

Therapy saves Santa and Christmas, too

By Curtis Seltzer

BLUE GRASS, Va.—“I’m in a funk,” Santa said in a phone call last night.

Santa calls me collect, because I offer a complete array of unknown and unlicensed therapies for free. Psychiatrists practicing at the North Pole are very expensive.

Santa and I have hung together for years like the two sides of a mirror. He’s more substantial; I’m more reflective. It’s hard to tell who’s jollier.

“What’s the problem?” I asked.

“I think I’m done with the whole thing,” Santa said.

“So why are you feeling unwanted?”

“It’s just one thing on top of the other,” he said. “For decades, people kept blazing fires in their chimneys on Christmas Eve. How inconsiderate was that? Talk about a hot seat! Now they build houses without any fireplaces. What am I supposed to do—slither in through the sewer pipe?”

“So this is primarily a funk over access?”

“It’s the whole ball of wax—the sneaking around, the fibbing, the hokey costume, the obligatory jelly-belly. The reindeer are in revolt. The boys in the traces say Rudolph couldn’t guide himself down an empty Interstate at high noon on a sunny day. And the Missus says she’s had her fill of living in an igloo with no one to talk to except male elves who only talk about toys. She can’t vent properly.”

“So you’re feeling put upon?”

“I feel like Santa’s Workshop has been made into a national-sacrifice business. I’m stuck in a role that I’ve outgrown. There must be more to life than slaving over a hot toy bench. I need my bells jingled.”

“So you’re feeling underappreciated?”

“I’m feeling P-O-O-R. I can’t pay my bills, any of them. I can’t even afford to buy the Missus a Christmas present. It’d be tacky to give her a doll from the shop, wouldn’t it?”

“So you’re feeling overwhelmed?”

“The elves are in an uproar. They’re *picketing* the Workshop as we speak. They say they want a living wage—with benefits! Who do they think I am—McDonald’s? I want a living wage, too. I’ll take even less than that, since it would be more than I’m getting now.”

“So you’re feeling that you’re a failure?”

“I’m working for nothing and piling on debt. I have to buy materials, carry overhead, keep my brand in the public eye and feed the elves. I’m expected to provide free Christmas presents to more than two billion people around the world. Free Christmas presents are not free!”

“So you’re feeling victimized?”

“And now the Missus says she’s tired of living at the North Pole,” Santa said. “Says she wants to kick up her heels and feel the sun on her mukluks. Says she wants a condo where it’s balmy in the winter. She’s talking Quebec.”

“So you’re lacking in marital bliss?”

Santa paused: “I made a bad career choice as a young man.”

“So you’re feeling second thoughts about youthful decisions?”

“I should have taken a steady job with a weekly paycheck,” Santa said. “Something normal, like an exotic dancer. You should see me wiggle down hot chimneys.”

“So you’re feeling sexually confused?”

“I’m feeling penniless,” Santa shouted.

“So you’re feeling powerless?”

“I tried following the Christmas spirit of giving, but it wrecked me,” he said. “I have to stop giving away presents to everyone, especially the undeserving naughties.”

“So you’re feeling exploited?”

“I’m never paid for the toys I make or my Workshop-to-stockings delivery on Christmas Eve. My suppliers want payment in cash, not Ho-Ho-Hos.”

“So you’d like to shift your business model away from a guaranteed annual loss?”

“I’ve tried my best to subsidize the Christmas toys with other ventures,” Santa said. “But customers have stopped buying my Santa snow angels—they complain that they lose value after they disappear. Same with people who gripe over the melting icebergs I once sold like hotcakes. The only profit center I still have is marketing frozen polar-bear tracks to environmentalists. But now they, too, are up in arms -- well, non-lethal arms anyway -- because all they get for their \$50 is a plastic baggie with nothing in it but a little dirt and water.”

“So you’re feeling frustrated?”

“It’s time for Christmas to carry its own weight around here,” Santa said. “It’s time to privatize Christmas. I could incorporate, do an IPO and sell stock.”

“Who would invest?” I asked. “Santa’s Workshop has never made any money.”

“So? Those are exactly the kind of IPOs that double in price on Day One.”

“So you’re feeling entrepreneurial?”

“I think I need to start charging for Christmas. If I do two billion deliveries and charge a dime each, that’s \$200 million.”

“That’s two billion dimes! Rudy and the boys could never fly that kind of weight back to the Pole.”

“OK, I’ll put the boys out to pasture on the ice cap,” Santa said. “I’ll be better off with a classic Volkswagen 5-liter diesel engine.”

“Diesel!? You’re going to pull Santa’s sleigh with a VW diesel!?”

“Remember the inventor Diesel—his first name was Rudolph,” Santa said. “I gave him his first adjustable wrench.”

“Did he have a shiny red nose that glowed in the dark?” I asked.

“Look. I need a headlight up front, not a reindeer with a chronic nasal infection.”

I said nothing for a long time, and neither did Santa.

“I dunno,” he said, after a while.

“You’re Santa,” I said. “You’re not Donald Trump or Bernie Madoff. Children count on you to be big and good.”

“What am I going to do?” Santa wailed.

“So you’re feeling despondent?”

“I’m feeling like I’m going to hit you on the head with a Dreamhouse Barbie doll?”

“You could retire,” I said.

“And let the impersonators take over? They’ve been ripping me off for years. No way,” he said, “I shall die in my Santa suit.”

“I think you just figured it out,” I said. “You *are* Santa Claus.”

He considered that statement. “Yes. For better and worse,” he said. “Santa is who I am.”

“So are you back on for the 24th?” I asked.

“Santa will fly. Rudy will lead the boys. Toys will be delivered as always.”

“And the elves?” I asked.

“Cookies and milk all around! I’ll come home with my sleigh filled. It’ll feed them for a year.”

“And the Missus? What about the condo where it’s warm?”

“I can buy a cabin on Alaska’s North Slope for cheap. The Missus can bask in the warmth of the Northern Lights. She’d burn up in Quebec.”

“Santa lives on!” I cheered.

“In a manner of speaking,” he allowed.