Louisiana Division of the Arts Folklife Program.

Carolyn & Anthony Musso

Next stop was the home of Carolyn and Anthony Musso, to talk about St. Joseph's Altars. Mr. Musso is a key member of the Grandsons of Italy, and the St. Joseph's Altar has been a tradition in his family for a long time. He had some amazing family photographs, which he kindly shared with me, allowed me to photograph. They gave me an orientation to the Sicilian culture in southwest Louisiana. Carolyn is Scots Irish by descent, originally from Texas, but feels removed from her cultural roots, so she is doing what she can to help preserve the Sicilian traditions. She is the cookie person for the St. Joseph's Altar—it's Eddie DiMaio who does the cakes. Carolyn had put out samples of the different cookies she makes, and had newspaper articles to share with me, and showed me her collection of books on St. Joseph's altars and cooking.

So, this was not the place to learn about cakes per se, but it did give me a strong grounding in the tradition. What lovely people! They also gave me a sample of the "favors" they hand out at the event—a St. Joseph prayer card and a little piece of bread, since the tradition is grounded in the idea of feeding the hungry, of having enough to eat.

Four Seasons Hat & Wig

From the Mussos' house, I headed across town to Four Seasons, where I was to meet up with Sarah Leonard. Thankfully, the Mussos gave me great directions for getting across town in rush hour traffic. Sarah was not there when I arrived, and eventually Kay called her and learned that something had come up, she wouldn't make it, she was sorry. So, Kay said I was welcome to take photos, which I did.

While I was shooting, a white woman came in to buy a hat she had seen there earlier, but wasn't sure about buying, and Kay had already sold it. So, Kay was trying to help her find a hat that she liked instead. She needed a hat for Easter in New Orleans, and one for a Kentucky Derby party she was attending a few weeks later. Eventually, Kay helped her find a hat that she liked, but it took a while! The moral of the story is, if you see it, get it, because it may not be there when you get back. I really admired Kay's graciousness in dealing with this customer, who was a tad prickly.

Dolores Watts came in—she is someone that Brenda Gautier had told me about, and she had told Dolores about me—so it was providential that we coincided at Four Seasons. She gave me

her contact information and told me when to call, to see if I could come by and interview her and her aunt.

I took many photos, and then when things quieted down, Kay agreed to be interviewed, but not on an audio recording because she is self-conscious about her accent—she is Korean. So, I was sitting in the wig consultation area and just began asking her questions. She kept working while we were talking, and occasionally stopped and talked to me.

Dolores had brought in a dress and said, “Do something with this.” Kay did what I am beginning to see is the protocol—she hung the dress up on the wall, and then tried different hats with the outfit by hanging a hat from a hook just above the dress. She had a long handled pole with a hook at the end of it, which she used to hang up the hats and dresses. A very effective way of doing it because you can really see how the hat goes with the outfit that way. Sometimes you can put together an ensemble that you think will go, but you can’t tell until you see them together. Dolores had a white dress that she brought in, and Kay was helping her shop for the right hat. The occasion she was shopping for was Women’s Day, when women do everything (i.e. take on all roles) in the church. This event is color-coded—people pick out a color for everyone to wear.

Later, after Dolores had left, Kay told me, referring to this encounter, that you don’t tell someone what looks good. You put it up and see what they say. This goes along with what Sarah Leonard had told me, what she learned from Kay—not to tell someone which hat to buy. Leave it in the customer’s hands. I took photos of them while they were talking, trying different hats, looking at a catalogue.

While I was there, a young man came in to pick out a hat for his grandmother. This really surprised me. Kay seemed to know his grandmother, and they picked out something together that they thought she would like. This was to be a gift from the young man to his grandmother for Easter. They were going away somewhere for Easter, so he needed to get the hat now.

* * * *

Interview with Kay

Kay never worked until her children were grown. When they were in kindergarten and first grade, she worked in a friend’s restaurant, helping with the lunch shift. There was a hat shop next door, and one day they found out that the owner was going to close or sell the shop. Kay’s friend told her, “You could do that.” She didn’t think she had the money. But they decided to take a look. Her husband also said, “You could do that.” Kay had a cousin in Dallas who told her that she could do better than washing dishes in a restaurant, and so this cousin funded her to buy the business. He told her that every day she washed dishes, a work situation that didn’t let her bring her talent to her work. She was making \$50 a day.

She had no experience with millinery work when she started out in the business. She began on June 1, 1994. The business was downtown, on Third Street. At the beginning, she didn’t know

what to purchase. At that point, the business consisted of hats and wigs, but not clothing. She went to a show in Houston. She was so scared when she did this, as she didn't know how she would repay her purchases there. She didn't spend a dime for herself until she paid her cousin back.

At a certain point, she had to move out of her first location, so she came to the location on Government Street. She was looking for a new location and she went to the Chinese restaurant next door and saw a "for lease" sign in the window. She took down the number and called. She said, "My heart was trembling," as she made a call from a public phone. She told herself to calm down, and she had to pick her children up from school. When she got to go inside the store, she knew, "This is it." She must have had a vision of how she would fix it up, as the place was a mess, such a mess, she said. It had previously been a Little Caesars pizza place, so there was a lot of food residue, etc. She began leasing the new location on August 21, 1996.

Backing up a little in her story, Kay had lived for a while in Mississippi, from 1987 to 1989. She moved to Baton Rouge in 1991. In Mississippi she had a friend who was Chinese who had a Hallmark gift shop. Kay went in to buy a card one time, and they became friends. This woman taught her the business, and Kay learned a lot from her. So she did have some business background when she went into the hat and wig business. So she said she has had great teachers—the restaurant owner and the Hallmark store owner. Even so, when she went into business for herself, "I still didn't know that I know something." She gave thanks to the Lord. She didn't have a higher education, so experience was her guide, and "the Lord sent me good people." She had never experienced retail. "Every day, I learn," she said.

How did she know what to buy? I asked her. She said she looked at the news, magazines, and had a sense in her eyes. She is good at distinguishing color. For example, lavender has more blue than other shades, whereas lilac has a pink tone. There was a millinery store that had started in 1976, had been around for 30 years at the time she bought this business. She thought at the time, I would like to have my own freedom. She enjoyed it, felt like she was doing something.

She sometimes customizes the hats, so that they are one of a kind. She sews things with a needle, not glue. She doesn't do this a lot, but she might sew things onto the hats. She used to carry designer hats and fine hats. But the church people are wearing them less the last four to five years.

Are most of her customers African American? Among the Caucasians, there is the Red Hat Society—these are elderly people who wear red and purple. Younger people wear a lot of pink and lavender.

The Kentucky Derby is now an in thing—people either go to Kentucky, or they celebrate with parties elsewhere, so people buy hats for that.

The Royal Wedding piqued people's interest in wearing hats again. Many people watched it on television. This is when people started wearing fascinators, and the hat companies got into that. The people who wear fascinators are inexperienced, don't want to wear a big hat. They might wear a fascinator or a small hat to a Saturday morning tea or a bridal shower. Elders tend to wear hats to church and to teas.

People wear smaller hats to a funeral.

When a customer comes in, she asks them what occasion they are buying for, so she can suggest. She has watched a lot of old movies, and has seen the older hats that people wore to teas. For the Derby, people wear hats with large brims.

The wall sculpture in her store—at the front of the store—was a gift from her Chinese friend in Mississippi, who special ordered it for Kay's new location. It was from a show.

Deaconesses wear white hats in a more simple style, like a pillbox.

When customers come in, she lets them look around and see what is there. If they know what they are looking for, they'll find it. People sometimes bring in a dress to match. When they bring a garment—she might try purple, royal, green, tries to see what goes. Black and white can go with any color.

Some styles are not overly dressed up. For special occasions, the pastor's wife may do something fancy. There is something for every occasion. People match their outfits top to toe. Before Sarah worked with her, Kay had another employee who passed away. Sarah has been working with her for ten years. In working with Kay, Sarah follows her own style.

Kay doesn't want to influence her customers, so when they come in, she lets them decide what they want, what works best for them.

I asked Kay about the young man who had come in to buy his grandmother a hat for Easter—was that unusual? She said that that was not uncommon, that gentlemen come in to shop for their mothers and grandmothers, to buy them a gift. Over time, men pick up on their mothers' or grandmothers' sense of style, how they dress, how they coordinate their colors. She said that this young man had been shopping for his grandmother for several years.

Kay said that Four Seasons is the largest hat carrier in town. That seems likely to me, as she did have a huge selection. She buys her hats and other apparel from catalogs. She picks styles and colors that she thinks her customers will like. Generally, the hats and dresses don't come as a pair, as a matching set. So she orders the hats and dresses separately. It's always interesting when she opens the box. She knows immediately if the hats and dresses match. When they do, it makes her happy. When a hat and dress are the same color, when it happens like that, it's amazing. Sometimes, they don't match. When you open the box, you never know what exactly will be inside.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1

It was a busy day! Before setting out, I made a few calls.

Clyde Sandifer

I called Clyde Sandifer to let him know that I am not coming to his woodcarving group today. It would have been fun, I am sure, but I need to stay focused on the hats and cakes.

He seemed to understand. He also told me that he facets gemstones—he doesn't sell his work because he makes jewelry for nine women—his wife, daughters, daughter in law, granddaughters, etc.

He also does flint knapping, should we be interested.

He also wanted me to know that he uses unique gardening methodologies—container gardening. He went from conventional gardening to square foot gardening. He talked to me about his methods for air pruning, bag gardening, and using large containers. It's an intensive method. He told me that last year he had four tomato plants and picked 140 tomatoes off those four plants. He builds metal frames to support the weight of the fruit.

Debbie Grimes

I got to talk to Debbie Grimes today. I explained to her that I would likely not have time to get to come out to Cypress Springs. I explained to her the nature of the funding, the focus of the project, etc. I told her I would like to talk to her on the phone about her role in founding the St. Joseph's Altar at Cypress Springs. She seemed to understand and said that I would get out there when the time is right.

I mentioned that I would be talking to Debbie at Another Piece of Cake and she was quick to say that this was the first time they had been involved in the Cypress Springs altar, whereas Miss Elizabeth [Schoettle] has been tried and true. I think there may have been some kind of miscommunication there, as Debbie Daigle of Another Piece of Cake told me that someone had asked her to do the rosary cake because the person who had been doing it wouldn't be doing so this year—so there were two. Not sure. Maybe I'll find out tomorrow.

Debbie told me about Jean Luc, a pastry chef in New Orleans—he has delivered cakes to Cypress Springs, sacred cakes. He is French, straight from France. His bakery is Maurice's Bakery in Metairie. She thinks the bakery is named for Jean Luc's father, who started the bakery. You'll never see anything like it, Debbie said. If you walk into the bakery, it's a little hole in the wall. It's rough. But it is amazing. He makes "sacred images," as Debbie called them—the cakes for St. Joseph's Day altars. He delivers cakes to Cypress Springs.

There is absolutely no accident, and I'll be back. This was Debbie's take on my not being able to come out there this time.

Debbie has known Sister Dulce for 15, 16 years. The monastery has been on the grounds where they are now for six years. They were formerly in an inner city church. There is story after story about their work.

So we left it that I would call her after I get home, to get more information about the founding of the St. Joseph's Day Altar at Cypress Springs. I asked her to clarify what she meant about having to run things by her, what she said on the phone the other day. She said she doesn't need to see what I write about Elizabeth, it's just that if what I write has to do with the ministry, she needs to see it. Anything else, she doesn't need to see it.

Debbie and Mr. Charles ____? founded the St. Joseph's Day altar at Cypress Springs. The people who were there were of Mexican descent, didn't know the St. Joseph's tradition before.

This was sixth year for the altar.

I called Angella and she had been in touch with Eloise Jones. She told me it would be fine for me to come early on Friday morning, that Miss Eloise would be expecting me.

Nomzamo's

I wanted to find Nomzamo's, so I looked it up online and I am glad I did. The address was different from the one I had written down previously, so I called and found out where to find them. I talked to Nomzamo herself, and she asked me who I was, so I explained the project. She was very nice, explained to me that she had an IT guy coming and that she had to see him when he came. So we would have to work around that. I told her I understood. She said that she hadn't been carrying as many hats lately, but she was wearing one today, and there was one in the store. I asked her whether that was because people weren't wearing them as much, and she said that she thought they were actually wearing more.

I found the place in a strip of the Broadmoor Shopping Center. Right away, it felt very different from the other stores where I have been going—it seems much more geared towards more contemporary styles and African centered clothing and products. There were some church type dresses but there were also African ensembles that I was told came from Ghana—two piece dresses made from African cloth, for women and girls. There were also accents—jewelry, purses, etc. And then some body care products—the wall behind the counter was covered with essential oils. Customers can have scents custom made. There were soaps, lotions, etc. And some African sculptures.

In the time we had to talk before the IT man came, Nomzamo told me that her sister in law, Jacqueline, had done research on hats. She thought that we ought to talk. She dialed Jacquie on her cell phone, and we talked a bit. Jacqueline Jones, Nomzamo's sister in law is the assistant dean of library science at Baton Rouge Community College. She explained to me that she has done a PowerPoint on the hats, about their history, and put on a special program, relating to heritage, as a vehicle for promoting literacy. I explained my project, that I was interested in

learning more about the work that she had done. We exchanged contact info, and I told her I would send her more info about the folklife survey via e mail.

Nomzamo also told me that between the time I first called the store this morning and the time I came in, a customer came in looking for hats. The woman wanted to know why Nomzamo didn't have more hats in the store, so Nomzamo ordered ten hats. She was kind of amazed by the timing, since she hadn't been as focused on hats, and she kept saying, "Divine Order," referring to the coincidence between my call and the woman coming in to buy hats.

It was becoming clear that there wouldn't be time for me to interview Nomzamo, so we set up a time for me to come to her home and do an interview after work tomorrow evening. She said she might invite Jacquie, too.

From there, I headed down Florida Boulevard to Baum's, where I interviewed Kelly Landry. While driving from Nomzamo's to Baum's, I heard an ad on the car radio for Nomzamo's. Divine Order!

Baum's

Kelly was expecting me. We sat in the bridal consultation area—that works out well for interviews with bakers! It was interesting to talk to her, as she had chosen baking as her profession, had done an internship in Rye, New York (in the same county where I grew up!), and then came back to Baton Rouge. It was through her work that she met her husband, Jason and married into the family that founded and continues to own Baum's. She talked about some of the intergenerational differences. The business is in her in laws' hands, but she is the lead cake decorator. It sounds like she and Jason are making some innovations where they can, and are still learning from his parents.

She was very generous with her time, and then took me on a little tour through the kitchen, where people were putting together petit fours. They bake many sheets of these a day. The sheet cakes are cut into squares, iced on all sides, and then put into the little paper cups. It's a huge process. They also make cake squares, which are larger, and are only iced on the top. There were several women working on the petit fours and cake squares. They were being decorated with Easter and spring designs, with piped icing and little charms. There was also a woman working on bunny cookies. In addition to their baked goods, Baum's also makes savory items, like soups and stews, etc. The big sign outside, on the edge of the parking lot, advertised jalapeño and spinach crawfish étouffée for Lent. So, there was a separate area for cooking, in addition to the bakery area.

From there, I photographed Kelly in the bakery area, near the Styrofoam cake that had been used at her wedding. It was in the showcase in the bridal area, along with other wedding cakes on display. Kelly pointed out that her cake was looking a little worse for wear. The gold or gilded frosting was starting to come off. She said that people expected a lot from her at her wedding, since they were two bakers getting married. So she felt a lot of pressure to have something really special and showy. Looks like she succeeded at that!

Sadly, when I went to log the recording, I found that about a thirty minute segment of the recording had been damaged and could not be repaired.

The Ambrosia Bakery

From Baum's I headed to Ambrosia, where I interviewed Carolyn, Felix, and Felix Jr. Sherman. I know they were squeezing me in during a very busy week, but it was good to have this opportunity. As seems to be the norm, we sat in the bridal consultation area. There is a separate room with a door that closes, but it is still visible from the rest of the bakery. The whole bakery is beautifully designed. There is a large desk in the consultation area, and the staff member who fields about weddings was there and at work, as we sat at the nearby café table. Later, as I was packing up my gear after the interview, she was having an exasperating call with a mother of a bride, as she explained when she got off the phone. The walls of this room are lined with "dummy" cakes, model wedding cakes.

Carolyn and Felix Sr. talked about the beginnings of the business—which is remarkable, given that they are now a huge business with something like 65 employees and a huge presence in Baton Rouge. The story is that Felix Sr. lost his job and looked at Carolyn and said, "Okay, I've supported you for all these years, now it's your turn to support me!" And even though he was kidding her, it sounds like, that's what happened. Carolyn had been doing some cake decorating and selling cakes from home, so this was kind of a natural direction for her to go.

They are very involved with national baking associations, and have learned much and done a lot of networking and growing through those channels. There are five family members working for the business now, and it is clearly a very well organized business, with an ordering window for shipping, the bakery counter, the café. There is a mural that runs the length of the counter, hinting at the bakery's name, Ambrosia, food for the gods, so it has a Greek theme.

Felix Jr. was watching his smartphone during the interview and dashed out when the interview came to an end. So unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to take his photo with his parents. I did get to photograph Carolyn and Felix, Sr. Felix Jr. later e mailed me to apologize for rushing out like that—one of his children was in a soccer game and he had to get there. He invited me to be in touch with any questions, etc.

After the interview broke up, I spoke with Carolyn a little bit longer. I was ordering an Ambrosia cake to take back to Houston for Christmas and she wanted to be sure that it was wrapped properly for travel, so she was talking about it with the folks who were taking my order. I will come and pick it up on Saturday morning, with a cooler with ice in it.

We talked about how these are such different times from our own growing up years. Carolyn said that her mother never served a bakery cake, they always made them from scratch. This is where Carolyn learned to bake. In fact, some of her family recipes are made at the bakery. Today, they offer 22 different specialty cakes. You can see them on the website, and they also have a computerized screen with a slideshow on a loop of their different cakes.

As we were taking our leave, Carolyn said that she wanted to give me the cake as a gift, and asked me to let her know how my family liked it. That was incredibly sweet of her! They also gave me a piece of caramel apple king cake to take with me, so I could taste it. Incredibly good! This has been a very fattening but enjoyable fieldwork project!

THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2015

Today was the “crescendo” day—when I fit in as many interviews as I could! Four in all, pretty intense but worthwhile.

Elizabeth Schoettle

I began by visiting Betty Schoettle, who lives in Denham Springs. She does accreditation work for schools, so has had a very interesting career. She could relate to my traveling and navigating new places for work.

We sat at her kitchen table and talked about her connection to St. Joseph in general, and to making the cakes for the altars, how she got into this work—both in New Orleans, where she is originally from, and in her new home. As I wrote in the notes above, she participates in two altars—the Immaculate Conception church in Denham Springs and in the Cypress Springs Mercederian Prayer Center. I have the sense that Betty does everything in a big way—she had just hosted a china painters retreat at her home.

She showed me giant buckets of cake ingredients in her home—she now gets these from WalMart. She learned to do cake decorating from “good old Wilton,” as she called it—the national cake decorating company that teaches classes and sells supplies like specialty pans, etc. I remember my mom taking those classes and making specialty cakes for birthdays when I was a kid, before she went back to work.

Betty is in the process of teaching a sixth grade girl to do the cake decorating work—in part because she needs help with the annual St. Joseph’s Day altar work, and in part because she wants to train a successor, as she realizes she won’t be able to do this work forever. She also has a devoted crew of assistants each year—some live locally or participate in the church, others who seem to serendipitously wander into the project each year.

Betty was very generous with her time. I imagine we would have talked a lot longer, had she not had a doctor’s appointment and I another interview to go to!

Jescenia Crenshaw

From Betty’s house, I made my way to Jescenia Crenshaw’s house. Jescenia is the biological mother of Susan Thornton. She also lives in Denham Springs. We set up in her living room, where we sat side by side on her couch and did the interview. When I arrived, she asked me if she could get a copy of the photo of her in the silver hat she had tried on at Penny’s on Saturday—she said it was an expensive hat and she didn’t choose that one, but would love to have a copy of the photo. I told her I would send it to her.

The interview focused largely on Jescenia's attendance at her church—the church she has been attending all of her life. We talked about how other members of the congregation look at and of course evaluate each other's hats, about what colors and styles are worn at different times of year, about how often a person can wear the same hat, and so on. None of her children attend this same church, but they occasionally come and attend with her on special occasions.

There was a gallery of family photos on the wall in the living room behind where we were sitting, and there was a beautiful photo of Jescenia's mother wearing a great hat. I don't know what it is called, but it had kind of a "droopy" design—the hat kind of draped down along the side of her face, almost like a large beret. I meant to photograph it, but forgot—I realized after I left that I hadn't taken the photo and needed to get to the next interview—darn! Maybe Susan could send me a photo when she is out visiting Jescenia.

During the interview, Jescenia got a call from her son, who jokingly asked her what she was cooking for supper on Easter Sunday. She said he was joking because he knew that she wouldn't be cooking anything. It sounds like some of her family will take her out to lunch that day. After we finished the formal part of the interview, we took some photos in the kitchen, where the light was best. Jescenia showed me the Easter baskets she had bought for her grandchildren. They were store bought baskets, wrapped in cellophane, very sweet.

Before I left, Jescenia showed me her full Easter outfit—the hat Susan had bought her on Saturday (which she modeled for the photos), and the dress that they found at the Burlington Coat Factory. She also showed me her closet, which had shelves containing her hats. I actually think this would be an interesting dimension of the research—storing the hats, how they are arranged, cared for, etc. Many of Jescenia's hats are in large plastic bags, because she said that the hat shops no longer give customers hat boxes to go with their purchases. Jescenia showed me how she handles the bags, so as not to damage the bows or feathers. She picks them up by the rim, knows where on the hat to pick them up. She had her hats arranged by season. It would have been interesting to photograph the closet, but somehow that seemed an invasion of her privacy.

Another Piece of Cake

Next stop was Another Piece of Cake, in Greenwood Springs. Debbie is busy this week, but she found time to talk to me today, for which I am grateful. We sat in the wedding consultation room—of course!

As at the other bakeries, there were sure signs of Easter—here, mostly Easter cookies, with pastel colored icing and bunny shapes, carrots, eggs, etc. She also had special seasonal boxes and tins in which people could take home their purchases. There was also a drawing for a free Easter king cake. On the floor of the bakery were bunny tracks, leading people to a table where they could enter the drawing.

Debbie does various other promotional things—today was Turtle Thursday, so people could get a turtle brownie for \$.99, for example. She also had signs up for "icing shots"—if people want a

little cup of icing. She offers cake tacos—when she trims the top of a round cake, to level the top surface, she saves the round piece, folds it up with icing on the inside, and people can buy a cake taco, among other specialties, from the case. So, she is clearly having fun with the business and developing things to make her business stand out.

We had an interesting conversation about wedding and groom's cakes—about some of the dynamics that take place between brides and grooms. She also talked about gender reveal cakes—and I realized for the first time that the couple themselves actually first learn the gender of their baby through the cake! The bakeries either receive a call or a sealed envelope from the doctor's office, with the information about the gender of the baby. The icing or cake on the inside of a cake or cupcake is either pink or blue—so when the couple cuts into the cake, or takes a bite of a cupcake, they learn the gender of the baby by the color of the frosting or cake. The outside of the cake doesn't give this information away. Wild.

Debbie has an incredible album of photos of her wedding and groom's cakes, and she kindly sent me some photos via e mail after the interview. She also explained the split cakes—some couples are now getting a cake that is half and half—in other words, the bride's side is white and the groom's side is chocolate, but it is one tiered cake. She had a model in the wedding consultation room that showed this. So the bride and groom each have on their side what they want.

Debbie will be open on Easter Sunday. My sense is that she is filling a niche for a good bakery out in her neck of the woods, that there is appreciation from the local community, to have a quality bakery in their area, without having to drive into Baton Rouge. So, it seems like she has support from the community for her business. Another Piece of Cake is located between Mike Anderson's Restaurant and a large Catholic church, making the bakery an easy stop after church, or for dessert after a meal.

As I was taking photos after the interview, I noticed a display of Italian cookies. Debbie had told me on Saturday when I stopped by to talk to her for the first time that she has Italian roots and that she has lately been getting more into her heritage. She told me that she invited a group of older Italian women to come in and share their recipes and have a session where they taught her to make the cookies in the bakery kitchen. Debbie had anise cookies, fig cookies, and sesame cookies out for sale today. She said this teaching session was a real hoot—that she had a bunch of women all lined up in the kitchen, working on this project. That would have been something to document! I wish I had known about this during the interview, as I would love to have learned more about this.

I did notice at most, if not all, of the bakeries I visited that there are cannoli and Italian cream cakes—that seems a sign of the Italian heritage that is prevalent in this area. Debbie allowed me to come back into the kitchen and photograph her and her assistant at work. There was an interesting to do list or schedule on the fridge—a white board which I found interesting, but she asked me not to use in the publication.

Debbie has a small staff and is clearly working hard to make her business a success.

Nonzamo & Jacqueline Jones

I drove back into Baton Rouge and stopped at Al Basha to pick up some dinner, fuel for the last interview. I got something to go and ate it in my car in the parking lot, and listened to the radio. A nice lull in today's full itinerary.

Nomzamo welcomed me at her home, and we set up at her dining room table. Her home is full of African art and books about African art and culture. As I was setting up the recorder and microphone, Nomzamo said something that few, if any, fieldwork consultants have ever said to me before, that she know how much work goes into logging the recordings, etc. In addition to being an entrepreneur, Nomzamo also is very engaged in cultural and educational programming. I think they are connected—in other words, she might hold a trunk show or fashion show in tandem with a cultural event. But she has brought various African/Africanist scholars and speakers to town for events. She has done some work with the Louisiana Division of the Arts, she thought, but didn't seem to know Maida. So that is definitely a connection to make.

Nomzamo thought that Jacquie Jones, her sister in law might show up to take part in the interview, as she had invited her to come over. Sure enough, Jacquie showed up as I was setting up the recording gear. She brought with her poster sized photos of her events. She has done culturally and historically focused literacy programs, including one on hats. These programs have been hosted at various Black churches, along with a tea, where women and their daughters or granddaughters came and wore hats. Jacquie explains during the interview that at least once a year, everyone should wear a hat to honor her mother or grandmother, and the women of previous generations who were not allowed to where hats.

Jacquie has done extensive research on Black women's hats, and she told us about the Tignon Laws—earlier in Louisiana history, Black women were not allowed to wear hats. Many wore tignons—or head scarves that could be tied in elaborate ways to look like hats. Jacquie had much to share on this subject, and talked about how important hats became so important to her after losing her aunt—who raised her, after her mother passed away when she was a little girl.

Jacquie and Nomzamo are married to two brothers, so there was a lovely sense of intimacy during the interview, a nice exchange that wouldn't have taken place in a one on one session. Jacquie had some beautiful things to say about the emotional impact of hats and the women who wore them. She had a PowerPoint on a jump drive, and she also had a copy of the book, *Crowns*, which Nomzamo looked through and found many familiar styles, which she commented on during the interview. Jacquie also had a newspaper article about hats, which included the quote from First Corinthians which says that a woman should cover her head when in church. Jacquie said she would be happy to share copies of these materials, as long as I gave her credit—which I of course said I would be happy to do.

Nomzamo talked about how she built her business from her original stall in flea market, where she began by selling stockings and women's intimate apparel. She filled a niche, as brick and mortar stores were not legally allowed to carry these items on Sundays, so women could stop by Nomzamo's booth on a Sunday morning if they needed these items for church. At that time, she was also working for an insurance company. When the insurance company relocated out of state, she had to come up with a new plan, as her husband was firmly planted in Baton Rouge. So the apparel business—which had grown to include hats by then—became a fulltime business.

We did get to talk about the business, sales techniques, the niche that Nomzamo's fills—along with the hat history and the importance of hats in the culture. So, it was a twofer. I did have the sense, though, that if I came back to town and interviewed Nomzamo on her own, I could focus more on the business. I asked Nomzamo what her take was on not getting to interview some of the people I'd approached. She thought they were probably busy this week.

After we turned off the recorder, Nomzamo and Jacquie talked about how Nomzamo's has a unique inventory—that in addition to the church clothes, they carry some more unique boutique and African centered items. They said that the other milliners in town carry a lot of the same item, as in more than one of the same thing, so it is easy for people to buy the same outfit. Nomzamo's is a place to go where you can find something different. She also keeps track of who buys what from the same church—and might say to a customer, "I don't think you'll be happy with that selection, as someone else from your church has already bought it."

They also told me that when customers are looking for something in particular, the shop around until they find it.

But talking about customer loyalty and relationships over time, Nomzamo told me that some women come in and shop with her after their mothers have passed away, as a way to reconnect with their mothers, in a way. They'll come in and say that their mothers once shopped there. Customer relationships are very important to Nomzamo—she really cultivates those relationships. It sounds like she works hard to train her staff to take care of their customers in the same way that she does. Nomzamo's is also known as a place to come for nutritional knowledge and grassroots information about health issues—things like home remedies and such. Her extensive line of scented oils are also a source of information for people who use the different scents for different occasions—kind of like aromatherapy.

Long but productive day! It was nice to end it at a dining room table in someone's home.

FRIDAY, APRIL 3, 2015

Eloise Jones, Joe Gambino's Bakery

Last day in the field! I began the day at Gambino's, with an interview with Eloise Jones, who has been working in bakeries for 56 years. Miss Angie made it possible for Miss Eloise to take a break from her work to talk to me. We sat at the wedding consultation table and talked for a

little under an hour, even though she was only supposed to take a half hour break. So I was lucky that it worked out for her to talk to me longer!

Miss Eloise talked about her trajectory in the baking business, starting with going to work for Miss Beulah Ledner—originator of the doberge cake—in New Orleans when she was nineteen years old. She has moved around to various other family run bakeries along the way, worked at Hunt Correctional as a baker, at Albertson's in Baton Rouge, and even had her own business, which she ran with her husband. Because of carpal tunnel syndrome, she no longer decorates cakes unless the bakery is in a pinch. She sets up and ices cakes now. Miss Eloise comes in to work at Gambino's two or three days a week. She clearly still enjoys her work, and had a lot of interesting and inspiring things to say about job satisfaction. She kept saying that she finds bakery work "fascinating." She and Miss Angie clearly have a close relationship, one of mutual admiration and respect. I got to take some photos of them back in the kitchen together. Miss Pat Glover, whom I'd photographed icing doberge cakes when I came in on Monday to interview Miss Angie, filled out release forms for me today.

There was clearly such a sense of family among the staff. I talked to Ash, who is a delightful woman who works behind the counter, takes cake orders and also does bridal consultations. She is about to get married, herself, and Miss Angella is going to make her cake. I asked what kind of cake it would be and Miss Angella said that she would surprise her. Ash's fiancé is someone who comes in and works on the coolers—he works in refrigeration.

I came back later in the day to pick up some goodies to take back to Houston tomorrow, for Easter. They told me it was quiet in the morning, but that it had picked up later in the day. Someone was going to have a first communion celebration on Easter, so they were preparing a cake for that. The bakery staff was kind enough to wrap the box containing the coconut cream pie, for travel.

Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church Good Friday Service

I had made an appointment to interview Sheila Hilton of Hilton's at 2:00. Somehow, I had the feeling that this was not going to materialize, so I called the shop and found her there. Sure enough, something had come up, she told me. So, the rest of the day was unplanned. Several people had invited me to come to the Good Friday service at Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. They had said there would be good music there, and that it was a short service, about an hour.

I called Dolores Watts on my way to the church, as she had said she was going to be there. She told me that she wasn't going to make it, after all, something had come up. She told me that she wants me to call her when I come back to town. She wants me to come over for dinner and interview her and her great aunt about hats, as they have a lot, she told me. She told me that even though she had just met me, she could tell that I have the spirit of an angel. Well, that was a nice thing for her to say! I hope I'll be able to follow up with her on her kind invitation.

I arrived at Shiloh and this time knew to park in the lot across the street, as opposed to next to the church. As I arrived, the young man who had greeted me and shown me to the Sunday

school on Sunday was there, and he kindly greeted me again, made me welcome, gave me a program. At first I sat in the back, feeling a little shy. Many of the hat ladies were seated up at the front of the sanctuary. [Later in the day, when I was visiting with folk art quilter Judith Braggs, I told her this and she commented, “They *would!*”] Although Jacquie and Nomzamo had told me that it was bad hat etiquette to sit up in front with a big hat.

I saw Brenda Gautier, and she beckoned me to come sit up front next to her—in the very front row! Actually, there was a pew in front of us, so it was the second row, I guess. Brenda was wearing the same black and white outfit she’d worn on Sunday. I think she might have been a little embarrassed about this, or maybe not, but she told me that I made her feel so good, taking her photo, etc., that she wore the same dress again, but with a different hat. I slid into the pew and she was next to me, to my left facing the altar. She had a squirmy grandson with her, and had to leave the pew a few times and ultimately sat at the side of the church, as he just couldn’t keep still. On the other side of me was a woman on her own, who turned out to be the wife of one of the guest pastors. She was very lovely, very welcoming. In front of me was a man who recognized me from Sunday. He had begun talking to me in French that day, and did so again today. I have no idea how he knew that I speak French! He told me that he was trying to put together a French conversation group, so that people hang onto their heritage, and seemed disappointed that I don’t live in Baton Rouge. That would be an interesting thread to follow.

So, I hadn’t realized what I was committing myself to, but it turned out that the Good Friday service was to be a collaboration among the Baton Rouge Area Wide Churches. The service was called, The Seven Sayings of Christ from the Cross. Each of the seven sayings were among the things that Jesus Christ said during the time he was on the cross. So, after a Call to Worship by Reverend Jeff Smith (son of Charles T. Smith, who had been Shiloh’s pastor for fifty years), each of the seven guest pastors delivered a sermon on one particular saying. These sermons were interspersed with musical selections by the Praise Team, which I think was also composed today of people from the different churches, as it seemed bigger than the Praise Team on Sunday. To my left, there was a pianist and a drummer with a full drum kit. To the right was a keyboard player. And the Praise Team was in back of the seven pastors, who sat in a line across the altar. When it came time for each pastor to do a sermon, he took the pulpit, while the others stayed seated nearby.

Clearly, this was not a short service! In fact, at the end, Reverend Smith said, “Well, I told you all I would get you out of here by 3:00, and we made it.” When I told my mom about this later she said, “Even *I* could have told you it was going to be a three hour service!” She remembered this from growing up in an Episcopal church. The three hours represents the amount of time Christ was on the cross.

I was more than happy to be in attendance at this special service, as it was an incredible opportunity to experience all the different preaching styles—truly a feast, in that sense, along with the music, which was incredible. Some of the younger preachers had a flashier style, using more vernacular language and expressions. For example, the pastor who had the saying, “It is

Finished,” used the metaphor of a race, and used athletic metaphors to talk about the race, finishing the race, etc. The pastor who had the saying, “Dear woman, this is your son. Son . . . here is your mother” used this as a platform to talk about the importance of family relationships, especially taking good care of your mother, leaving her in good hands, as the preacher implied that Jesus had done.

Sitting so close, with the large image of a Black Jesus and disciples behind the altar, it really struck home to me how the stories in these sayings and the whole metaphor of crucifixion and resurrection resonates so deeply with the Black experience in the U.S. There was so much in these sermons about suffering and about staying true to your faith, remembering to stay true to your values and beliefs, no matter how severely or unfairly they are tested. I felt truly privileged to be in attendance at this service. As was the case on Sunday, in both the Sunday School and the Palm Sunday service, people responded openly to the preacher’s sermons, calling out responses from where they sat. It would be hard not to engage with the emotional impact of the sermons.

Following the service, I did approach a few more women and took a few more hat photos. One of the women, Zavia, is among the oldest members of the congregation and has been a member of the church all of her life. She was there with her daughter. Hindsight’s twenty twenty—had I to do it over again, I would have photographed people *before* the services, as people were eager to leave after the service—especially after a three hour service! But I consider myself lucky to have gotten the photos I did.

I am submitting the program with the ephemera for this fieldwork.

Variety Fashion

So, it was much later in the day than I thought it would be when I left Shiloh. I took a few exterior shots of the church, remembering when Maida had first driven me past this church and New Salem, talking about these churches as historic pillars in the Black community.

I knew that I wouldn’t get in an interview at this point, but it felt important to stop in and visit with Tony at Variety one more time, to at least have closure for this visit and to hopefully leave the door open for next time, in the event I can come back—which I hope to do.

When I arrived, Tony and her husband, Arturo, were sitting at the front of the store. He was off from work that day, Good Friday, so he was keeping Tony company in the shop, which he often does. Tony told me that if I came back, she would give me an interview in the evening, say at 5:30, after the shop closed, so it would be quiet and she could focus. Any evening but Thursday, she said.

But as always, she offered me a bottle of water, and I stopped and visited for a while. Customers came and went, so I visited with Arturo and sometimes with the customers—Tony would tell them what I was up to and say about a customers, “You should talk to her!”

Tony and Arturo talked about how when they first got into the business, they traveled a time or two to the garment district in Los Angeles, to learn about the business, what sells, and so on. They didn't have a lot of money for traveling extensively, so after they got a sense of the business to some extent and then worked with traveling reps who came to the shop to sell from vendors based in New York and LA and other urban centers.

Over the years, when she has had the opportunity to travel to the vendors in New York and Los Angeles, she said it was great to meet in person people she had talked to on the phone for years, to meet them in person for the first time after doing business for so many years.

I told Tony and Arturo that I'd been at Four Seasons and seen a young man come in and buy a hat for his grandmother and that I'd been surprised by that. I asked whether that happened much in their store? They said that it did, that young men pick out hats and dresses for their mothers and grandmothers. Sometimes, they buy their mothers these gifts for Mother's Day, but often for Easter. On Mother's Day, they often take their mother out to eat or give her money. She then takes that money and she comes in and spends it on new clothes. But the men who buy clothes and hats for the women in their lives know their mother's dress size, know what she likes. Every so often they return the next day if it didn't work out. But most often they hit the mark. Although Tony has big signs up in the shop about not taking returns, i.e. all sales are final, in these rare instances, she'll take something back.

Tony told me that she doesn't particularly enjoy waiting on younger people. She says they have an attitude, are not as polite as women from older generations. So she doesn't carry their sizes as much. Interestingly, I think this is a niche filled by Hilton's—two doors down. Maybe this diversification in inventory is by design. When I've wandered into Hiltons, they have had lots of prom dresses and have talked about waiting on young people.

But Tony said that when she does work with parents who are shopping with their daughters, the parents won't let them buy immodest clothing. So they'll say things like, "That skirt is NOT being shortened!" Tony seems to especially enjoy waiting on older customers, likes to take special care of them, look after them. She is not sure what will happen in the hat business when the elders who are now her customers are gone. She is not sure that the younger generation will carry it on.

Tony told me that Kay at Four Seasons used to only carry hats and wigs, and that when Kay began carrying clothing it cut into Tony's business. They are just down the street from one another, maybe a mile or two apart. But Tony said that they have different taste, that they carry different things, so there is at least some diversity there.

Tony and Arturo told me that they had tried carrying shoes, but that it was too hard to carry enough of a line to make it worth their while. They did have a little display of shoes at the front of the store—maybe left over from the time when they carried shoes.

Tony and Arturo don't go to the big shows and markets, as it is too expensive to do so. So mostly these days, she works with the traveling reps who come to the store. Now, they often ask *her* what is selling in her business, in the region! She has become the expert now.

While I was sitting there, a woman came in looking for a silver lap scarf.

We agreed that I would check in with her to set up an interview when I come back to town.

From Variety, I headed over to Judith Braggs' home to exchange the quilts that Steve had bought from her as my Christmas gifts. It was great to see her again. We visited for a while before I had to go and pick up my order at Gambino's before it closed.

On Saturday morning, when I stopped by The Ambrosia Bakery to pick up my order, the box holding the Ambrosia Cake was carefully wrapped for travel. I'd bought a couple of Styrofoam coolers and had ice on the bottom, and managed to get the goodies over to Houston in good shape, taking a little bit of the experience home with me to share with my family.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3

Follow-Up Interviews

I have returned briefly to Baton Rouge to do a couple more interviews with the milliners, since it was so hard to talk to people during the week preceding Easter. So this trip is very short and targeted to getting in interviews with the hat sellers, to complement the interviews with the hat wearers. Prior to my arrival, I was able to schedule interviews with Nomzamo Iyanu of Nomzamo's and Tony Aguirre of Variety Fashion. Sheila Hilton of Hilton's was not interested, said she didn't have time, so I finally let go of that one. And I texted and called Sarah Leonard, who works at Four Seasons, and never heard back from her. I also called the shop and talked to Kay, but she was always with customers when I called, so I never got to talk to her again.

It was tempting to try to schedule additional interviews relating to the St. Joseph's altars—with Eddie DiMaio, whom Carolyn Musso told me was the cake person for the Grandsons of Italy—although Maida believes that that is a recent affiliation. And I am ever interested in the plarn mats made for homeless neighbors, a ministry of the First Baptist Church downtown. I am erring on the side of keeping things manageable in the interest of getting the deliverables done.

Nomzamo's

So, today, I re-interviewed Nomzamo one on one, as the interview I did with her and Jacqueline Jones last time I was here was more focused on the history and heritage, the personal connections to hat wearing than on the business of selling hats—although there is some good information in there. When I arrived at Nomzamo's, I found that she was short-handed, that someone had called in sick, so she was needed to help in the shop. We decided to go ahead with the interview, and she would jump in and help in the store as needed. I set up my recording gear in her tiny office, and then Dee came in to work—when I arrived Birdia Dennison

was there working. I recognized Birdie's name from the last interview—Jacquie and Nomzamo talked about her. Miss Birdie told me that she wears a hat every Sunday in church, that she feels her outfit is not complete without a hat. She is a retired school teacher from Gonzales, very involved in the community and in her church.

So, Nomzamo and I were able to get in an interview, between customers. I had written up some follow up questions while I was processing the last interview, so had those with me. A big focus for her is on her relationships with her customers, so that was something she talked about a lot, along with strategies for customer service—the service angle is really important to her. While I was there, I watched her wait on customers, so I got to see her in action—how much time and care she takes with people. That personal touch is a big part of the draw to her shop, along with the fact that she has the largest selection of African clothes in town, and the fact that what she carries is a little different than what other people carry.

She says sales are down, as a result of the economy, as well as the move from one location on Florida Boulevard to another. Evidently, Google won't take her old address off of the website unless she pays them for advertising—in fact, when I looked up her shop, I got two different addresses, so there is confusion. Also, the location is not that easy to find—I had to get directions last time I was here, as the shop is tucked away in a strip mall, in a corner of a shopping area near the former Broadmoor Theater.

She is preparing for a fashion show relating to Juneteenth next week. She hopes it will help boost people's awareness of the shop, remind them that she is there. She will have customers wear the outfits they bought from her. I am going to send her some of my fieldwork photos, should they be helpful—they want to do some kind of presentation about the shop—I've not sent people courtesy copies yet.

Variety Fashion

It felt a little full circle, ending with Variety Fashion, since Maida and I began there last year when I did my pre fieldwork visit. Tony, her husband Arturo and I sat towards the front of the store, where she always has chairs out, and we talked for two hours. Like Nomzamo, Tony feels that relationships and customer service are the most important aspect of her business, what brings customers to her store. She has a special fondness for the older women, and knows she has to be patient, take her time, when waiting on them. She said that her customers like her attitude—she has heard that from a lot of them.

It was fascinating hearing how she learned the business, from the manufacturers' reps and from her customers. Previously, she traveled to the garment district in Houston, and she has also gone to NY, Las Vegas, LA. But now the reps come to her in her store, and now they ask *her* what sells—so she has a hand in the design process as well. Arturo, who has been very supportive of and involved in her business also spoke on the recording, which is great.

I decided to go back tomorrow to photograph, as it was late when we finished and I didn't want to keep them any longer, after they'd both put in a long day at work, then talked to me.

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

Photographing Variety Fashion

When I walked in, Tony said to me, “Just in time!” For one thing, there was a Korean rep from a clothing company called Serafina, who had brought several suitcases of dresses to look at, the fall line for Tony to choose from. He hung the dresses along the front rack and Tony went through them, accepting or declining them. Towards the end, there was one dark apricot dress that Tony didn’t want to get, said it would be too bright for her customers. But then she asked a customer in the store and me what we thought and we encouraged her to take it! She told us we would have to come back and buy it if it didn’t sell. So I got to see this process in action. Also, the AC had gone out and there was a man there to repair it—had he not come, she said she would have closed the store. She has a 29 year old air conditioning unit that is only supposed to last about 17 years. The repairman—who installed the unit originally—knows the unit, knows how to care for it—but he told her that it is just a matter of time before it gives out for good. Tony thanked him, gave him a bottle of water for the road (as she does me when I leave)—I could see her relationship building in progress.

After the Serafina salesman left, Tony waited on a customer who was buying jewelry. The customer asked me what I thought of the earrings she was picking out. Her hair is growing back, presumably from chemo—after she left, Tony told me she thought that this woman had breast cancer, but that she doesn’t want to talk about it. She had been in the store before, maybe once. Tony said that people get upset if they have been in the store before and she doesn’t remember them, so she greets everyone as if she knows them, remembers them.

Tony had me try on a couple of hats and she took my photo wearing them—she matched the hats to what I am wearing today. And then she picked out a peach colored one that matched her blouse—very pretty. But she doesn’t wear hats.

I shot photos of the displays of hats, the jewelry (“bling bling,” as Tony called it), shoes, dresses, etc. Tony is such a lovely warm and caring person—it is genuine with her, not an act. Same with Nomzamo and Kay. All of them love their work and both have been in the business for about thirty years, Kay a little less.

For the rest of the day, I took myself to the Main Branch of the library, where I worked on writing up notes, etc.

FRIDAY, June 5

Gambino’s

Of course, a trip to Baton Rouge would now not be complete without a bakery stop to bring things home to the family, especially as my siblings were gathered for my brother’s fiftieth birthday, so I stopped in to pick up some things I had ordered.

This errand allowed me to see Miss Angie in action, demonstrating what she had shared in her interview about taking care of customers. I was a couple of people in line behind a woman who was clearly upset, saying that she had not gotten what she ordered, her cake was not what she wanted. So, Miss Angie was called out, and very calmly, graciously said, "Let's see what we can do, we'll take care of it. Now, tell me what it was that you wanted." And so it went, the woman had wanted an image of a Bud Light beer can on her husband's birthday cake, and they got it wrong, had the colors wrong, something along those lines. So, Miss Angie took the cake back and they fixed it. Later, after the woman had left, the staff looked at the original order slip and saw that the woman had initially gotten what she wanted. But they honored her wishes when she came in, offering good customer service. So interesting to see that in action!