Cajun expressions

In this recording you will hear two people, Clothilde and Carla, talking about Cajun expressions. Cajun people were originally French people who lived in today's Canadian provinces Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and moved to Louisiana after 1755. Clothilde, who is Cajun tells Carla in this conversation about words and expressions from French that Cajun people use even in English today.

Carla: I really liked the joy of life. I mean, I'll try to pronounce it but joie de vivre. That is a French word too. Are there other French or Cajun French words that you can share with us?

Clothilde: Oh yeah. I like the word "lagniappe", and it means a little extra. For example, if you go to the bakery and you order a dozen doughnuts, and the baker gives you an extra one that he or she would say is for lagniappe. Another word, when you go to south Louisiana, you're gonna to hear a lot of sentences punctuated by the word "sha." I love this word. It comes from the French word "cher" which means "dear" and it's used as an expression of fondness. For example, let's say that you see a precious baby at the coffee shop. And you say, "Oh sha, this baby is precious." So sha it's a sweet word. If you were happy to see me and you wanted us to have a chat, you might say, "Sha come on over here and tell me how you're doing." So, you've got "lagniappe" and you've got "sha". Another one that I often hear my brother use is the word "boo," my brother loves to use that word. And it is the same word that a ghost says: "Boo," but it's used to describe a loved one. My brother will say to his nieces and nephews, "Boo, come on over here and let me give you a hug." Oh, there are so many Cajun phrases. Also, many of our family names or surnames in the region are French: like LeBlanc, Boudreaux, Arceneaux, Breaux. Thibodeaux.

Karla: Are the Cajun phrases always in French?

Clothilde: Usually, but it's an old French. I have no doubt that the Norwegian language has changed and evolved over the past 300 years. So has the French language that is spoken in France and Quebec. But Cajun French has not changed that much in over 200 years because it was spoken by a small number of people in an area that was isolated from the rest of the United States because of the bayous and swamps. Let me give you an example. If you have friends who have the same name as their fathers? For example, if a father's name is Olaf and his son is named Olaf too, what do you call the younger Olaf? I don't know. But in south Louisiana, if a father whose name is Claude has a son and his name is Claude, the younger Claude is going to be called usually T-Claude. The "T" is the shortened version of "petit" or "little." I don't imagine that will

ever change in south Louisiana, at least I hope it never will change. Things don't change fast in south Louisiana. We hold onto our traditions.