

A Very Chilly Christmas

By Warren Swenson

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The story you're about to hear
May sound strange but it's true.
It happened Christmas eve one year
Right here in the bayous.
When it's winter in the bayous
It can get so cold at night
The next morning you'll see frost
And some puddles turned to ice.
Maybe once in your whole lifetime
A strong northern wind will blow
And you'll wake early one morning
To discover that it snowed.

But this rarely ever happens
So there simply is no way
For Papa Noel to travel
Through the bayous in his sleigh.
Not only can't the reindeer swim
His heavy sleigh won't float.
So he travels through the bayous
In a large flat bottom boat
That he painted a bright yellow.
We call it his Christmas skiff.
Since his reindeer cannot swim
He has gators pulling it.

This arrangement worked real well
Until, as I remember
The northern winds were blowing
Several days in late December.
Well, the weather got so cold
All the bayous turned to ice
And it actually snowed
On that Christmas Eve night.
Now, with all that snow and ice
On the bayous everywhere
You'd have thought that it was perfect
For the sleigh and the reindeer.

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But the ice was rather thin
So there simply was no way
That the ice could hold the weight
Of the reindeer and the sleigh.
So even though the weather
Seemed a little bit extreme
For Papa Noel's skiff
And the Christmas gator team
There wasn't any doubt
On this Christmas Eve night
That the gators would be traveling
Through bayous filled with ice.

Papa Noel knew the water
Would be freezing ice cold so
He made sure each gator had
An extra cup of hot cocoa
Before they put their harness on
And slipped into the water
For the journey like the ice
Through the night would get much harder.
But his gators were determined
That no bayou girl or boy
Would wake up Christmas morning
Without their Christmas toys.

So they set the course before them
Heading on into the night
Braving the freezing waters
And the bayous full of ice.
As they traveled through the bayous
All around them they could see
The bonfires all burning bright
Lighting up the levees.
It's a wonderful tradition
That was started long ago.
When the Cajun's first came down here,
From the land of ice and snow,

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The children feared Papa Noel
Would get lost, so, they say
They started building bonfires
To help light up his way.
This night they burned so brightly
The sky looked like it was dawn
And the sight of all those bonfires
Helped keep the gators warm.
But the night kept getting colder.
They were barely halfway through
When the gators got so cold
They all started turning blue.

Papa Noel knew his gator team
Was getting cold and tired
So he told them, "let's all take a break
And warm up by the fire."
They all got out of the water,
T'was a strange sight to be seen
Blue gators by a fire
Warming up till they turned green.
While they warmed up by the fire
On that cold and windy night
Papa Noel's skiff got stuck fast
In the slowly forming ice.

They struggled for an hour
Or somewhere thereabouts,
But Papa Noel's gators
Simply could not pull him out.
The night kept on getting colder
And their strength was almost gone
When down that icy bayou
Came the gator named Tuson
Big Tuson came from Texas
He was powerful and strong.
His shoulders were near four feet wide
His tail was eight feet long

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Now, when Tuson saw Papa Noel
Worried about his skiff
That was stuck fast in the freezing ice
With undelivered gifts,
He knew somehow he had to help
Or all the girls and boys
In the bayous would wake up to find
They had no Christmas toys.

So Tuson cut a deal that night
With dear Papa Noel
Who said, "Tuson I'm not certain
That even you can help."
But if you can we have a deal
And so they both shook hands.
Then Tuson surprised everyone
When he took several cans
Of chili from a knapsack
He carried on his back.
See, when Tuson was out traveling
He always loved to snack

And since he was from Texas,
Well, it shouldn't seem too silly
That Tuson's favorite snack was
His own homemade hot chili.
After heating up the chili
He gave each gator a cup
Which they very promptly ate
And it promptly warmed them up.
Then he cooked another batch
And he used three times the spice
Which he ate to make his breath
Hot enough to melt the ice.

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And that's just what Tuson did,
Or so all the gators say.
When he breathed down on the ice
It started to melt away.
Then Tuson put the harness on
And using a twelve-foot chain
Tuson started pulling
They could see his muscles strain.
But there isn't any progress
If there isn't any pain
So Tuson kept on pulling
And kept on pulling again.

Then the whole team starting pulling.
When they all got in a grove
And began pulling together
That big skiff started to move.
Then with sweat from the hot chili
Pouring off each gator's brow
With one final mighty heave
They pulled Papa Noel out.
All the gators started cheering
But there still was much to do
Christmas morn would soon be coming
And they were but half way through.

Tuson led them through the bayous
Through the dark bitter cold night
Like a fire breathing dragon
He melted the snow and ice
Till the last gift was delivered
And their work was finally through.
And not once did any gator
On the Christmas team turn blue.
Taking Papa Noel home now,
Was all they had left to do.
Home to Papa Noel's cabin
Somewhere on the Lost Bayou.

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But before they headed home
They all heard Papa Noel
Tell Big Tuson, "You did the job,
And you did it very well.
You kept your part of the deal
So I'll do just what I said."
He inscribed a silver Christmas tree
Outlined in brilliant red,
The sign of a Christmas gator,
On Big Tuson's forehead.
Now you're a Christmas gator,"
Papa Noel said,

"And considering all that you have done,
Tuson, it only seems
Fair that you should be the captain
Of the Christmas gator team
Now if you wouldn't mind it's time
To get going Tuson
So let's turn this Christmas skiff around
And start heading back home.
This was more than Tuson bargained for
He could find no words to say
So he quickly took the lead
And they started on their way.

Now when Christmas gators gather
In the bayous every year
From Thanksgiving Eve till Christmas
Big Tuson is always there
And when the nights get cold
In the bayous, we all know
Papa Noel and his reindeer
Like a cup of hot cocoa
But it's different for the gators
You can believe it or not,
When the nights are chilly cold
Gators like their chili hot.