

Nayati and Little Lejohn

By Warren Swenson

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In the everglades of Florida
There is a story told
About a young Indian boy
Who was a Seminole,
But unlike other stories
That begin with, "Long Ago"
This happened rather recently
And that's why so few know

About this fabled Indian
Whose name was Nayati
So, if you haven't heard of him
Then listen carefully.
He grew up in the everglades
And as a Seminole
He heard the ancient stories
That the tribal elders told

About the world when it was young.
All creatures then were brothers
And men and animals
Often spoke with one another.
Nayati, from their stories learned
Just how the world should be.
He learned to treat all creatures
Great and small respectfully.

From the smallest of the tree frogs
To the mighty manatee
He considered every creature as
Part of his family.
So much so that young Nayati
Gave to each of them a name
And everyone was different.
There were never two the same.

So, it really was amazing
He remembered everyone
And if ever he would call them
They were always sure to come.
For not only were they family
They were all the best of friends.
He had all of them befriended
And they all befriended him.

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So it was that young Nayati
Even as a little child
Was very much at home
With his friends there in the wild.
Of all the friends Nayati had
He considered gators special
For even as a small boy
Young Nayati loved to wrestle

But he didn't wrestle people.
No, he sought a challenge greater.
Young Nayati loved to wrestle
With the alligators.
They say he could out wrestle
Any gator he could find
Some say that he's been known
To wrestle several at a time.

It should come as no surprise
That he was quite successful
As a wrestler for his name Nayati
Actually, means to wrestle
He even wore a necklace
That was made from gator teeth.
Whenever he had won a match
The gator he'd defeat

Would have to give to him a tooth
Which really was no bother
Because when gators lose a tooth
They will always grow another.
He'd outwrestled every gator
In the everglades so he
Decided he would travel north
To the Okefenokee

A swamp where lived
The greatest gators anyone had seen.
To wrestle such a gator
Was Nayati's greatest dream.
He traveled north for several days
When finally, he got there
Not one gator could he find
For they all had disappeared.

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Where they went, he didn't know
But why they went he knew.
It seems that several days before
Some poachers had come through.
Evil men with rifles
Whom the gators all despised
For they would shoot a gator
Simply to take his hide.

Though disappointed Nayati
Would very soon discover
The greatest gator yet to be
And they'd become like brothers.
For as he pondered what to do
He suddenly realized
That he was being watched
By a little pair of eyes.

As he brushed aside a lily pad
He said, "What have we here?"
T 'was a frightened little gator
Who was trembling with fear.
Nayati placed him in his boat
Then said. "Don't be afraid
For I'm taking you back home with me
To the everglades.

And there I will take care of you
For it is clear to see
By the poachers you've been separated
From your family.
But first," Nayati said
As he continued on,
"I'll have to give to you a name.
Your name shall be LeJohn. (Lay shon)

And since you are so little
Little LeJohn you shall be."
Together, that same day they left
The Okefenokee
And headed for south Florida
Back to the everglades
Where, with his newfound friend,
LeJohn would never be afraid.

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Quicker than the time had past
So quick had LeJohn grown
Into the greatest gator
The everglades had ever known.
They say he stood near ten feet high
His tail near eight feet long
His shoulders were near four foot wide
He was powerful and strong.

Nayati taught him every move
And every wrestling hold
Till Little LeJohn could outwrestle
Any Seminole.
Except, of course Nayati,
They would wrestle to be sure.
But every time they wrestled
They would wrestle to a draw.

Though they became the best of friends
He had always known
The day would come when Little LeJohn
Would want to return home.
Back to the ever-endless swamps of
The great Okefenokee
In hopes one day somehow someday
He'd find his family

While Nayati knew our choices,
Not our family history
Determines our future,
Who we are and who we'll be,
He knew family would always be
A part of who we are
And knowing that Nayati knew
Though the journey was quite far,

It was a journey, without a doubt,
One day would be made.
And so, the day had finally come
They left the Everglades.
They traveled north for several days
Until they finally
Reached the edge of that great swamp
The Okefenokee

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As they stood there by the swamp
Neither knowing what to say
Realizing that the time had come
That they'd be parting ways
Not knowing when they'd meet again
They both were very sure
That time and distance could not break
The bond that they had forged.

Little Lejohn turned, then from his mouth
Pulled out a tooth
Which he handed to Nayati
And he told him, "From my youth
You have been my best friend
And my only family
So, wear this tooth on your necklace
To remember me.

Nayati said, "Little LeJohn,
That will never do
These are teeth from gators I've defeated
And I've not defeated you.
So, I'll wear it on a separate chain.
When people ask about it then
I can tell them that it comes
From my undefeated friend."

Nayati, then from his wrist, unwound
An ornamental band
Of beads his mother made for him
And put it in the hand
Of his best friend Little LeJohn
And said, "I'm giving you this now
To remember me when you wear it
Upon your wrist or brow."

Then he told his friend, "Little LeJohn,
When your story is told
You will always be remembered,
Just like the Seminoles
For being undefeated.
For the Seminoles have always been
The only undefeated tribe
Of native Americans."

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Then there they took an oath
To remember on another
And where they once as strangers met
They departed now as brothers.
Yes, Little LeJohn was able to find
His long-lost family
Be he never forget his very best friend
The Seminole boy, Nayati.