

## Reading Project book gives students a taste of New Orleans

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"I knew I wanted to make the rest of the world love and care about New Orleans, but I also knew that a New Orleans book that New Orleanians didn't like would be a loser," says Dan Baum, author of *Nine Lives: Mystery, Magic, Death and Life in New Orleans*, this year's Tulane Reading Project book for all entering first-year students.

*Nine Lives* by Dan Baum

If New Orleans is a "carnival for the senses," Dan Baum says the sense that was most stimulated for him was "my sense of shared destiny with the people around me. That exists nowhere else in America the way it does in New Orleans." (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

In this second part of our [interview with Baum](#), the author says he hopes his book will give students a taste of New Orleans.

**Q: What do you think incoming students at Tulane, as newcomers to New Orleans, can glean from your book?**

I'm hoping it will serve as a primer to the unique subcultures that make up New Orleans. It's hardly a scholarly treatise on each, but rather a taste of each. And I also hope to communicate to newcomers to New Orleans that they can get any New Orleanian to tell them anything at all about their lives ... as long as they're willing to spend the time to listen.

**Q: Many writers quote New Orleanians phonetically to give a sense of the unique way some of us speak. Do you feel the lyrical element of New Orleans speech patterns was maintained in *Nine Lives*, despite the fact you didn't take that approach?**

I take notes on a laptop, and can type as fast as anyone can talk. So I end up with transcripts of my interviews. And it wasn't until I was working with the notes that I discovered a linguistic oddity. If you're from above Canal Street, you say, "We're going to meet AT eight o'clock." If you're from below Canal Street, you say, "We're going to meet FOR eight o'clock."

To the extent possible, I tried to reach each person's story in his own way of speaking ? though without resorting to dialect, which I always find forced and distracting.

*Dan Baum is scheduled as the [Tulane Reading Project](#) keynote speaker on the uptown campus on Oct. 2.*