

MUSICAL PICTURE BOOK

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Rockin' the Bayou Down in Louisiana!

WE'RE A POSSUM FAMILY BAND

Story and songs Bia, Erik West-Millette and Olaf Gundel

Illustrations Fanny Berthiaume Performers Alexa Devine,
Olaf Gundel and Annick Brémault

1



the secret
mountain

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Mama Poss! Papa Poss!
Tell us what it was like when
you were growing up.



Yeah! In your time,
were there dinosaurs?



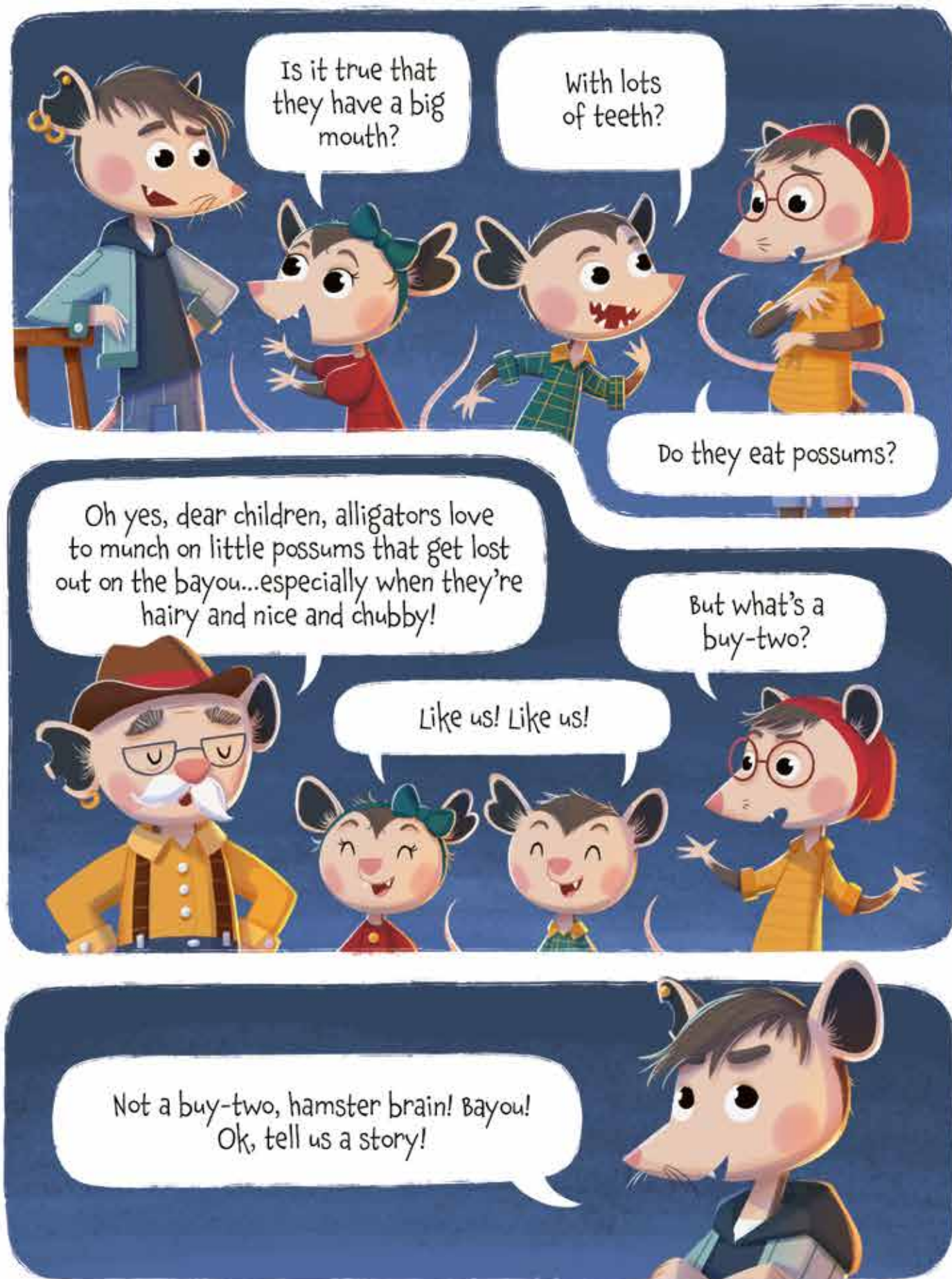
Dinosaurs? Do we look like fossils from
the Ice Age? When we were young and
lived on the bayou, do you know what
we would often see?




Alligators!



Alligators?



Tell us a story, please, please, please!



Imagine being around thousands of animals. There are sea cows and owls, too, along with crayfish and alligators. But our favourites were the earthworms... with a splash of Creole hot sauce!



The bayou, kids, is just awesome. It's green, wet and always hot. Pretty much everybody lives by the water.





Who's the one with the long moustache?

And the lady with the feather boa?

Looks a bit like Grandma before she was a grandma.

They look like movie stars!





Once upon a time along Bayou Nezpiqué, there was a kid who played the dobro. Every Saturday night, he'd play at the Fais Dodo Thibodeau with his friends. Ti-Jean the turtle was on the bassinette, Froggy played the Cajun ti-fer and Snake was on the frottoir...


But the real charmer, my true hero, was the kid who played the dobro. He had a ring on each toe and a moustache that reminded me of Zorro. Hearing him play the dobro was a delight for my ears.



The heron, with his puffed-out feathers, played a mean violin and the pelican could sure make people dance to the sound of his accordion.

But the one who always caught my eye, the most handsome possum around, and the reason I liked to go down to the Fais Dodo Thibodeau, was the kid who played the dobro.





But Mama Poss, who was that kid
who played the dobro?

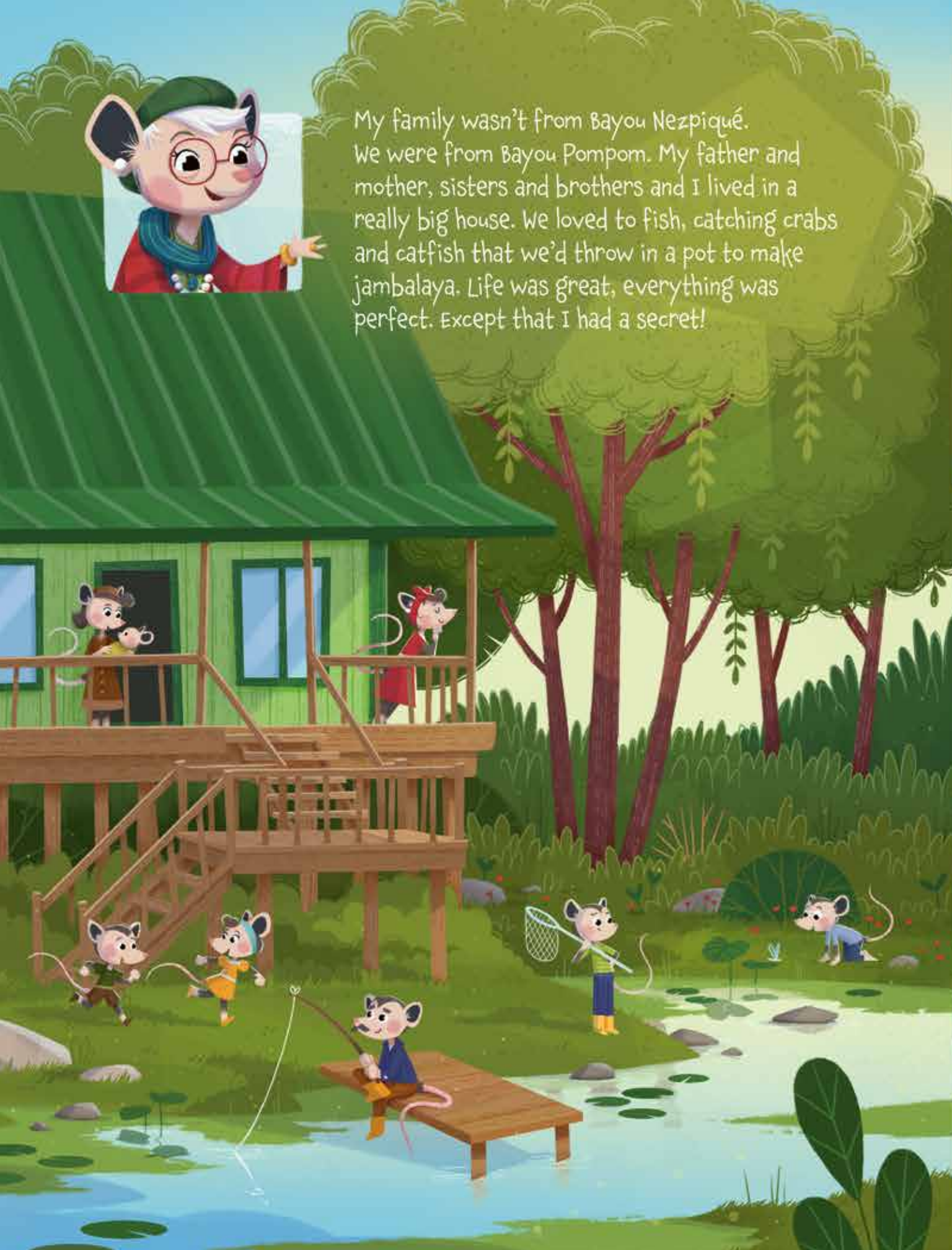
How old were you then? Did you
get back aches back then, too?
And what's a Fais Dodo anyway?

How come we've never met him?
Is that him in the picture?

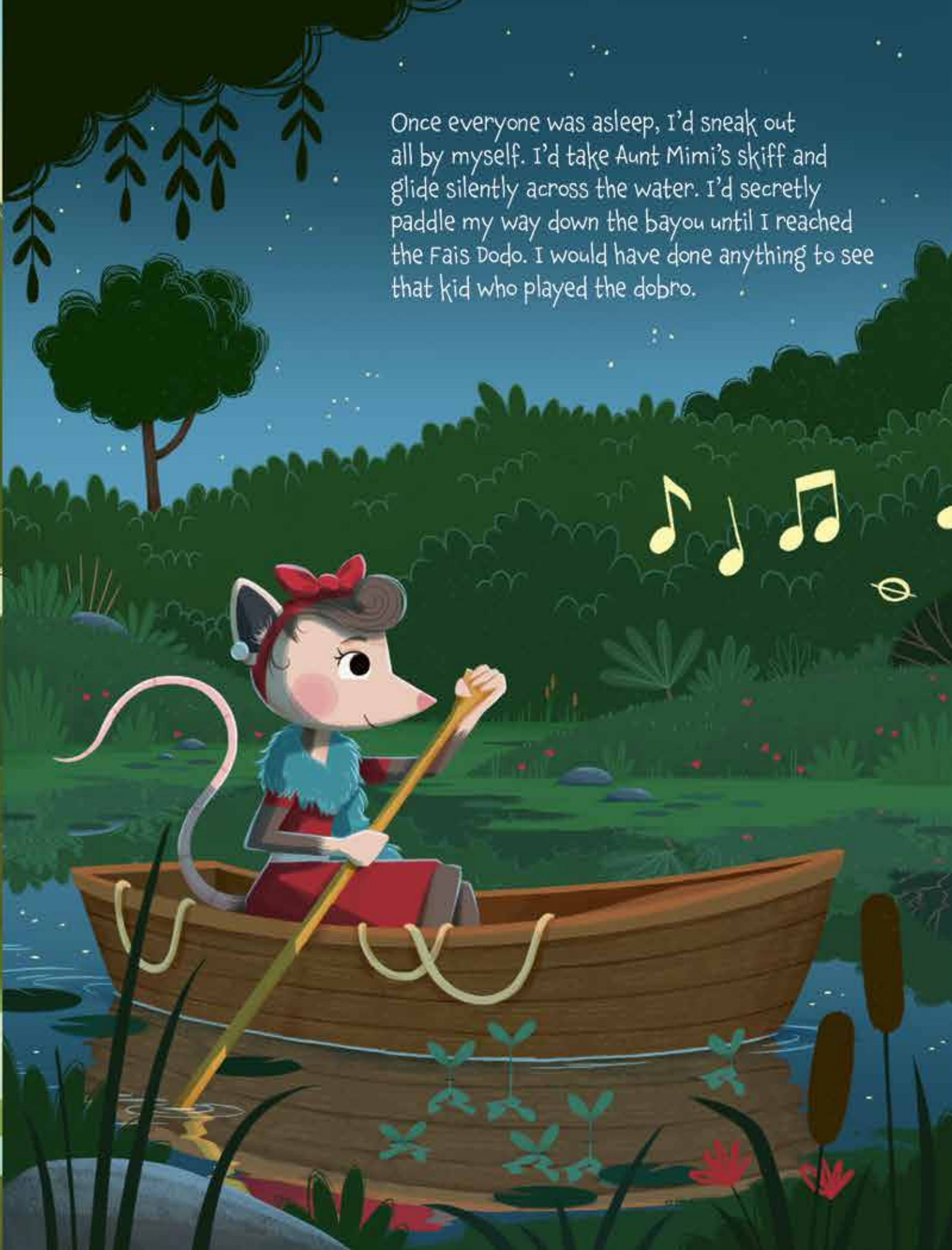
Did you already play the harmonica?



My family wasn't from Bayou Nezpique.
We were from Bayou Pompom. My father and
mother, sisters and brothers and I lived in a
really big house. We loved to fish, catching crabs
and catfish that we'd throw in a pot to make
jambalaya. Life was great, everything was
perfect. Except that I had a secret!



Once everyone was asleep, I'd sneak out
all by myself. I'd take Aunt Mimi's skiff and
glide silently across the water. I'd secretly
paddle my way down the bayou until I reached
the Fais Dodo. I would have done anything to see
that kid who played the dobro.



What about you, Papa Poss,
what did you do in those days?





Well, as it turns out, I was that kid who played the dobro. I was young and good looking. On Saturday nights, I'd go play at the Fais Dodo Thibaudeau.

It just so happens that in the middle of one fine evening, a raccoon showed up and said to me...



Hey kiddo, for a possum, you sure don't seem to have much going on upstairs. Ok, so you can play the dobro and that's great, but do you know how to dance? Over there in the corner next to the swamp rats, there's a gal talking to a muskrat. Isn't she pretty? Word has it, she even knows how to play the harmonica.

Wake up buddy and start acting like a real possum. You're not just going to leave her standing there, are you?





My eyes were immediately glued to her.
I put down my dobro and walked towards
her grinning from ear to ear.

“Good day miss, you sure are easy on the eyes.
Would you allow me to have the next dance?”

But as I approached her, my little feet got
tangled up with a snake who was crossing the
floor. My legs flew up and I was about to fall
flat on my face.

But somehow, I ended up in her arms.



What did you do while she was holding you up?



Were you embarrassed?

Did you cry? Did your cheeks turn red?



Did she treat you like a rodent?



My dear children, at that very moment, I wanted to fall off the face of the Earth. So much for my pride! So much for my self-respect. I just wanted to run for the hills.

And as I remained in her arms, utterly humiliated, the prettiest possum I'd ever seen squeezed me and cried out:

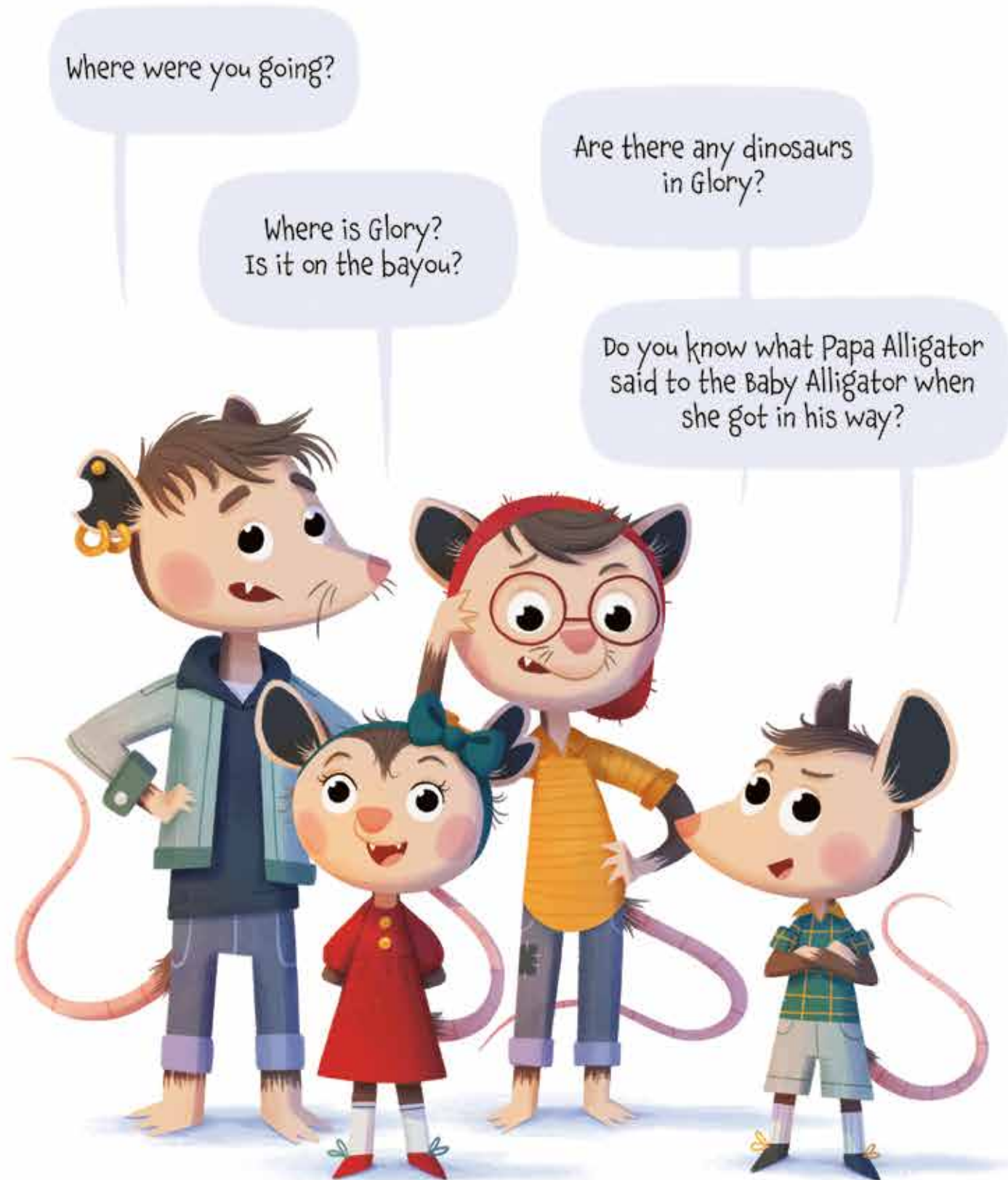
I love the way you play dead!



As word about us spread, folks even came
from the neighbouring bayous. We were a hit!
We were stars! We were well on our way to glory!



From that day on, Papa Possum and I became
a duo. With my harmonica and his dobro, we
were the life of the party at every Fais Dodo.
Our love story, the perfect romance, drew
huge crowds of animals, from big turtles
to little mosquitoes.



Possum Anthem

Lyrics Bia and Annick Brémault **Music** Olaf Gundel, Erik West-Millette
and Bia Singer Annick Brémault

Possums are smart and bright
We love to come out at night
When we play dead
We stand out in a crowd
Fainting really makes us proud
It's so very awesome
Just to be a possum
We'll eat anything in sight
We love to come out at night
Possums are smart and bright



Dance With Me Darling

Lyrics Bïa and Annick Brémault Music Olaf Gundel, Erik West-Millette
and Bïa Singer Annick Brémault

I was born in a swamp down in Louisiana
We got music in our blood where I come from
When the moon is full and the temperature's rising
Honey, I'll take you out to Bayou Pompom

Come dance with me darling
The band is really shaking
Tonight at the Fais Dodo
Jolene is playing the guitar
She's such a superstar
And Zack is rocking the banjo
Come on and let the good times roll
All night long
If you hold me tight
'Til the morning light
Nothing can go wrong

Come dance with me baby
We're really going crazy
Tonight at the Fais Dodo
Ti-Jean is swinging on the ti-fer
Dust flying in the air
And we're shaking up the floor
Come on and let the good times roll
All night long
If you hold me tight
'Til the morning light
Nothing can go wrong

Allons Danser Colinda (Let's Dance Colinda)

Traditional, arrangements Olaf Gundel and Erik West-Millette
Singers Olaf Gundel and Annick Brémault

Allons danser Colinda
Danser collé Colinda
Pendant que ta mère est pas là
Pour faire fâcher les vieilles femmes
C'est pas tout le monde qui peut danser
Toutes les vieilles valse des vieux temps
Pendant que ta mère est pas là
Allons danser Colinda

Danse Colinda
Danse collé
Colinda

Let's go dance Colinda
Dance close together Colinda
While your mother isn't around
To get the old ladies angry
Not everyone knows how to dance
All the old waltzes from the old days
While your mother isn't around

Let's go dance Colinda
Dance Colinda
Dance close together Colinda

The origins of this folk song trace back to an Afro-Caribbean dance practiced in the eighteenth century by enslaved people from the former African kingdom of Kongo in France's Caribbean colonies. The song was first recorded in 1946 by the Cajun duo Leroy "Happy Fats" Leblanc and Oran "Doc" Guitry.



LOUISIANA

A state in the southern region of the United States bordering Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico, with a population of more than four million. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Louisiana was first a French colony and later Spanish, before being ceded to the United States in 1803.

THE CAJUNS

The Cajuns descend from Acadians, who settled in the New France colony of Acadia now known as the Canadian Maritime provinces. In 1755, the British deported the Acadians en masse, forcing thousands onto ships bound for ports along the American coastline. Known as the Great Upheaval, this traumatic expulsion led many Acadians to settle in Louisiana (then a French colony) and become the Cajuns, as they are still known today.

CAJUN MUSIC

Influenced by both Creole folk and country music, Cajun music features the violin, vocals and the accordion. With roots in nineteenth-century bayous, the genre represents the confluence of diverse cultural groups living in Southwest Louisiana. Anchored by French traditions and shaped by African rhythms, Cajun music's distinct sound captures the rich interactions of Haitian, Creole, Spanish, German, Irish and Indigenous populations.

A derivative of Cajun music, zydeco is a musical style that takes its name from the traditional song “Les haricots sont pas salés” (The beans aren't salty), an idiom that means “times are tough.” The style, which features the accordion, was created by Creoles of African heritage in French Louisiana. Cajun and zydeco musical styles influenced one another to the point that certain instruments are now common to both.



Instruments



Cadien (Cajun) accordion Diatonic accordion imported from Germany in the late nineteenth century, with a single row of buttons for the melody. Played with the right hand while two or four valves for the accompaniment are played with the left.



Banjo Plucked string instrument similar to the guitar, featuring a long neck and round body with a skin head.



Spoons Handheld percussion instrument. Originally, actual kitchen spoons were used.



Dobro Guitar whose sound is amplified by an aluminum resonator. Usually held on the musician's knees and played with finger picks.



Vest frottoir Percussion instrument, also known as the rubboard (or washboard), hung over the shoulders in front of the musician. The sound is produced by rubbing finger thimbles across the corrugated surface. Originally, an actual washboard was used.



Jaw's harp, also called **jew's harp**, **juice harp**, or **guimbard**, consisting of a flexible metal or bamboo "tongue" attached to a frame. This tongue is placed in the performer's mouth and plucked with the finger to produce a note of constant pitch.



Harmonica Free-reed wind instrument that, like the accordion, harnesses the vibration of air to produce its sound. Played by blowing air in and out.



Ti-fer Percussion instrument in the form of a metal triangle that used to be made from the prongs of a pitchfork.



Fiddle Four-stringed instrument held between the shoulder and chin and played by drawing a bow across the strings.

Terms and expressions

Bayou Nearly stagnant body of shallow water. Derived from *bayuk*, an Indigenous Choctaw word meaning “snake.”

Bayou Nezpiqué Body of water in Southern Louisiana. The name comes from *nez piqué* (pricked nose), referring to the Atakapa people’s practice of tattooing their noses.

Bayou Pompom Fictional village mentioned in a traditional song frequently recorded by Cajun artists.

Fais dodo (Go to sleep) Dance party held in a private home where the children were put to bed out of earshot of the festivities.

Jambalaya Rice-based dish derived from paella, typical of Cajun cuisine.

Laissez le bon temps rouler Cajun idiom expressing joie de vivre generally associated with Mardi Gras festivities. Borrowed from the English “Let the good times roll.”

Catfish Voracious freshwater fish with long barbs.

Pecan pie Dessert pie made of corn syrup custard and pecans. It was first made by the French, who learned of pecans from Indigenous peoples after colonizing Louisiana.



Notable musicians and singers

Joe Falcon (1900–1965) was an accordionist made famous for the first ever recording of a Cajun song in 1928 with his wife **Cleoma Breaux Falcon** (1906–1941). “Allons à Lafayette” remains one of the most popular songs in French-speaking Louisiana.

As a duo, **Amédé Ardoin** (1896–1941), a Black accordionist and singer, and **Dennis McGee** (1893–1989), a fiddler of European descent, were one of the first groups to record Cajun music in the 1930s.

Clifton Chenier (1925–1987) paved the road to and embodied zydeco music. Nicknamed the “King of Zydeco,” his career was crowned with a prestigious Grammy Award in 1983.

After forming a group in the late 1940s, the **Balfa Brothers** (Dewey, Will, Rodney, Burkeman and Harry) went on to become great ambassadors for traditional Cajun music for more than 30 years, from 1950 to 1980. They performed hundreds of concerts in the United States and Europe and released at least a dozen records, including a self-titled album published in France on the Le Chant du monde label.

Michael Doucet (1951–) is a musician, folklorist and musicologist specializing in Cajun and zydeco music. He was honoured with a National Heritage Fellowship, an award given to individuals active in the field of folk and traditional arts in the United States. In 1975, he founded BeauSoleil, a group that went on to record more than 25 albums and earn two Grammy Awards.

Zachary Richard (1950–) was the first artist to perform his country's traditional music in a contemporary style, blending his grandparents' music with that of his own generation. With more than 20 albums to his credit, he has become one of the best-known representatives of French-speaking Louisiana. He was named an Officer of the Ordre des Arts et Lettres of the French Republic and is a Knight of the Order of La Pléiade.

We're a Possum Family Band is a collection of six musical picture books: *Rockin' the Bayou Down in Louisiana!*, *Glory Days in New Orleans!*, *Sunny Days in a Memphis Studio!*, *Heading for Nashville on Horseback!*, *Making It Big in Chicago!* and *Flying High All the Way to Québec!*



Story Bia **Songs** Bia, Annick Brémault, Erik West-Millette and Olaf Gundel **Illustrations** Fanny Berthiaume
Story translation Patrick Lacoursière and Katherine Sehl **Voice actors** Alexa Devine (Mama Poss, Weeny Poss, Teeny Poss, Train-tracks Poss, Spitter Poss, Racoon) and Olaf Gundel (Papa Poss) **Singers** Olaf Gundel and Annick Brémault
Record producer Olaf Gundel **Arrangements** Olaf Gundel and Erik West-Millette **Artistic director** Roland Stringer
Graphic design Stephan Lorti for Haus Design **Copy editor** Katherine Sehl **Recorded and mixed by** Olaf Gundel
at Studio Chez Frank **Mastering** Ryan Morey **Musicians** Olaf Gundel (bass, acoustic guitar, dobro, programming and percussions), Erik West-Millette (acoustic guitar and percussions), Francis Covan (violin and accordion) and Lévy Bourbonnais (harmonica). **Back-up vocals** Annick Brémault and Olaf Gundel

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Additional teaching resources and activity sheets are available at www.thesecretmountain.com

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Find the narrated story and songs on all major streaming platforms under the title **Rockin’ the Bayou Down in Louisiana!**

www.thesecretmountain.com/rockin-the-bayou-down-in-louisiana



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Every Saturday night at the Fais Dodo Thibaudreau, a suave young possum with a Zorro-like moustache takes the stage with his dobro to lead the band. In the audience, a pretty, doe-eyed possum falls for his charms. But just who could these plucky marsupials be? Mama and Papa Poss tell the story of how they first met and where their glory days as a musical duo began! Take a trip to the bayou in this side-splitting, toe-tapping tale that pays homage to Louisiana's Cajun and Zydeco music traditions.

Rockin' the Bayou Down in Louisiana! is the first story in the **We're a Possum Family Band** series, which follows Mama and Papa Poss on their travels that bring them across North America to the birthplaces of Cajun, jazz, country, rock'n'roll, blues, and traditional Quebecois music. At the end of each story, explanatory notes delve into the key figures, instruments and customs behind each genre.



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