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Nothing as poor as a turkey with no drumsticks

Have you ever wondered about Santa Claus? You know, the fat, red cheeked, red suited capitalist with a ho,ho,ho, who makes you want to spend your hard earned cash as fast as you can or puts you into such a depression at the first thought of him that you just never want to get out of bed again.

Without sounding like a complete dinosaur, I must say that in my lifetime I have gone the whole nine yards with the old fart.

My first encounter with him was in 1946. I don't remember him before that so I am assuming he didn't exist on our road allowance. But in 1946 he arrived at our house after everybody had gone to midnight mass and the kokoms and kids had gone to bed, the mommas and aunties to stuff the goose and my dad and his brothers to the barn to do goodness knows what.

Of course, not all of us went to sleep. My brothers and I stayed awake excited by our uncle's stories about the "little fat man who gave children, good ones that is, gifts of candies, apples and oranges. We had never seen an orange, much less tasted one and as if that wasn't enough, "if you were really good, my uncle said, Santa would leave you a store bought gift."

Of course I had been exceptionally good. Fighting with my brother didn't count, so I know I would get the red jackknife and perfume I wanted. See, even then I had my priorities straight. A sharp knife first, to skin rabbits and weasels and then the perfume. Anyways, that night my brothers and I lay on our beds and listened for this Santa Claus to land on the roof, which is what we had told he would do. We had also been told he rode a red cutter pulled by a bunch of reindeer. We had a hard time wrapping our heads around a bunch of deer pulling a cutter across the midnight sky, but uncle said it was "white magic" and so we believed him.

"Sssh, my brother whispered and we held our breath as something, someone walked across the roof and stopped just over our heads. We heard, "whoa, whoa."

"It's him! It's him," my brother Ray was almost beside himself.

"Sssh, you'll scare him away." Ben grabbed his arm. We all sat up and strained to hear more. Sure enough someone was up there. We could hear blowing and stamping and again a man's voice saying "Whoa."

Then the language switched to Cree/Michif. "Ah bah mojee!" "Haaah payatik!"

More grunting and sliding, then a crash! We jumped out of bed and raced to the kitchen where our mother and aunties were all crowded at the door pulling on coats and rubbers and laughing hysterically. We pushed past them in our long johns and bare feet and there on the ground lay our dad and uncles. When they saw us they jumped up and dad pointing at the sky yelled, "there he goes! Look up there see, past the trees."

We all craned our necks to no avail. There were no signs of Santa Claus, the cutter or the reindeer in the clear night sky. Then my brother Ben, yelled, "look, he left a sack!"

And sure enough there was a flour sack sitting by the chimney, Ben ran to the corner of the house and started to climb up.

"No, wait," Uncle said grabbing him. "You can't touch it, it's magic remember. Go back to bed right now and you'll get your presents in the morning. If you touch the sack now we'll lose everything."

So off to bed we went, falling asleep immediately knowing that yes, indeed, Santa had been to our house. It never once occurred to us to wonder what Dad and our uncles were doing lying in a heap on the ground.

In the morning our stockings were full to overflowing. An apple and an orange. I'd never tasted anything so wonderful in my life. Hard candy in all colors and yes a red jackknife and a bottle of "Lily of the Valley" perfume. I was ecstatic. If I stopped fighting with my brothers and listened to every single thing my mom said and never talked back, goodness knows what I would get next year.

Well, I fell in love with Santa Claus and was caught hook, line and sinker in the whole glitz and glitter of a capitalist Christmas and life was never the same in my road allowance childhood or my adult urban life.

I spend money like there's no tomorrow. I love to give presents. My house glitters and twinkles and is as tacky as it can be. For a pagan socialist woman I have every possibly glittering and tacky ornament you can buy at antique stores, Wal-Mart and Dollarama and that's not counting the stuff I've saved since childhood. You know, the scarred up glass balls with peeling paint. The baby Jesus and Virgin Mary with her broken head that's been glued so much I've lost count of the times. The wise men carved by an old Ukrainian man in Prince Albert in the 1960s, a glittering angel and yards and yards of tinsel.

There are Christmas cards hanging from string strung across the room, some of them new but most of them go all the way back to 1950s. I never throw anything away. The only thing I don't have is a silver Christmas tree and an inflatable Santa.

Ever since 1946 every Christmas has been either a joyous one full of excited shopping, baking and cooking or a lowdown poor as a church mouse Christmas. I am an artist and money can be pretty scarce at times. I remember one year when there was very little money but I had managed to scrape enough together to buy small gifts and to pick up a real cheap turkey, cheap because it had no drumsticks. When I put it on the table my son looking really pitiful said, "This is the poorest Christmas we've ever had, right Mom?"

"Not really," I replied. "We've had poorer ones."

"No mom, this is the poorest," he said. "'Cause there's nothing as poor as a turkey with no drumsticks."

But this year there will be no glitz or glitter as I have not only weaned myself of Christmas shopping or at least I am trying to, but I have also downsized and I actually threw out several boxes of shiny things including that poor Virgin Mary. Now back to my question, do you ever wonder where Santa came from?

Well, some call it appropriation but it's really theft by Coca-Cola of a people's folk hero. The story is that some time in the fourth century there was a kind and generous man in the country now known as Turkey, who went around giving gifts of food and clothes to underprivileged children. He became known as St. Nicholas and he kept evolving from country to country then sometime in the 1600s he immigrated with the Dutch to North America...New York to be exact. They called him Sinter Claos.

He was appropriated in the early 1930s by Coca-Cola, who fattened him up, gave him a new red suit, rosy cheeks, twinkling blue eyes and a ho ho ho. With a bottle of Coke in his hand he has smiled and twinkled at us from magazines and billboards throughout the Depression years and today and has entrenched himself and Coca-Cola forever in our psyche, so much that he has become what Christmas is all about. That's real sad isn't it?

Have a good Christmas and a happy New Year.