



# *Winter Solstice*

By Pete Leki

*For Nicole and Salim*

*Long time ago,*

before Hanukah,  
and Christmas,  
and Diwali  
and Kwanza.

In fact, before humans roamed the Earth,  
the planets and the Sun did their dance,  
circling around and around each other,  
in a tipsy celebration of Time.

On Earth, creatures big and small,  
plant and animal,  
watched the dance carefully.

And they noticed that at one part of the year,  
the days started getting shorter,  
And the Sun didn't come up so high into the sky  
like before.



A Snapping Turtle was talking to a Great Blue Heron.  
"Feels like there is a chill in the air. I'm thinking  
about taking a deep breath and hunkering down in  
the mud for a long nap."  
Heron looked with her big eye and said:  
"Well, I ain't doin' that! Get's too cold. I'm out of  
here. Goin' south"

A nearby Black Willow said, in a creaky tree voice:  
"Happens every year, this time.  
Days get short, my leaves fall off,  
I suck in all the chlorophyll I can handle,  
and take MY rest, too." But alot of animals worried,  
especially the young ones.

A Skunk said to a Possum:  
"You notice how each day gets shorter?  
And the Sun keeps sinking and sinking?  
Now what if, I'm just saying, what if it kept sinking  
and the daylight disappeared totally?  
Then what?  
Then what? Why, you'd freeze, and I'd freeze. No  
Sun, no heat."  
"What we gonna do Skunk?"  
Skunk scratched his head, and neck, and tail, and  
then said:  
"Let's talk to Bur Oak"





“Scuze us! Hello! Scuze us ma’m”, Skunk said to Bur oak.  
Nothing.  
Possum and Skunk looked at each other, and Possum  
began to cry, then wailed : “Yahhhhhh”

“What? What?” said bur oak, wakened from the start of  
her winter nap.  
“What is it?”

Skunk and possum explained about the days getting  
shorter and the Sun going down further, and it getting  
colder....

Bur oak groaned a cranky groan, like  
a mom or dad might do when waked  
up by a whining kid in the middle of  
the night.

“Now, why do you think you got those  
nice fur coats??? All stylish and warm?  
Do YOU think YOU are the first people  
to go through a Winter??? Have you  
noticed that EACH day the Sun is  
slowing down as it lowers itself in the  
sky?” Skunk and Possum looked at each  
other, a little embarrassed.

“No” said Possum, “We didn’t. We were  
busy playing.  
I was hanging by my tail. And Skunk was  
spraying her perfume on a coyote. We just  
noticed the Sun and got to thinking...”

"Well", said Bur oak, "pay attention. In a few days it will be the Winter Solstice. The Sun will stop its journey to the south. The days will STOP getting shorter. And slowly, gradually, the Sun will start back up into the high sky, and the days will get longer, and, in a month or two, you will start to feel the first warm breath of spring.

Possum and Skunk looked at each other.  
"But how do you know?????" asked Skunk.

"Go on away with you. You know how old I am??? I been through this for more than 350 cycles and I can tell you, for sure, this is the BEGINNING of the END of Winter. Oh, there will be cold days ahead, wind and snow. But there's no stopping it. Spring is on its way." Skunk and Possum's eyebrows shot up. "Yeah! Let's go and play. You play dead," said Skunk. And I will play perfume counter...."

"Oh my" Bur Oak moaned. "Let me sleep"

What Bur Oak predicted, came to pass. And each year after, Skunk and Possum shared this wisdom with their own worried children. And instead of worrying, on the day of the Winter Solstice, they danced and sang, and ate and drank, watched the Sunset, and the Moonrise, and the stars circling in Space.



