

The Wrestle at the Trestle

By Warren Swenson

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People still love to hear stories
Of the grandeur and the glory
Of the boxing champions from long ago.
And there may be a few of us
Who remember old Joe Louis
James J. Braddock and Rocky Marciano.

We've seen movies on TV
About Mohammed Ali
And his greatest adversary Smokin Joe.
I remember those two boxing
They were rocking and a socking
As they battled with each other toe to toe.

They had a Thriller in Manila
And a Battle in Seattle
And a Rumble in the Jungle but I hear
None of this was quite as special
As the Wrestle at the Trestle
That takes place down in the bayous every year.

Now I know it sounds absurd
That no one has ever heard
Of this event. So what exactly does that mean?
Well, it means all the spectators
And participants are gators
And by people this event's never been seen.

Gators come from near and far,
From Texas to Florida
To Louisiana's bayous each November
Where they race to catch the dream
Of making the Gator team
That pulls Papa Noel's skiff every December.

They all come to the bayous
For the races except two
Who come to meet each other at the trestle.
The first gator's Big Tuson
The other's Little LeJohn' (Lay shon)
And they meet here every year just to wrestle.

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When it started I don't know
But it wasn't long ago.
I hear it started when Little LeJohn,
Who lived just about as far
South in Southern Florida
As you could go, heard of Big Tuson.

Now, Little LeJohn was never little
So it really was a riddle
Why he was ever called Little LeJohn.
In fact, as I recall
He was nearly nine feet tall.
He was big and he was powerful and strong.

But what made him really special
Was the way that he could wrestle.
Not one gator in Florida could you find
Who had wrestled him and won.
He defeated everyone
Even when he wrestled several at a time.

With each challenger defeated
He consistently repeated
As Florida's state wrestling champion
But with each victory he scored
LeJohn started to get bored
Always winning wasn't always that much fun.

That's when a gator named Robert (row-bear)
Said to LeJohn, "You know I hear
In Texas there's a gator named Tuson
Who, though I cannot swear it's true,
I hear he is as big as you
And some say he's twice as powerful and strong.

But I guess we'll never know
Cause I'm sure you'd never go
To Texas just to wrestle someone else."
But LeJohn, who's quite precocious
And a little braggadocios,
Which means he likes to brag about himself,

Said, "I am heading west for Texas
Where I'll teach them to respect us
When I wrestle Mighty Tuson to the ground.
I'll need a witness when I brag,
So Robert you pack your bags.
Tomorrow morning both of us are leaving town."

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They both left, as I remember,
On the last day of September
For a town in Texas close to Mexico.
They went west through Alabama
Down to south Louisiana
But that would be as far as they would have to go

Because, as you remember,
Every year in late November
The biggest, fastest gators gather here
For the Thanksgiving Day Races.
Though I don't know where the place is
I can guarantee you Big Tuson was there.

The word quickly spread around
There was a new gator in town
Who said he could out wrestle Big Tuson.
Well, they say when Tuson heard
What LeJohn said he sent him word,
"If you think you're big enough then bring it on."

Then to add a Texan flare
Tuson told him, "If you dare
You can meet me here tomorrow at high noon
On the south side of the trestle
Where I'll be waiting to wrestle
With a gator whose about to meet his doom."

"Did you think that if you dared me
To show up that you would scare me
If you did," LeJohn responded, "Listen here,
It is you who are mistaken
And it's you who should be quaking
In his boots knowing tomorrow I'll be there."

When neither of them would back down
The word quickly spread around
There would be a big showdown at the trestle.
Who would win? The world would know
By high noon on the morrow
When the world's two greatest gators met to wrestle.

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When the morrow finally came
Every gator you could name
In the bayous had gathered at that trestle.
Just to be able to say
To their grandchildren one day
That they were there would be something very special.

For this day was sure to be
A date in wrestling history
And this wrestling match would be second to none
As the gator Big Tuson
And his challenger LeJohn
Met to see who'd be the first world champion.

When Big Tuson arrived
His size was no surprise
After all that's why they called him Big Tuson
But when Little LeJohn got there
All their mouths dropped as they stared
For he was every bit as big as Big Tuson.

When the water that was under
Both their tails parted asunder
It sounded just like thunder in their wake
As they stood there eye to eye
Each measuring the other's size
To see what advantage they might take.

They both stared with icy scowls
As they grumbled and they growled
But neither showed even a twitch of fear.
Every gator there was sure
This wrestling match would be a war
You could feel the tension crackling in the air

They were waiting for the whistle
Of the train that crossed that trestle
For it's whistle always sounded at high noon.
So the sounding of that whistle
Would signal, it's time to wrestle
And the whistle would be sounding very soon.

But what happened next that day
Would change history they say
For before they ever heard that lonely whistle
A huge barge, I have been told,
Was drifting out of control
When it slammed into the north side of the trestle.

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They heard the grinding and the groan
Of the columns made of stone
As the old trestle began to pitch and sway.
They heard the screeching and the squeal
Of her huge girders of steel
And they thought at any moment she'll give way.

But the trestle never fell
By some miracle it held
Though her columns had been knocked out of line.
"Well it's up to me and you,"
Said Tuson, "to pull her true
Before the train comes through which leaves us little time."

"The first thing that must be done
In my opinion," said LeJohn,
"Is to push that vessel clear. What say you?"
"We must do both. We cannot fail
Or that big engine will derail
And the whole train will plunge into the bayou."

LeJohn hollered to Robert,
"You have to push that vessel clear
And I don't care to hear how difficult it seems.
Just get the help of all the gators
Who came here to be spectators
And start pushing that big vessel back upstream."

"Don't you worry Little LeJohn,"
Said Robert, "We'll get it done.
All you gators gather round and follow me
For this day we've gotten more
Than any of us bargained for
We've got a chance to become part of history."

Tuson listened with a smile
"Now there's a gator who has style."
Said Tuson. LeJohn answered, "I agree
And I really should confess
That he learned it from the best:
And of course, as we both know, the best is me."

"You need to get your tail a-wagging
Not your tongue so quit your bragging,"
Said Tuson, "You and I have work to do.
This is not a competition
And failure is not an option
Somehow we have got to pull those columns true."

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“Since this isn’t a contest,”
Said LeJohn, “May I suggest
That we probably would do a whole lot better
By pulling them in line
One column at a time
And that way both of us can work together.”

“I agree,” said big Tuson,
“So LeJohn, let’s get it on.”
And they both put their shoulder’s to the stone.
It would take all of their might
Just to pull one column right
As they pushed and they pulled and they groaned.

You could see their muscles strain
As they both grimaced in pain
But Big Tuson and Little LeJohn wouldn’t quit.
When they both got in a groove
That column began to move
As they pushed and pulled until they straightened it.

Though the first column was done
There was still another one
And together once again with all their might
They pushed and pulled and strained
As they both grimaced in pain
Till the second column finally stood upright.

They collapsed under the trestle
Just in time to hear the whistle
Of the passenger train speeding overhead.
Said LeJohn, “I guess that whistle
Means it’s time for us to wrestle
But to tell the truth I’m just to exhausted.”

“So am I,” said Big Tuson,
“And to tell the truth LeJohn,
I am very glad that you were here today.
Had it not been for your help
And had I been here by myself
To move these columns I can tell you there’s no way

LeJohn laughed, “I know that’s right
And aren’t we a sorry sight.
Sitting here like two broken down old gators.
Yet I really have to say
After what we’ve done today
I don’t think I’ve ever done anything greater.”

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“Neither have I,” said Tuson,
“And to tell the truth, LeJohn,
There’s a lesson to be learned here it would seem
Competition can be fun
But when real work must be done
We do better working together as a team.”

Just then they heard the cheers
Of all the gators with Robert
Coming back from pushing the old barge upstream.
What Tuson had said was true
But it took much more than two
Famous gators that day to make up the team.

It took every gator there.
Not one gator could they spare
To get the job done that they had to do.
But now the job was finally done
And it was time to have some fun
So they held a great big bash on the bayou.

That’s how it started so I hear
And now they celebrate each year
With a big bayou bash at the trestle
And every year, the gators say,
At high noon on that day
The world’s two greatest gators meet to wrestle.