

Gwen Thompkins: The long way home

September 08, 2015 11:00 AM Gwen Thompkins
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Gwen Thompkins, at home in New Orleans, discusses the origins and evolution of Louisiana music every week on her radio show, "Music Inside Out." (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

At this writing, I hear footsteps on my roof as workmen repair damage from a recently fallen tree. Make that a large tree. No, make that the Hammer of Thor.

It was an old Chinese tallow, otherwise known as a gray popcorn, or even a chicken

tree. These are not names of distinction. The U.S. Geological Survey's most common descriptor for the Chinese tallow is "invasive," which is like a really bad "Yelp" rating, but in nature. As it turns out, that 40-foot pile of chicken smashed my air conditioner like a clove of roasted garlic.

I could describe what it feels like to live in New Orleans over summer break without cool air, or what insurance adjusters are like, or the relationship among air-conditioning compressors, hydrochlorofluorocarbons and the Montreal Protocol. But instead, Cole Porter comes to mind:

*It was just one of those things
Just one of those crazy flings
One of those bells that now and then rings
Just one of those things*

Fact is, I've seen worse. We all have. This summer marks the 10th anniversary of one of the biggest hammers of Thor to hit New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Her name was Katrina and may she die a thousand miserable deaths.

The hurricane and flood set in motion a series of events that sent me scrambling around the world. Yes, I made it back ? and with a fistful of frequent flier miles. But in the spirit of Odysseus, who spent 10 years en route home to his kingdom ? through wars and weather, Lotus-Eaters, cannibals, a cyclops and an angry god ? I can't help but think there had to be an easier way. Leaving home shouldn't involve so much water, so many deaths and such a long tail of recovery. But it does make for a good story. *The Odyssey* has never been out of print.

[Gwen Thompkins](#), a 1987 graduate of Newcomb College, is a visiting scholar at Newcomb College Institute. Her radio show, "Music Inside Out," airs on WWNO-FM in New Orleans on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and Saturdays at noon. [This is an excerpt](#) of an article that originally appeared in the September 2015 issue of Tulanemagazine. To read the entire article and to find out what's on Thompkins' "Pontchartrain Park playlist," [click here](#).