

Annie Christmas

An American Legend



Annie Christmas was easy to find in a crowd. She was six foot seven and weighed 250 pounds. She had rich, dark skin and an easy laugh that was as loud as a foghorn.

Annie lived in New Orleans, Louisiana. She worked on the docks. She had a keelboat named *Big River's Daughter*. A keelboat is a boat that is flat underneath. You move it using a long pole that pushes off of the bottom of the river. Now, Annie was much stronger than most men. She could carry two barrels of flour in her arms and one on her head. She could pole her boat both downstream and upstream. Going upstream is hard. She had to fight the river's strong current. No man could pole upstream.

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Annie was very strong and tough. She beat up the bullies on the dock. She beat men up when they were being mean or trying to cheat her. She beat up so many men



that no one would mess with her. Now, most of the time, Annie dressed in men's clothes. But she wore a pearl necklace. Each time she beat up a man, she added a new pearl. It was said that her necklace was 30 feet long.

Annie was once married, but her husband died long ago. On her own, she raised 12 strong, handsome sons. They were all seven feet tall.

Annie decided to take a vacation on a fancy steamboat called *Natchez Belle*. She had the finest cabin on the boat. She met the captain, but wasn't much impressed with him. He was not the smartest man she had ever met.

One day, the steamboat sailed straight into a dark storm. The water of the Mississippi churned. The *Natchez Belle* rocked dangerously. The passengers huddled together and hoped for the best. Annie saw that the captain was steering them right towards a dangerous part of the river. Now, Annie knew the river like the back of her hand. She ran right up to the captain and told him to turn around. But he refused. The ship struck a sandbar and got stuck.



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Luckily, Annie had tied her keelboat to the steamboat before they left the port. She told all the passengers on board to get on her keelboat. Just as they climbed on, the *Natchez Belle* began to sink. So many passengers joined Annie on her keelboat that it was barely above the water. The storm raged and paged at the keelboat. Annie poled for her life. She was strong for sure. But poling all those people on her keelboat through that storm was a lot, even for Annie Christmas. Finally, Annie poled the keelboat ashore. She saved hundreds of passengers that day. But working so hard overtaxed her heart. Soon after, poor Annie's heart gave out.

