

## **Watering the Masonry**

I was eleven when I visited New Orleans the first time. It was summer, the weather hot and muggy. My Aunt Carmol and her husband Tack lived in Metairie. Carmol was a schoolteacher and took it upon her self to introduce my brother Jack and me to all the cultural aspects of the wonderful old city.

Carmol was a good Methodist of Irish and German descent. She did not drink or smoke and would never have taken us down Bourbon Street after dark. She had no qualms, however, of showing us every historic sight, of which there are many in New Orleans, during the daylight hours. On one excursion through the French Quarter, she took us to the Court of Two Sisters on Royal Street, one block from Rue Bourbon.

The thing I remember most was the beautiful courtyard complete with fountains and flagstone. It was early, before noon, and an old black man was hosing the flagstones.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

The man smiled and gave my flattop a friendly rub. “Watering the masonry.”

“But why?”

“Cools things off and makes it more comfortable for the diners when they sit out here to eat.” He smiled again when he saw my incredulous look. “We do it all over the Quarter. It works.”

“Thanks,” I said, shaking his extended hand.

“No, thank you. You made an old man’s day, asking proper questions and showing respect. You come back anytime.”

The old man twisted the nozzle of the hose and returned to watering the bricks again. Brother Jack had wandered off to look at the goldfish in one of the fountains. I glanced around to see Carmol smiling at me.

“I am proud of you,” she said. “Culture is not all museums and art galleries. Sometimes you learn lots more by talking with the locals. That nice man just gave you a valuable lesson.”

I did not know what she meant at the time but I do now. Today, with central Oklahoma temperatures in the nineties, I hosed the bricks and cement around the pool while my two pugs quarreled playfully under my feet. Marilyn simply shook her head when she asked what I was doing and I answered, “Watering the masonry.”