

*Truly - Santa's Green Elf*

*Jim Owen  
505 Royston Lane  
Melbourne Florida 32940  
321-255-7690*

## Truly - Santa's Green Elf

Truly Toad wasn't big toad or a small toad. He was just the right size and color for a green pond toad.

Truly's friends didn't call him - Toad. They called him Truly. He didn't want to be just a green pond toad. Truly longed to be Santa's Elf.

When the cool fall winds blew into Truly's Mosquito County retention pond his friends built burrows deep into the pond's muddy banks. Truly didn't dig. He hopped from one Lilly pad to another - north toward the North Pole.

Truly hopped and hopped and hopped until he reached the banks of a lagoon. As he washed the dirt and dust from his little toad legs - Minnie Manatee stuck her nose above the murky water and cried out - "Truly! What are you doing so far - far away from your pond. It's fall. Winter is on its way. It is time for you to burrow deep into its muddy banks and it is time for me to seek the warm waters of the springs. Why are you on the banks of my lagoon?"

"I'm on my way to the North Pole to become Santa's Elf!" Minnie Manatee sighed, "My - oh my! Such a long trip and so very - very cold. Do you know the way?"

"I'm not sure if it's upstream - or downstream."

"Follow the North Star and you will find your dream."

"Thank you Minnie. Are you going my way?"

"Swim out and hop on my back. I will give you a ride north."

Truly hopped into the lagoon and swam to Minnie Manatee. He used his tiny toad legs to hang onto Minnie's back as she swam north.

When Minnie Manatee reached her winter home - Truly hopped off her back and said, "Thank you Minnie Manatee. I hope you find warm water in your spring. When Santa sails south through the sky - I will bring you a present. What is your wish?"

"My wish? For boats and motors to slow down when we Manatees are in the lagoon."

Truly swam to the banks of the Intra coastal Waterway. He hopped - hopped - hopped and hopped along its banks - following the North Star. A very - very tired Truly met Alligator Foo. Foo turned his head - flashed his teeth and cried, "Truly! It's time for you to burrow into the bank of your pond. What are you doing on the bank of my waterway?"

"I'm on my way to the North Pole to become Santa's Elf!"

Alligator Foo growled a deep alligator growl, "It is a far - far journey of many nights. Do you know the way?"

"Minnie Manatee said to follow the North Star."

"She gave you wise council."

"Are you going my way?"

"Hop on my back. I will give you a ride. I'm swimming north to visit my relatives."

When they reached the waters of Alligator Foo's relatives - Truly said, "Thank you Foo. When Santa flies this way - I will bring you a present. What is your wish?" "My wish? For poachers to leave my young alone. To let them grow old - not handbags and shoes."

Truly hopped - hopped - hopped and hopped until he was off Alligator Foo's back. Then he swam to the northern bank of the river. As he hopped - hopped and hopped away - Foo growled a deep - deep alligator growl and barked proudly so all would hear, "Truly - my dear friend! You will go far if you follow your star!"

Truly hopped - hopped - hopped and then he swam - swam - swam through coastal swamps following the North Star. When he reached a port he rested on the banks of a river where Saboo the Sea Bass swam. Truly watched as Saboo blew bubbles out of the water. Inside each bubble was a word. "(Where) (are) (you) (going) (Truly)? (It) (is) (time) (for) (you) (to) (burrow) (into) (the) (mud) (of) (the) (bank) (of) (your) (pond) (for) (a) (long) (winter's) (rest)."

"I'm on my way to the North Pole to be Santa's Elf."

"(It's) (a) (long) (long) (journey)! (Do) (you) (know) (the) (way)?"

"Minnie Manatee said to follow the North Star."

"(Minnie) (is) (wise) (in) (the) (ways) (of) (the) (night) (sky). (Hop) (into) (the) (river) (and) (hang) (onto) (my) (fin). (I) (will) (take) (you) (north) (on) (an) (Atlantic) (swim)."

Truly hopped - hopped and hopped into the river and wrapped his toad legs around Saboo Sea Bass's top fin. Saboo swam - swam and swam until they were in the Gulf Stream. Right On Whale sounded - leaping high out of the ocean. He laughed a mighty whale laugh at the sight of Truly hanging onto Saboo Sea Bass's top fin with his little toad legs. Right On Whale cried out, Truly Why are you swimming with Saboo Sea Bass in the Gulf Stream? It is time for you to hibernate in the bank of your pond."

"I'm on my way to the North Pole to become Santa's Elf!"

Right On Whale roared, "It is a long - long journey - half a world away and Saboo Sea Bass looks very - very tired."

Truly smiled his best toady smile, "Can you help me?"

Right On Whale roared out a laugh that shook the ocean, "I have a month before I must swim south to my winter waters. Santa is a dear friend. I will take you to the North Pole. Swim over and hop up on my back."

Truly called out to Saboo Sea Bass as he swam away,

"When Santa flies this way - I will bring you a present.

What is your wish?"

"(My) (wish) (is) (for) (all) (long) (line) (fishing) (boats) (to) (stay) (in) (port). (My) (fish) (friends) (are) (being) (fished) (out) (of) (the) (sea)."

Truly hopped - hopped - hopped - up - on Right On Whale's back. Truly asked, "Where shall I hang on? Your back is so wet and slippery?"

"Hang onto to my blow hole. And when I must dive under I will hold you gently inside my mouth. After we reach the Arctic ice pack - we will have a long underwater trip to Santa's workshop at the North Pole."

Right On Whale swam north - north - north following the North Star to the Arctic ice pack. When they arrived - he whispered to Truly "Slide into my mouth and hold your breath. We must swim under ice get to the North Pole." Truly let go of Right On's blow hole and slid forward into Right On Whale's mouth. Right On dove under the ice pack and swam quickly to the North Pole.

At the door of Santa's workshop, but not too close - Right On Whale swam to the surface - bursting through the ice and opened his mouth. Truly hopped out - saying, "Thank you Right On Whale. I will bring a present for you when Santa flies south. What is your wish?"

"I want my kind to survive. There are so few of us left."

Truly hopped - hopped and hopped to the door of Santa's workshop. If he had stopped to rest his little toad legs would freeze fast to the ice. Hopping in place - Truly rang Santa's doorbell. Santa opened the door - looked out and shouted, "Ho! - Ho! - Ho! Who rang the bell to my workshop?" Truly looked up, "It is me - Truly Toad. I've come to be your Christmas Elf."

Santa looked down, "Come in - come in. Truly! Why haven't you burrowed under the bank of your pond?" "I'm tired of being a toad. I want to be a Christmas Elf!" Santa laughed so loud his belly shook, "Ho! - Ho! - Ho! So you want to be more than a green toad. A Christmas Elf indeed! To be a Christmas Elf you must have hands to build toys for all the good girls and boys. And you only have little toad legs. You have traveled a long - long way. I have work for you until I fly south at Christmas. Hop - hop around my workshop and rid me of our bugs. And I will talk with Mrs. Claus. We will put our heads together and see what we can do for you. A green toad as a green Christmas Elf indeed!"

Truly hopped - hopped and hopped around Santa's home and workshop dining on bugs. Mrs. Clause was pleased, "Why Santa - Truly has eaten all of our bugs. Are you certain he won't make a good Christmas Elf?"

"He is a fine specimen of a green toad! But an Elf? It is impossible. He has no hands. And an Elf must make toys for all the good little girls and boys."

"I can make him an outfit!"

"We are what we are. An Elf outfit will not change a Toad."

"I know! Use your magic and turn Truly into an Elf!"

"A wonderful idea. What color will his outfit be?"

"Green - like an Elf's and his toad skin."

"If he is to join our merry band - Truly must have a new name. Can you think of one?"

"Our toad has truly good friends and he has been true to them. From now on will be known simply as Truly Elf."

"And he will ride with me on my sleigh - his bright green outfit will tell the world that all is well!"

Mrs. Clause frowned, "But what about the wishes of his friends? Can you keep the long line fishing fleet in port? Can you take harpoons away from the whaler's hands? Can you

make alligator hunters wait until Foo's friends are older?  
Can you make boaters slow down to protect the Manatee from  
their props?"

"I cannot - but Truly Elf will. He can ride with me on my  
sleigh. When the world looks up and sees his bright green  
outfit - like a beacon in the night sky - it will remind all  
to save more than just a pod of whales. It will remind them  
not to over fish - not to over hunt and most important of all  
- slow down for the Manatees!"

"Won't our Rudolph be jealous?"

"Ho! Ho! Ho! Not at all! You can tell by Truly's outfit  
that he is a green Elf. Rudolph knows that for every red  
light - there must be a green one!"

And so children - when we look up into the Christmas  
night sky and see red and green lights flashing by - it is  
Santa on his sleigh - with Rudolph leading the way and Truly  
Elf at his side - his bright green outfit a beacon to stem  
the tide.

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