



The History of Café Du Monde



In May 2012, Café Du Monde celebrated its 150th anniversary. When the original location in the French Quarter opened, electricity was still a decade away. Café Du Monde sits just off the Mississippi River in the New Orleans French Market. The French Market dates back to the Choctaw Indians, who used this natural Mississippi River-level location to trade their wares with travelers along the river. The French Market is comprised of seven buildings and is anchored at the Jackson Square end by Café Du Monde and on the other end by the Farmers Market and flea markets.

The café is located at the corner of St. Ann and Decatur in the building known as the Butcher's Hall. This building was built in 1812, after a hurricane destroyed the original. It has undergone a number of renovations over the last two hundred years, including major changes in 1930 and 1975.

Café Du Monde is world renowned for its café au lait and beignets. The signature drink is a blend of coffee and chicory, which is the root of the endive plant. Once the coffee and chicory have been roasted and ground, the two are mixed together prior to packaging. The chicory is added to dark-roasted coffee to soften its bitter edge. Once brewed, the coffee is mixed with heated milk to make the perfect cup of café au lait.

The Acadians, who were expelled from France in the mid-1700s, introduced coffee with chicory and the beignet to New Orleans. Their version of the beignet was a fried

fritter, sometimes filled with fruit. Today, the beignet is a square piece of dough that is fried and then covered with powdered sugar and is served in orders of three.

In 1942, Hubert Fernandez purchased Café Du Monde. Since then, four generations of the Fernandez family have joined together to serve their guests. They have expanded to nine different locations in New Orleans and the surrounding areas, while remaining family owned and operated.



Images Courtesy of Café Du Monde



Lisa Annitti Actress, Los Angeles

A Coconut Pie and a Bottle of Red Wine



“If I were a food, I’d be a chocolate Ding Dong, hard on the outside and oh so soft and sweet in the middle. I’m from Jersey...what do you want?”

So it was the night before Thanksgiving, and I found myself lonely and depressed, in my corporate apartment in Shreveport, Louisiana, trying really hard to overcome a devastating break up. If you’re wondering why I was in Shreveport, it’s because I was on location working on a feature film. Actually, that’s not the whole truth. I had run away from Los Angeles, which is where I live, because my heart was broken. The love of my life had broken up with me. (You know the kind of guy I’m referring to—the guy who when you meet him you know you are “done with searching” and you thank God that you will never have to date again.) I needed to put some distance between us.

Now mind you, I was invited to a wonderful Thanksgiving family dinner in Baton Rouge (thank you Sweeney family), but I was coerced by my boss to attend a dinner for orphans (you know what I mean, right? People with no other place to go—very depressing!) at her home in Shreveport.

It turns out that my boss’s mother is a gourmet cook, and I thought maybe this wouldn’t be so bad. I quickly changed my mind when I heard the menu, which, although it sounded delicious, didn’t include the most basic Thanksgiving fare, mashed potatoes. The dessert menu was even worse! No pies! How do you have Thanksgiving dinner with no pies? They had no pumpkin, no pecan, and not even my all-time favorite coconut cream pie. So being the generous person that I am, I offered to bring a

coconut cream pie. If looks could kill, I would be a dead woman. However, my boss, ever polite, said that that would be fine.

So it was the day before Thanksgiving, and I ran out of my office to Strawn’s Eat Shop to get my pie. I was so excited. When I returned to the office, to my utter disbelief, the “powers that be” announced that the office would be closing early for the holiday. I was almost reduced to tears. You’re probably wondering why I was so upset. It sounds great, right? Well, remember I was in Shreveport, and dinner wasn’t until 5:00 P.M. the next day! What was I supposed to do alone for the following twenty-seven hours?

I took a few moments to compose myself, and being ever resourceful, I decided to run a few errands. I went to the grocery store and bought myself some beautiful pork chops, Brussels sprouts, and a bottle of wine. I then headed home to make myself a very fine home-cooked meal. Sounds good, right? This was not so great because it brings me right back to the beginning of my story. I was trying really hard to get over a devastating breakup, lonely and depressed, in my corporate apartment in Shreveport, Louisiana. Oh, and did I mention, I have two cats?

So now, it was only 5:30 P.M., and I was home in my pajamas, with pork chops marinating, when I decided that it was not too early to open a bottle of wine. We’ve

all been there, right? Uh huh. The next thing I knew I had practically licked my plate clean and had almost polished off the entire bottle of wine. In my slightly drunken haze, I really wished I had something sweet to eat. All of a sudden I heard this little voice calling me from the kitchen, “Lisa, Lisa, eat me, eat me!” And that’s when I remembered that I had pie!

Okay, so I know what you’re thinking. The pie was for Thanksgiving. But remember I was drunk, and drunk people can rationalize almost anything. So I headed to the refrigerator and removed my beautiful pie, and it was beautiful. I told myself that if I only have one piece, I could cut the pie in half and still bring it to dinner. I cut myself a piece of pie. I took my first bite, and it was glorious, rich, and creamy. It was so cold and smooth in my mouth. I almost didn’t want to swallow it. But swallow it I did, and the next thing I knew the pie was on the coffee table. I was no longer cutting slices but eating it out of the tin with a fork, still rationalizing that I could bring the pie to dinner. I wouldn’t cut it in half though. I would cut it in slices and arrange it on a plate. I mean after all, they didn’t even want me to bring it anyway, right?

Then the phone rang, and it was my friend Sheri from Los Angeles. Before I could even begin to speak, she blurted out, “I am so depressed! They let us out of work early, and I had nothing to do, so I came home and opened a bottle of wine. Now I’m lying on the couch, and I’m really drunk!” Well, they say

misery loves company, so I told her she was not alone. I was in the same boat as her, lying on my couch and drunk off my ass. But at least she was not alone in Shreveport. Then I began to tell her about the pie.

I’m not a minute into the story when she screamed in my ear, “You can’t bring that freaking pie!” I started to tell her that I thought I could cut it into pieces and arrange it on a plate. “Are you kidding me?” she screams again. “You can’t bring that freaking pie!” And then the realization hit me. She was right. What the hell was I thinking? I couldn’t bring that pie. Was I out of my mind? So then she asked me what I was going to do. Stumped for only a second, I said, “Well if I can’t bring it with me, I am going to finish eating it!” And that’s right. I ate that pie, every last bit of that pie, and it was good!

I woke up the next morning hung over, still depressed, and with no pie to bring with me. When I finally peeled myself off the couch to leave for my boss’s house, I realized I couldn’t go empty handed, so I grabbed a bottle of wine as I headed out the door. Yes, I managed not to drink all the wine in the house. Anyway, I drove myself to my boss’s house, and when she opened the door, I said in my most non-hung-over voice “Happy Thanksgiving” and handed her the bottle of wine. She looked at the wine and looked at me, and she said “Lisa, where’s my pie?”



Signing event poster at House of Blues with Jay Basist

Lisa's Coconut Cream Pie

My real recipe is as follows: Go online and find a flight to Shreveport, Louisiana. Book it. Drive to the airport and get on the plane. Upon arrival in Shreveport, rent a car, and drive as fast as you can to Strawn's Eat Shop. Get a table and order a coffee and a slice of their amazing coconut cream pie. Die and go to heaven. If you are unable to fly to Shreveport, check out my recipe below. It will make you want to die and go to heaven too!

1 cup white sugar
½ tsp. salt
¼ cup cornstarch
4 tsp. flour
3 cups whole milk
4 egg yolks, beaten
3 tbsp. butter
1 ½ tsp. vanilla
1 cup shredded, sweetened coconut, plus ½ cup for toasting (optional)
9-inch pie crust
Whipped cream

In a medium saucepan, combine sugar, salt, cornstarch, and flour. Gradually stir in 3 cups of milk. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly until mixture becomes thick and boils. Boil for 1 minute, still stirring. Remove from heat.

Place egg yolks in bowl. Whisk constantly, while combining with 1 cup of hot milk mixture. Mix egg mixture with remaining milk mixture. Bring mixture to slow boil. Boil for 1 minute and remove from heat.

Stirring constantly, combine butter, vanilla, and coconut into the hot mixture. Pour mixture into pie shell. Chill for at least 3 hours.

Top with whipped cream and toasted coconut (optional).

Toasted Coconut

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread ½ cup of unsweetened coconut shavings, sweetened, shredded, or flaked coconut on a rimmed baking sheet and bake, stirring once or twice, until golden, about 5 to 10 minutes. If toasting sweetened coconut, check and stir more frequently because the added sugar causes irregular browning.



The famous Strawn's Eat Shop Coconut Pie



Photography by Diana Zollicoffer



Lisa with her mother, Ellie, and her grandmother, Catherine celebrating Catherine's one hundredth birthday; Lisa at 2010 Endymion Parade; The Myrtles Plantation Premiere Show, May 16, 2010; Strawn's Eat Shop in Shreveport; House of Blues New Orleans Premiere; Lisa and Peggy at SOUTH Santa Monica Show; Academy Award Party; Thanksgiving with mom





Peggy Sweeney-McDonald President, Superstar Events—LA, Los Angeles

Meanwhile, Back at Café Du Monde . . .



“If I were a food, I’d be a gourmet chocolate. I’d come in a shiny gold box with a ribbon on top, sometimes sweet, sometimes bitter, or sometimes nutty or a tasty combination, but always a treat!”

In May of 1992, I moved back to Louisiana with my New Yorker fiancé, Jimmy McDonald, who came kicking and screaming. I had left Louisiana twelve years before after graduating from Louisiana State University with stars in my eyes and dreams of being an actress, but after struggling as a legal assistant with the occasional acting job, I was ready to go home. The last year in New York had been a tough one. Jimmy had been laid off as a result of the stock market crash and then was shot in the eye by a twelve-year-old kid with a pellet gun, while walking out of our apartment on the Upper East Side. I suggested a move to Louisiana might be good for us. He told me I was out of my fricken mind if I thought he would move to fricken Louisiana (well, that’s the PG version). But, after lots of fights, tears, and threats, Jimmy went out to Rockaway to talk to his mother. She told him that if he couldn’t imagine his life without me, then that was his answer—a wise woman!

The day we left New York, we made a final important stop at Carnegie Deli, our favorite, to pick up one more mile-high pastrami sandwich, pickles, coleslaw, spicy brown mustard, and extra rye bread. As we drove through the Lincoln Tunnel, I took the giant sandwich apart, divided the delicious, mouthwatering pastrami into smaller sandwiches with the extra bread—making it easier to “inhale” in the car—and headed south. This Southern belle was going home!

The first week in Louisiana, we found a great apartment

in the warehouse district, found jobs, traded in the old Monte Carlo for a brand new Honda Accord, and set a date for our wedding at the St. Louis Cathedral.

The day the movers delivered our furniture to our fabulous apartment at 700 South Peters we were totally overwhelmed, surrounded by boxes, and didn’t know where to begin unpacking. Jimmy was having a low blood sugar moment and looked at me and said, “I need to eat, let’s get out of here”—so much for unpacking and getting settled. I suggested we go to the famous Camellia Grill for a great breakfast. It’s a small diner where you sit at the counter, and I hadn’t been there in years. The line was out the door and down the sidewalk, but I convinced him the amazing pecan waffles would be worth the wait. However, being the impatient New Yorker that he is, he just kept getting more annoyed! We were finally close to getting in the door when some college student rudely stepped in front of us to look at the menu on the wall. Jimmy looked at me and said “Damn tourist!” We had only been residents of New Orleans for a couple of hours and already considered ourselves locals.

Six months later on a cold, clear November day, with trumpets playing, the big doors of the St. Louis Cathedral opened up. On the arms of my daddy, I sashayed down the aisle as only true Southern belles can do, slowly stopping for pictures whenever I saw a camera. At that same moment, Jimmy, overcome with emotion, started tearing up. His dad saw this and got up from his pew to hug his son. Those who

witnessed this special moment between father and son couldn't keep the tears back. After the wedding, we climbed into one of those grand, white mule-drawn carriages and headed to the reception at the Bourbon Orleans Hotel. Lots of delicious Creole food was served, cocktails flowed, and Joe Simon's jazz trio kept everyone on their feet dancing. The New Yorkers didn't know what hit them and were soon up on their feet joining in the New Orleans second line around the room, waving their napkins in the air!

Later that evening, we met all of our out-of-town friends at Pat O'Brien's patio bar, and around midnight, we ended up at Café Du Monde stuffing our faces with delicious beignets and café au lait, laughing at memories of the day and wiping powdered sugar off our faces, hands, and clothes. As we were peeling ourselves off those sticky green chairs, we saw Mike Spiro, a friend from New York at the takeout window. Mike and his wife, Lori, had decided this three-day wedding extravaganza was a nine-meal trip! "No sightseeing just let us know all the best restaurants in town!" They had been to dinner at Brennan's that night, and now he was picking up beignets to go, as the day would not be complete without beignets in bed! He had five orders to go. His wife is a size 2. So unfair!

With all this great food around, I knew I needed to find a walking buddy fast, and I did—Alden Lovelace, a Southern belle from Gulfport, Mississippi—practically "dripping from the magnolias." We would meet at 6:15 A.M. in the lobby of our building and walk briskly over by the aquarium, along the Mississippi River, around Jackson Square, and back. The smell of beignets frying would hit us as we passed Café Du Monde. The first time she said, "Smell the beignets. I could eat a dozen of them." "Yes," I replied, "It's heavenly. I think of them as little pillows of decadence, and one of these days, we should bring some money, stop, and order some to go." Although we craved that indulgence, we realized that would defeat the purpose of the early morning walks, so we never gave in to our beignet power-walk fantasy. Instead, we'd walk and discuss our favorite New Orleans restaurants and recipes. I remember one recipe she shared with me—Easy Delicious Crawfish Pasta, made with pasta, a bag of crawfish tails, a can of spicy tomatoes, and a block of cheese. She told me her guests flipped out over it, and all but licked the pot clean. They begged her for the recipe, but she claimed it was a secret family recipe. Funny thing about Alden and this recipe is that years later, she married a famous

New Orleans chef. I have yet to ask her if she ever shared or made her easy crawfish pasta for Emeril!

Anytime Jimmy and I were in the French Quarter, we would always end up at Café Du Monde. Morning, noon, or night! We never discussed it. It was calling our name. We would automatically start walking there. Even if we had just finished a big, fancy dinner at NOLA, Antoine's, the Palace Café, sandwiches from Masperos, jambalaya from the Napoleon House, or gumbo from the Gumbo Shop, we were headed to our place. Even full, we could always find room to throw down a few beignets and delicious café au lait.

At one point, Café Du Monde started making iced café au laits! If you haven't dipped a hot beignet in an iced café au lait on a hot, sticky day, you haven't lived the whole Café Du Monde experience. It takes those little "pillows of decadence" to a whole new level.

Six years later, my wanderlust kicked in, and I decided it was time to move to Los Angeles. Jimmy's response was, "You're fricken kidding me, right?" The New Yorker had fallen in love with life in Louisiana, had learned to play golf, had his favorite cigar shop in the Quarter, made great friends, and loved all the great food. However, being the persuasive Southern belle that I am, he finally gave in and moved to Los Angeles, kicking and screaming! Before moving, we were at Café Du Monde one night, and I lifted my coffee cup, toasting my friends, and said, "Meanwhile, back at Café Du Monde." We all started laughing. The next time we were visiting, I said the same thing. Jimmy and our friends joined in by the time I got to "Café Du Monde," and we clinked cups on the dot, dot, dot. I remember saying, "One day that will be the name of a book, movie, play, or the story of my life."

So here I am thirteen years later, back home in Louisiana, where I have created a festive event celebrating our food experiences with the people I love!

No matter where I live and no matter what happens in my life, I always end up at Café Du Monde. You know what you are ordering, those little pillows of decadence. You know how it will taste, delicious. You know you can afford it, cheapest meal in New Orleans. And you know you are having a great time with good friends or family, and for a brief hour, you are totally in the moment—taking life one beignet at a time. So lift your glass, pretend it's one of those famous white porcelain cups and join me in saying, "Meanwhile, back at Café Du Monde . . ."

Peggy's Jammin' Jambalaya

When I lived in New York, every time I would visit my family in Baton Rouge, I would return to New York with Louisiana coffee, jambalaya mix, creole seasoning, red beans, and black-eyed peas. Once back in New York, I would invite my friends over for a great Louisiana dinner, and everyone raved about my jambalaya. Jimmy will tell you that I make the best jambalaya he has ever tasted! Yes, I cheat and use a jambalaya mix to start, as it makes a good base. I claim this is an award-winning recipe because I once won a company cook-off at one of my corporate jobs. Everyone knew the senior vice president did not like me, and I loved it when he realized he had just awarded my recipe the prize! I serve the jambalaya with coleslaw or green salad and hot French bread. It's even better the second day, so make enough for leftovers.

- 2 8-oz. packages Louisiana Jambalaya Mix, or 1 12-16-oz. package family-style mix
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 bunch green onions, chopped
- 1 medium green bell pepper, chopped
- 1 medium red bell pepper, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 14.5-oz. can crushed tomatoes with juice (spicy/hot optional)
- 1 package beef or turkey sausage (spicy sausage optional)
- 1 lb. chicken breast, cut in bite-size pieces
- Low-fat chicken broth, as directed for water on jambalaya package
- Creole seasoning and hot pepper sauce, to taste

In large pot, sauté vegetables in cooking spray or butter until softened. Add the can of tomatoes with juice.

In separate frying pan, sauté sliced sausage. Remove. In same pan, sauté chicken until cooked. Add sausage and chicken to pot with vegetables.

Add Jambalaya Mix. Add chicken broth as directed for water on jambalaya package. Stir, bring to boil, turn to low, and cover. Cook per directions on package (usually 25 to 30 minutes).



Photograph by Diana Zollicoffer



Peggy and Jimmy McDonald at the Lyceum Show

Remove from heat and let sit for 30 minutes (to absorb extra fluid). Add hot sauce or Creole seasoning, to taste.

Serve with green salad or coleslaw, French bread, and butter.

Serves 12 to 15.



Peggy eating a beignet at Cafe Du Monde; Peggy with Leah Chase, New Orleans premiere show at House of Blues; Peggy and James "Jimmy" McDonald, Jr. wedding at St. Louis Cathedral, November 14, 1992; Peggy with her parents, Myles and Sherry Sweeney, at the premiere show at the Myrtles Plantation, May 16, 2010; Peggy and Jay Basist at Café Du Monde; Peggy and Baton Rouge Mayor Kip Holden; Peggy at the Santa Monica Show at Sonoma Wine Garden, February 2011; Peggy, Jimmy, and Nanny, Peggy's grandmother, second lining; The Sweeney Family, Christmas 2011

