

NOTES FROM NEW ORLEANS UAC
May 21 – 30, 2012

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

BOUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW ORLEANS
May 21, 2012

Tomorrow morning before 5 AM, I will be on my way to New Orleans and the United Astrology Conference (UAC). Held every four years, UAC is the largest conference of astrologers that I know of on the planet, probably somewhere near 1500 astrologers. I was at the last one in Denver, Colorado in 2008, and before that many similar conferences all the way back to the AFA (American Federation of Astrologers) of 1980, held in New Orleans. So I have come full-circle with this.

I have been asked to speak on Tibetan astrology, so I will be doing my best to share what that is really all about, which probably will surprise many. It is very deep, thanks to the Buddhism. I have a PowerPoint presentation to make it fun. Then there is the city.

I love New Orleans, certainly the most different of all American cities. When I was there in 1980 I didn't want to leave, which is rare for a home-body like me. And of course I am enthused to be going there to see my many colleagues, some going back 36 years. I hope to meet my Facebook friends there too. Be sure to come by the Matrix Software booth in the Marketplace or catch me walking around and say hello.

My whole family loves New Orleans and they have all been there, except my son, our youngest, who is now 26 years old. My daughter May, who is a performing musician, has spent time there. Here is a song she wrote about New Orleans to help raise funds after the big hurricane. It is called "I Love This City" and this live version was recorded in 2011 at a show she did with her husband Seth Bernard at the Wonder Ballroom in Portland, Oregon. Give it a listen if you have the time, it is nice.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qjh4S5yyWbs>

I will soon see some of you in person!

TRAVEL OR "TRAVAIL"
May 22, 2012

My first spiritual teacher, Andrew Gunn McIver, a traveling Rosicrucian initiator, use to play with words, take them apart, put them back together again, and the like. With the word travel, he always invoked the French word "travail," to work. Travel to him was work, and I know what he means. I am reminded of the old Ricky Nelson song "Traveling Man," which tells you how old I am. It was a #1 hit back in 1961 and here it is if you don't remember it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JhxlmdgIN4>

I am not a travelin' man by nature, but I do travel sometimes, and today is one of the rare exceptions. Most times, true to my Sun sign Cancer, I am a homebody. I see no reason why I

should leave a perfectly good home and go elsewhere. Why would I?

There has to be a good reason and this time it is to visit with my astrological friends in the “home of the blues,” New Orleans, and event that happens every four years. Who knows where or if I will be in four years, so now is the time.

In just a little while I will tiptoe upstairs and say goodbye to my wife. Don’t know why I should tiptoe, since she asked me to wake her. And then there is that little black dog standing by the door, who started to hang his head the moment he saw the suitcase come down the stairs. He knows the score and will miss me mightily.

As I like to say, I often take several days to decide if I REALLY want to go to the grocery store before actually doing it, so this is somewhat of a departure (pun intended) from my regular routine – leaving. I did manage to get everything in one bag, including my laptop, which leaves me with just one of those over-the-shoulder bags that are good for conferences.

But even the shoulder bag is already too heavy for my wishes, as I keep adding things to it. Of course I have my iPhone, then there is the iPad, a few pairs of glasses, a magazine to read on the airplane, a notebook for notes, and on it goes until it actually is kind of heavy. Oh well.

I will throw the bags in the back of the car and head out for the one-hour drive to Grand Rapids, Michigan where the airport is. From there it is a puddle-jumper to Chicago, and then a big jet to New Orleans. I have not flown for a while, and the stories of flight I hear these days are not pleasant. I will just curl up by my window seat and sleep. I am one of those folks who can sleep on a plane, train, or car -- something about the rocking motion. I brought along a ski hat, one of those little beanies, which I just pull down over my eyes.

I have told this little story before, but I can’t help mentioning it here again, because for me it is my travel story of all travel stories and it came out of the blue. It was during my yearly 15-minute interview with my dharma teacher Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche. That’s when every year I tell him how my practice is going and ask him if there is anything special he wants me to do. Since I like to think I must be special in some way, I always assume there must be something special he wants me to do.

But each year, he shakes his head and says, “No, nothing special. Just keep practicing.” I am always a little disappointed, but not this year. It was 1997. He looked at Margaret and I, and a big smile came over his face. I had no idea what he was about to say. “Yes there is something I want you to do,” he said, “I want you to go to Tibet and see His Holiness.” ‘His Holiness’ was the Karmapa, the head of the dharma lineage to which Rinpoche and we belong.

Well that was a shock, especially since I don’t like to travel even a little bit, but I took it in the best stride I could. Yes, I told, him, someday I aspire to go see His Holiness in Tibet. But Rinpoche was having none of that. “No,” said, “This summer, as soon as you can.” It was already July.

Now he had my full attention. What he asked us to do was way more special than I had bargained for, and you do what your lama asks you to do. And we did that, getting ready to go (visas, shots, etc.) in less than a month! And we took all of our kinds except one with us. So, I guess I can manage to go to New Orleans, where I hope to continue this blog, but any photos I post from there will be from my iPhone.

REPORT FROM NEW ORLEANS

May 24, 2012

I am still alive and made it down here to New Orleans, where I am in the midst of it all. This is my second time here and there is no doubt in my mind that New Orleans is the most different of all American cities, and probably my favorite as well. From Grand Rapids we took a puddle-jumper across Lake Michigan to Chicago to make my connection to New Orleans. The plane for the New Orleans flight was one of those larger ones, with six seats across, three on each side. I noted with a sigh that my seat was in row 34, right next to the bathrooms at the rear of the plane.... and with some 120 people ahead of me for deplaning. Now I have a little problem with deplaning. I don't exactly panic, but I am anxious to get off a plane once it lands. I am grateful I landed safely, but I want to get the hell out of there quickly. The idea of waiting while 120 people got their things and filed out was not a happy one, so I inquired whether they needed anyone for exit rows and so on. They did not, but they did have forward seats for a fee. I guess this is the new flying, charge for everything that you can. I read that one airlines now charges to use the on-board toilet. Incredible! For \$30 they did have a window seat, with an empty seat next to it in row #1, the first economy row after First Class... and with no seats in front. I considered that a bargain and was happy to get it. I can sleep on planes, so I just pulled my little ski beanie over my eyes and before I knew it we were getting ready to land in New Orleans.

The shuttle from the airport to the hotel was a bit of a ride and the driver, who had no sound system and whom I was sitting directly behind, gave us an impromptu guide to the city as we rode along, shouting above the noise of road. I was already realizing: this is New Orleans! So, it was hurry up and get to the hotel, check in, and then what? Then just nothing. I had nothing to do but just sit around and wait to see who arrived. I am such an active person, and impatient too, but there is something in me that also likes to wait. Well, the fact is that I always find myself waiting for someone or something, so over the years I have learned not only to expect it, but to kind of enjoy it. The operative phrase is "kind of." People began to materialize and before I knew it I was saying hello to old friends, and also meeting some of my new Facebook friends for the first time. I am surprised how many of you here on Facebook were kind enough to come up and say Hello. Although we have never met, it seems like we are already old friends. I felt kind of conspicuous sitting there in the lobby for such a long time, but what am I supposed to do, sit in my room? The windows in my hotel room do not open, and I hate having no fresh air, so I will spend as little time there as I can. So there I sat, doing exactly nothing, feeling self-conscious, etc., but I eventually forgot about that and just got into the swing of things.

Before I knew it I was invited with a group of friends to take a car tour of the most devastated areas of New Orleans, the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. Our tour guide was well-known author Martha Ward, whose biography of voodoo priestess Marie Laveau is so popular. It was a bit of a drive as we passed through the upper Ninth Ward, and crossed some imaginary line that I could not see into the lower Ninth Ward, one of the hardest hit areas. It was an eye-opener, for sure. There are great signs of recovery, but also many houses or bare foundations where nothing has yet to be done, other than clear away the debris. We drove through seeming endless neighborhoods. In many places you could see the high water mark and in others those marks were clearly pointed out. And we are talking about small houses, not big homes. It was sobering to see what the forces of nature can do and that there is nothing we could do to stop it. The signs of recovery were also strong, house after house newly built or completely redone, and the colors. These new houses were of all colors, one after another, bright and cheery. Life was returning, and I would imagine in an even more colorful way, literally.

I was shocked to hear that in this entire part of the city, and I mean a large section, there is only one small grocery store, so getting food for folks who live here is a big problem. The grocery chain-stores have never rebuilt, so if you don't own a car, and most here don't, where is your food coming from? It is too far to walk and the sun and humidity here are formidable, something I realize every time I step out of the air-conditioned hotel. We also toured what are called the "Brad Pitt," houses, homes rebuilt after the hurricane by the Brad Pitt Foundation. These were all kind of built up in the air on stilts, and I am told that architects all over the world submitted designs. And each house was so different and, again, bright and even 'crazy' colors were the order of the day. And there were also empty lots with just stairs going nowhere, where no house has yet been built. These houses were located along where the levee gave way. And we drove through what is called the "New Orleans Musician's Village," an area of some 300 houses that were rebuilt, a section mostly inhabited by musicians, and these too were a rainbow of colors, with people on their porches, the sound of electric saws, and rebuilding everywhere you looked.

And people all over New Orleans were out in the streets, living large. As night came, impromptu jazz bands, some of them just young high-school kids, sprung up on street corners, and the sidewalks were filled with people, and I mean all kinds of people. This is so different from the more 'sterile' use of streets up north where I live. I don't know why, maybe just the warmth of the sun and the South, but everyone was everywhere, and they seemed happy at that. I know I loved to see all of this being-together that was going on. We ended the night eating at a small soul-food restaurant "The Praline Connection," where we foolishly-perhaps ordered three platters for the table. There were four of us. The huge platters of food that eventually came were almost too large to fit on the table, and included things like fresh shrimp, oysters, catfish strips, stuffed crab, all deep fried. And there was fried okra, fried dill pickle, corn bread, collard and mustard greens, fried chicken livers, fried chicken, and on and on. Also a whole platter of crawfish etouffee. You get the idea. It was wonderful, but not something I could not eat every day. I would be dead from all the fried food. As it was, it took me about a day to recover from it, but friends, it was real good too.

By the time we got back to the hotel I was shot. I have been up since 3 AM, and it was about 10:30 PM by the time I got back to my room. And then I was too "out there" to sleep. There is more, but I will save that for another blog. Hope all my Facebook friends are still there. I am down here in this magic city. Wow!

MICHAEL ERLEWINE ON FOX NEWS
May 25, 2012

Not my favorite channel, but here I am in three segments on Fox News. My Facebook fans should like this! Let me know your thoughts please? Here is the video link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPq7vp-iHpw>

NEW ORLEANS REPORT: The Booth
May 25, 2012

Catching up on my sleep? Not really, perhaps a little. Part of it is that I am just busy, the rest I chalk up to being so enthused to be here with all my peers. And then there is the being in a hotel room without any windows that open (no fresh air), not my idea of a fun place to be, so I tend to out among the conference folks, which is why I came here in the first place.

Building our booth was a trip. We have a twenty-foot booth, part of which is a large (eight-feet high) curved wall which was shipped in that expands and is like a kind of giant erector set. I could have waited another day until my staff arrived, but of course I could not wait for that, because I wanted to see how it looked. It looks great and I include a photo here, but after building it the only thing I was fit for was a shower.

Even though I need sleep, my body still wakes up really early, like around 3 AM, just like at home. So I am kind of trapped in my hotel room until the restaurant opens at 6:30AM. After that my day begins and I am up at our booth or meeting astrologers as I find them. I continue to meet dozens of my Facebook friends, so that is great.

There was a little flurry of excitement when a Fox News video team showed up and started filming. As it turned out they liked our booth and ended up doing an interview with me on camera, including my calculating a horoscope for their celebrity person, and interpreting it for her right on the spot. That was fun. She also interviewed our staff member David Palmer, who is an astrologer and TV personality from L.A. I have no idea if any of the footage will make the news, but doing it was a blast anyway. I have been doing video interviews, and have more to do.

The tradeshow opened at Noon, which my staff handled beautifully, but by then I was headed out into the city for a rare treat, lunch with jazz singer John Boutte. Some of you may know Boutte from the HBO Series Treme, which is named after a neighborhood in New Orleans. Boutte wrote the theme song and other music for the series and is a well-known and loved part of the New Orleans scene.

I really didn't know much about the Treme series, but had heard about John's incredible voice from my daughter May and her husband Seth for a long time. Boutte had befriended them years ago and they always wanted me to meet him. Well thanks to bluesmen Bill Lynn and Luke Winslow-King, the four of us met at the Cake Café for lunch and just to hang out. And this was a chance to try out my Panama hat, which I have to tell you about.

No, you are not going to see a photo of me in this Panama hat, because I am still too self-conscious about it, but there is this story. My good friend Luke Winslow-King, who lives and plays music in New Orleans, told me that I must get a wide-brimmed light hat to wear around New Orleans, because the sun is so strong. A normal hat, with a small brim, just won't do at all he explained to me. So I searched the Internet until I found this wide-brimmed straw hat that was also foldable.

I brought it but had not worn it because I never leave the hotel, and when I do the blast of humidity and heat makes me realize the benefits of hotel air conditioning, and I soon slip back inside. Anyway, I wore my straw and my shades when Bill Lynn picked me up and drove me to where we were going to have lunch. I noticed that he did not have a hat on. Hmmm. Then at the Cake Café, when Luke Winslow King arrived with John Boutte, he had no hat. What's the deal? Here I am with this dumb hat on.

But then I noticed that John Boutte had a hat and sunglasses, and his straw hat and mine were identical, same brand, etc. I felt much better as he placed his hat on the table, carefully putting his sunglasses in the narrow groove at the top of the hat. My sunglasses were just out on the table, and it took me a while to secretly maneuver them into the groove on my hat. In the end there were these two hats side by side on the table, each with a pair of sunglasses. Of such

behavior is my life made up of.

The café is a small place and was not crowded. We could hear each other speak and a good time was had by all. We must have discussed everything under the sun. A surprise highlight was when Boutte accidentally flipped a plate, sending the food that was on it all the way to the ceiling, and bringing a shower of crabmeat down on us from above, mostly on me. There was a lot laughter at that event.

Later everyone took off and John Boutte drove me back downtown, playing some of his favorite songs for me to hear in the car. What a great singer this man is, so gentle and kind as well. It was a real treat and we have been trying to get Boutte up to our yearly Harvest Gathering seemingly forever, so we talked about that too.

The Harvest Gathering is a private gathering on a farm in Michigan each year for musicians, after the festival season is over. Some eighty bands or so converge for three days of music and being together. Three stages means music all the time, and all the best bands in the Midwest show up to play music for and with one another. It is a special time that happens in the third week of September each year. Although not much advertised, perhaps 1000 non-musicians also find their way there. It is called a gathering because everyone is tired of festivals by that time of year, so all the festival bands gather for their own celebration.

After lunch at the Cake Café it was back to the booth and meeting astrologers I have not seen for years, with conversations, on and on. At the end of the day I was invited out to a very fancy restaurant, Antoinnes, one that seemed to have more wait staff than customers. It was very, very high class. I could tell.

I went with Mark Graham and his team from Astrology.com, the largest astrology site (owned by NBC) on the Internet and by now an old friend. I had worked with Mark for years as a senior consultant for NBC, so we discussed all kinds of business things and also had some laughs. It took so long to have this casual dining experience that we had to almost run back to the hotel for the opening ceremony of the conference at 8:45 PM. The streets were full of people walking right in the street where cars were trying to get through. I could hear live music being played from the side streets, and I would peer down to catch a glimpse of the players.

Back at the hotel and into the huge ballroom (or whatever it is) was itself an experience. It was filled with probably 1,000 people all sitting in endless rows of chairs and carrying on like there was no tomorrow – a cacophony of voices. The moment I stepped into the room it came home to me that I was exhausted, too tired for any such ceremony and it sent me immediately looking for shelter. I was not game.

Being an astrologer, I live by the signs around me, and this was a sure sign to skip the ceremony and hit the sack, which I did. So we are kind of up to date. I got some sleep and am up at 4 AM writing this. I will keep you posted. Let me know if you want to hear all this stuff.

NEW ORLEANS CORRESPONDENT
May 26, 2012

There is a special area set aside for speakers where food and drink is always available. Well, not always available, but most of the time. The only thing is that it's on the top floor of the hotel, some 41 floors up. I have two problems with that. First, that is a long elevator ride up and I have

to swallow more than once to keep my ears from popping. And the second is that it is a long ways up and I have a touch of vertigo.

For those of you who don't know what vertigo is: when I look out from a very high place, my mind puts 'me' or some part of me out into the open space I am looking at without asking my permission. Suddenly I feel like I am outside building 41 one floors up, and so on.

In fact when well-known astrologer Noel Tyl asked me whether I had been up to the 41st floor and seen that incredible view of the river and the big ships, I could only say I had been up there. So he asked me again, "Well, what about the view, Michael?" I had to tell him I never saw the view, perhaps just a sideways peripheral glance at the river. So I have not been up there very often and when I do I tend to look inward from the windows, not out.

The sense of time here is starting to pick up its pace. Those first days were long and slow, as I took it all in, but by now they are starting to just slip away into a stream. I spend my time at our booth or talking with other astrologers, and sometimes just strolling around. After that first night out on the town when I ate all that fried food, I am being much more conservative. Often I am not even going out on the street, but just eating in the hotel, where the food is nothing much, but the hassle of trying to find a restaurant, waiting for food to appear, and getting back into the hotel, does not seem worth it. And this is aside from the fact that all the fried food does not sit well with me.

A highlight yesterday was having my friends Luke Winslow-King and his partner Esther Rose come to our booth and play a set of pretty traditional New Orleans music. It was lovely and people really liked it. I include a photo here that David Palmer, as astrologer from L.A., took. I have known Luke for many years and even taught him to play the blues some, way back when. But he has played on the streets of New Orleans for years and is now featured in the clubs. His partner Esther Rose has a lovely voice and is just plain lovely aside from that.

And, of course, there is the dreamlike quality of being suddenly dropped in the midst of 1500 astrologers as opposed to being home and isolated from all that. It is a bit overwhelming, but marvelous at the same time. And it is like a dream, because as I look around, here is this or that famous astrologer that is just alive and present. I can just walk over to them to talk, and I do. That part is kind of like a dream.

Today I do my second video interview and the rest is who-knows-what will happen? I still have not caught up on the sleep and probably never will while I am here. So that is my update. I kind of miss ready access to Facebook and what you folks are doing.

This is your New Orleans correspondent signing off into another day in the "Big Easy."

NEW ORLEANS JOURNAL
May 27, 2012

I am still here in New Orleans and still not caught up on my sleep. Woke up at 3 AM this morning and was up all day. I tried to catch a nap but didn't manage to catch it, so I lay there on my back for a while looking at the ceiling and then just gave up, got up, and jumped back into the stream of astrologers everywhere. Believe it or not, aside from perhaps a few thoughts of home and missing my dog (and of course my wife!) I was OK. I know that sounds bad, but I know my dog really, really misses me, and I hope my wife does too.

I started out the day with an on-camera interview for Chinese television, which took perhaps an hour. Apparently there is a growing demand in China for astrology, and (believe it or not) Western astrology at that. So that was fun and the camera crew and interviewer were fun and so respectful. Sometimes it is nice being treated like "somebody." I am sure we all feel that way.

As for food, I have pretty much given up on what I imagined I would be doing: feasting on all this classic New Orleans food. I tried it and liked it, but it was not too crazy about me. There is only so much fried food I can eat and then it's enough. Perhaps I can be a little clearer here if I tell you I actually ordered oatmeal for breakfast. And my lunch is shifting from whatever gumbo or New Orleans special there is to something like a Caesar Salad. You get the idea. I am not living to eat here, but back to trying to eat to live.

And it is the same story with my plans to take historical New Orleans by storm. I had a strong start when I toured the disaster areas of New Orleans, like the lower 9th ward, and so on, but any such plans have kind of evaporated and I find myself not particularly interested in leaving the hotel, air-conditioning and all. Instead, I seem to keep immersing myself in the stream of astrologers I am surrounded by.

I am meeting many new Facebook friends, and having conversation after conversation with astrologers attending the conference. I kind of lose all sense of time and wake up realizing I have been standing there in the middle of a crowd for a long time talking to someone and ceased to see or hear what is going on all around me, like a lot of movement and noise. And these conversations are not just chit-chat, but mostly real conversations that either are reestablishing ties since I last saw the person or plunging into topics of one kind or another. All this is all fun.

Last night I went to astrologer Michael Lutin's play "OMG, the Mayans Were Right." Every UAC Michael Lutin, armed with a small army of astrologers, performs a play. I know it is months in the preparation, and many of the astrologers (well known to us all) disappear from view for several days during the conference because of the rehearsal. We miss them.

The whole event was held in a huge ballroom, and there were many hundreds of people there. There were two acts, the first was a big silent auction and cocktail party that was loud and boisterous as you might imagine. I was pretty much wallpaper through that event. Then, this huge crowd massed to a single point and entered what was called a "wormhole" and into an even larger room where the play was held.

These kinds of plays are usually not my favorite cup of tea because no one has had enough time to really rehearse. However, this one was a lot of fun. Michael Lutin is a real pro, a true entertainer, and very funny. He was like the main actor/MC or narrator of the story. I was impressed.

All around him were all our favorite astrologers in various states of dress and undress, painted and not painted, but all carrying on. Where else could you see astrologers Stephen Forrest dressed as Albert Einstein and Andrew Morton as Sir Isaac Newton singing a duet? I think: nowhere.

And Gloria Star, one of my favorite people, was "Jelly," the cabaret singer, and she was incredible. Her singing was so good that it brought tears to my eyes, and I am a professional music critic! How about that?

Anyway it was a fun romp through the night and the huge audience loved it. So there you have it, a capsule review of the play and the day. As I write this, I must turn to more serious things because today is my talk and it would seem that I left my notes at home!

I am going to start recreating them. Thanks for listening and that is my journal for today. Hope you are enjoying these!

A HINT OF THE IMPERMANENCE OF IT ALL

May 28, 2012

Oh, oh. I can begin to feel this whole conference beginning to wind down. I hate it when that happens. Everything is still going strong, but there is the first hint of the impermanence of it all, that a couple days from now I will be on a plane and heading home.

Whenever I have such a rich experience as this has been, there is that little bit of heartache, or as Shakespeare said "Parting is such sweet sorrow." Anyway, I can already tell I will be breathing a sigh or two soon. As the writer Gertrude Stein once said, "Before friendship faded, friendship faded."

Meanwhile everything is still in bloom. I ran out of photos to share, so this one of a calla lily will have to do. That little drop that is about to fall symbolizes the end of the conference that will come.

I am sorry I will miss the banquet this evening, but astrology is but one of several areas I play in. I am also a musician and know a number of people who live here in New Orleans. I have been invited to a house party, where we will all cook together. And I promised to do the astrology chart for John Boutte, who wrote the theme song and other music for HBO's original series. "Treme." Boutte is a wonderful singer and it will be fun to do a little astrology for everyone.

Meanwhile, the day is starting again and I am about to launch myself back into the stream of astrologers and see where it takes me. I love the new way that the elevators here at the hotel work, where you punch in the floor number and are told which of seven elevators is coming for you. However, I don't love it when the elevators grind to a standstill when lectures let out and we all stand around there for... who knows how long.

Last evening I went to the open house that the AFA (American Federation of Astrologers) put on and ate dinner at the Palace Café. That is all I have to report other than last night I got my first real night of sleep. That too is a sign of this winding-down business.

THE MANDALA IS BREAKING UP

May 29, 2012

The UAC mandala is dissolving. The last day is already here. I have to remind myself that, like the intricate sand mandalas of the Tibetan Buddhists that once finished are swept into a pile and tossed into a river, it is not the colored sand that is the mandala and blessing, but the act of offering and making the design. We have all offered ourselves to one another here; how inspiring.

When I first arrived in New Orleans, time seemed to crawl by and each day was an endless

display of promising events. But each succeeding day has gone by faster and faster, like two trains passing, until today we are suddenly at the end. I already see that leaving all of this is going to be somewhat painful. I was afraid of that.

Much of my experience here has been like a dream or movie in which the cast of my many astrological friends appear one after another in succession. I am awake in my own dream. As for my Facebook friends, I have met scores of you in person for the first time and, although we have never seen each other face-to-face, we were already old friends. It has been such a treat to meet you!

In my life I wear several hats, including being a musician. I had to skip the UAC banquet I was looking forward to when I received a dinner invitation from Ben Jaffe (the owner and creative director of the Preservation Jazz Hall), and the son of Hall founders Allan and Sandra Jaffe. Ben also plays tuba and bass for the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. This was an offer I could not refuse. It was a wonderful evening, just a few folks meeting at an incredible home for food and conversation.

Attending was acclaimed musician John Boutte, who wrote the theme song and other music for HBO's original series, "Treme." I had lunch with Boutte earlier in the week. Also there was the legendary musician Charlie Gabriel, a 79-year-old clarinetist who also plays in the Preservation Hall Band. Luke Winslow-King, who played music at our UAC booth twice this week, was also there, along with Celia Sinclair (who helped out in our booth). Celia is the daughter of my long-time friend, poet, and activist John Sinclair. My old friend Bill Lynn picked me up at the hotel and brought me back. We had a delicious and vegetarian (mostly vegan) meal, so it was almost like home, what a wonderful time.

Today I will be tying up loose ends and (quite symbolically) taking down our booth sometime around 2 PM. After that I have no idea what I will do, probably say goodbye to as many folks as I can and prepare to head to the airport early Wednesday morning. I will soon be back home in a small town in mid-Michigan with my family, so far away from all this. Au revoir to New Orleans and to all of you at UAC.

GOING HOME

May 30, 2012

In a just a little while I will be on my way home from UAC, the United Astrology Conference, here in New Orleans. For someone who does not travel and, aside from nature walks and photography, does not even go out all that much, this has been a trip in more ways than one. In other words, you will seldom see me in large social groups.

At 2 PM yesterday the Marketplace closed and we deconstructed our booth. As we packed our freight boxes it was only too clear that the mandala of UAC was disintegrating very literally by that point. No, we did not sweep it into the river, but as I surveyed the now-empty space where our booth was, I understood once again that in any mandala offering, it is the 'offering' process that is auspicious and meritorious (what we gave of ourselves), the giving itself, and not the result -- what we got from the process.

Of course I personally got a lot out of the conference, but it probably cannot be measured in dollars earned in the Marketplace. Immersed real-time in the stream of astrologers from all over the world, I once again have a real sense of how things are with us and where we are going.

And as wonderful as we are as a group, I cannot say that all is rosy.

It is clear to me that astrology is still struggling to be properly recognized as a profession by society and that making a living through astrology remains a hard row to hoe. At the same time, I see that our intent and heart is in the right place and our wish that our compassion to be of use to others is very much alive and well.

Being here has been something of a wild ride, one that I will long remember. I certainly have ridden in enough elevators (some packed to the limit) and walked enough hallways for a while. And I will not miss the stinging in my eyes from the strong rug shampoo these hotels use that apparently has no way of being absorbed, except by our bodies.

But I will cherish the very many friends I have met here and the meaningful conversations we have had with one another. Isn't that what this conference is really all about? Of course I enjoyed the lectures I attended, but when I spontaneously think of this last week, it is the friendship of my fellow astrologers that comes to mind, and all my Facebook friends that I had never met before. We are many!

I include here a quick iPhone photo of our dog Molotov that my wife Margaret took yesterday. There he is amidst some poppies in our yard. I know that he is (and has been) waiting for me to come home all this time. My wife tells me that he has been spending most of his time in my office.

Anyway, I am on my way. Thanks to all of you who read this and I will return to my regular blog tomorrow (as they say around here), "If the good god is willing, and the creek don't rise."