Brief history of Cajun people

Carla: Hi Clothilde, so nice to see you again! I have been thinking about the Cajun people. My partner and I went on holiday to the US and Canada and that was the first time I heard the word Cajun. It was during a visit to Ellis Island; we were looking at a map that showed different patterns of migration in North America. One arrow showed that the Cajun people came from the coast of east Canada along the coast of the US all the way to the southern states. Of course, at that time, there was no Canada or the USA, there were only colonies. Meeting you and hearing about your Cajun heritage reminded me of that. I know nothing about Cajun people, and I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about Cajun people. Maybe some of their history and what the culture is like today?

Clothilde: Have you heard of the Canadian provinces Nova Scotia and New Brunswick?

Carla: Nova Scotia and New Brunswick are eastern provinces on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean, aren't they? Are they east of Quebec? Part of Canada?

Clothilde: Yes, before they were called Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, the area was known as Acadia or Acadie in French. It was a French colony, but in the early 1700s, France gave control of Acadie to Britain. In 1755, the British deported the Acadians from the area because they refused to sign an oath of allegiance to Britain. This expulsion is called Le Grand Derangement. I don't really know how to translate it, but it was kind of like the Big Departure. Thousands of Acadians were placed on ships and taken to various areas along the Atlantic Coast of the United States. So many Acadians were unhappy in their new homeland. Louisiana was under Spanish rule at that time and the Spanish colony welcomed the exiled Acadians to Louisiana promising the Catholic French people religious freedom, because as we know the Spanish were Catholics themselves. The Acadians could also continue speaking French. Eventually, many of the Acadians resettled in the bayou lands of south Louisiana and stayed. The word "Acadian" shifted to "Cajun" and my hometown, Lafayette, is considered the capital of Cajun Country.

Carla: I see, this is why the Cajun people today live on the coast of Louisiana and not somewhere near the USA – Canadian border in the northern parts of the USA. You said bayou – I have not heard that word before. What does it mean?

Clothilde: Well, you do a nice job, its bayou, which is a strange word, isn't it. I want you first to think about a river in your city in Norway. For example, if you live in Halden, think about the Tista River. The water in the Tista River moves rather quickly. Now bayous are stagnant; the water doesn't move, or it moves really slowly. Also, the water is brackish,

which means that it is both saltwater and fresh water. Finally, rivers exist all over the world; bayous exist only in the southern United States.

Carla: Cool! So, the word is bayou.

Cothilde: Hm, but you did a great job.