

MAMA NOEL'S CAJUN CONNECTION

By Warren Swenson

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There is a story that most people know
That was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
From a land far up north where in winter is snows
To south Louisiana, a long time ago,
Came the Acadian people who were gentle and mild
And who had from their homes been cruelly exiled.

Among those who came here two lovers we find.
One named Gabriel the other Evangeline.
They had through their travels lost touch with each other
And spent the rest of their lives looking for one another.
When they did find each other, Evangeline cried
For there, in her arms, Gabriel died.

It wasn't long after she too slipped away
And together beside each other they lay
Under a large oak tree on a small hill
In a quaint little town called St. Martinsville.
That we are told is where their story ends
But today that is where my story begins.

For when I was there, I will never forget
This wonderful elderly lady I met
Who told me a story that has never been heard
And I sat there entranced by her every word.
This story, she said, she heard from her mother
Who had in turn heard it from her own mother.

To each generation, down through the years
From mother to daughter this story's been shared.
She had no children and that is why she
Decided to share her story with me.
So, her story be told though she be not here
She made me promise her story I'd share.

So, her incredible story I'll share now with you
And you can decide if you'll believe it's true.
Her ancestral grandmother had, in her time,
Been befriended by none other than Evangeline,
Who shared her life's story and the grief she had known
And her heart's desire to be left alone.

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So, with her friends help, much like Joliet,
Evangeline decided to feign her own death
She then slipped away to a place no one knew
To a quaint hidden cabin in some lost bayou.
The years slipped on by and there was not heard
From Evangeline, not so much as a word.

Then her ancestral grandmother one Christmas received
A wonderful letter she could barely believe.
T 'was Evangeline's handwriting. That she could tell
But the letter was signed by Mama Noel.
The letter began, To my dearest friend,
You probably thought that never again

Would you hear from me, but you were there when
I needed someone who would simply listen
As I shared my heartache, sorrow, and grief
It was your listening ear that helped me find peace.
So, I'd like to share with you what has happened
Ever since we have parted, for I was certain

Here alone and at peace my story would end.
So, I could not have dreamed nor ere imagined
That here a new life for me would begin.
A life that I now want to share with my friend.
Though I lived all alone for several years
I made many new friends while living out here.

Alligators and pelicans, several crawfish
A family of nutria and several egrets
Each is quite different just like you and me
Each has their own unique personality.
I found this small pelican with a broken wing
So, I bound her up with a homemade sling.

When she mended, I thought she would fly away
But it seems that Pauli decided to stay.
Every evening I see her sitting out there
Perched on a piling at the end of the pier.
There's a village of crawfish that live here with me.
My front yard is full of their mud chimneys

Most look the same but there is one fellow
Who is very bright red, and I named him Boudreaux.
The list of my friends just goes on and on
Like the gators I named Chanelle and Tuson.
There's a little nutria who makes quite a fuss
I decided to call him Nicapopolus.

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Though I do live alone it is quite clear to see
I have plenty of friends to keep me company.
Life was getting quite comfortable but that would soon change
When one evening what happened was really quite strange.
Silhouetted against a sunset of gold
Was a man in a skiff pushing it with a pole.

He came down the bayou and when he got near
He called out my name as he tied to the pier.
I was really surprised. Just who could this be?
Why was he here? How did he know me?
I am sure he could sense my fear and alarm
For the first thing he said is, "I mean you no harm."

He went on to say, "So if you don't mind,
I would like to talk with you Evangeline."
I agreed but I asked him, "Who are you, pray tell."
With a smile he answered, "the next Papa Noel."
Before I could ask, he said, "Let me explain,
Papa Noel is a title and not just a name.

It's just like the title Mr. President.
When Papa Noel retires his replacement
Has to be chosen by a special council
Whose members, themselves, were once Papa Noel.
As a council member they each have a voice
And the burden of having to make the right choice.

It's an office so noble, so sacred a trust
That the council's voice has to be unanimous.
Then after he's chosen, he trains several years
Before they give him the reins to the reindeer.
But there's one last condition and only one voice
Matters when it comes to making this choice.

It's been said there's no Christmas without Papa Noel
But the same can be said of Mama Noel as well.
Mama Noel's the one who makes Christmas so bright
If Papa Noel's the candle Mama Noel's the light.
Mama Noel's the heart and the soul of Christmas
Papa Noel's the wrappings and Mama Noel's the gift
I guess what I am trying to tell you is this
Without Mama Noel there can be no Christmas.

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So, the final condition is obviously
To be Papa Noel one must be married. "
I sat there completely dumbfounded and dazed
By what I just heard stunned and amazed.
I was wondering would he get down on one knee
And if he proposed what would my answer be.

But then I could see by the look in his eyes
He was really upset when he finally realized
What he implied by what he had said.
I believe that his face turned several shades red.
He stammered, "That's not what I meant to say,
I mean I did not mean to say it that way."

So, I told him, don't worry all is okay
Just say what you mean and mean what you say.
And so, he continued, "Papa Noel
Thinks of you highly and speaks of you well.
He told me that I would be lucky to find
Someone as special as Evangeline.

Mama Noel calls you sincere and sweet.
So, I knew you were someone I just had to meet.
And now having met you I have no doubt
They both knew what they were talking about.
You are gracious and loving, gentle and kind
You're everything Christmas is Evangeline."

To which I responded, "You barely know me."
He just smiled and answered, "Oh, I disagree.
If I were articulate, I could express
My thoughts and my feeling, but I must confess
I find it difficult to put into words
My thoughts and my feelings, so as you've observed

Things can get awkward as awkward can be
But you chose not to dismiss or criticize me.
You heard with your heart and not just your ears
And that is a trait that's exceptionally rare.
So, if you'll forgive me for my awkward ways,
There is something I really would like to say.

Having heard all about you, having met you as well
I've no doubt you should be the next Mama Noel
But just like I said there is only one voice
That matters when it comes to making that choice
And just to be clear, that voice isn't mine
It happens to be your voice Evangeline

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So, the real question is, as far as I can tell,
Are you willing to have me as Papa Noel?
Now, please don't feel hurried, you've plenty of time
To consider my offer and make up your mind.
But should your heart tell you the answer is yes
I can tell you I'd count myself so very blessed."

Though I had some questions I wanted addressed
I knew in my heart my answer was yes
So, I answered by saying, "I have been told
You spend all of your time up at the North Pole
So, I was wondering if some of the year
Could be spent in the bayous, visiting here."

I could tell by the twinkle I saw in his eyes
He had, by my answer, already surmised
That I was considering answering yes.
So my question he graciously choose to address.
"Papa Noel and I have been searching for places
To hold the great Thanksgiving Day gator races.

You know we have reindeer games for the reindeer
But the gators hold races, so we need a place here
To stage all the races and we thought this bayou
Would be the perfect place if it's alright with you.
To be perfectly honest, were the truth to be known
We were considering building a vacation home

Down here in the bayous for the summertime
But depending upon your choice, Evangeline,
Those plans could prove to be unnecessary
For your quaint little cabin would probably be
The perfect solution to all of our plans
So the answer to your question you hold in your hands."

I said, "In that case, there remains just one thing
Just where are we going to hold the wedding?
But before you can answer it seems to me
There's something you need to do on bended knee."
So he knelt on one knee and then took something
Out of his pocket. T'was a beautiful ring.

Crystalized snowflakes that sparkled so bright
It looked just like stars in the heavens at night.
Then with love in his eyes that was easy to see
He asked, "Evangeline, will you marry me?"
Without hesitation I answered him, "Yes!"
Knowing together our lives would be blessed.

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For one moment more on his knees he lingered
As he slipped that beautiful ring on my finger
Then he rose to his feet and he hugged me so tight
Then gave me the sweetest kiss of my life.
And then he continued, "Regarding that thing
About where we were going to hold the wedding,

That, Evangeline, I will leave up to you.
If you wish we can hold it here in this bayou."
"And as to who will conduct the ceremony?"
He smiled as he looked at me so lovingly.
"T' will be none other than Papa Noel himself
And, if you wish, for ring bearers two little elves."

I stuttered and said, "I have so much to do."
"Well I know someone who would love to help you."
He said in his own kind gentle way.
"And who could that be? Tell me I pray."
"Mama Noel said she would count it an honor
To help you and you can depend upon her

To get everything done. She does things so well,"
So my wedding planner was Mama Noel.
Well, the day finally came and they all were there,
Papa Noel, the elves and all his reindeer,
Pauli the pelican, Tuson and Chanelle,
Nicapopolus, Boudreaux and Mama Noel.

It was quite an event and I'm very sure
There has never been a wedding like that before
Nor will there be one like it again.
I only wish you could have been there my friend.
But I want you to know, because you were there
When I needed you, that is how I got here.

So you now have a story to tell your children
How Mama Noel is your personal friend.
That's how the letter ended, and it was signed
Your friend Mama Noel AKA Evangeline.
Then this wonderful lady, to prove all this was true
Said, "I have something here that I want to give you.

Inside this envelope you're going to find
The letter that was written by Evangeline."
She then rose and she turned, she was ready to go
But I stopped her and said, "I really must know,
What is your name? That is if you don't mind."
She smiled and answered, "Evangeline."