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Cynic wets down Santa myth

By Michael Zangari

Cynicism before the age of five can be brought on by a virtual universe full of unsettling discoveries and confusion. For the logical minded infant, having your nay-nays and poo-poo rudely pointed out and named is one step below an unfortunate early encounter with the neighbors dog. Bad toilet training from an unqualified faculty is rather silly, as is being force-fed stewed prunes by a person who is making airplane noises and elaborate acrobatics with a spoon.

Perhaps the cruelest indignity of them all is being conned into believing that there is a jolly fat man who loves people so much that once a year he breaks into everybody's house and deposits gifts to the deserving, without wanting anything in return. The only prerequisites are that you are a good boy or girl, and have money.

First of all, even the Tooth Fairy demands a tooth before she coughs up the geld. Something for nothing is the Great American myth. *You may have already won! Poof!*

Secondly, being a "good" boy or girl becomes a negative factor when it is used to coerce you into giving grandma a kiss.

I guess I got hip to the scam early. Initially, I of course was open to persuasion. I accepted without any detailed cross examination that Santa Claus was the man with cotton glued to his face and a pillow up his shirt. Being a fairly liberal kid I didn't question his deviant life style or his taste in clothing. I didn't even belabor the fact that the man moved with incredible agility from store to store, or that he laughed like an idiot while stretching out his syllables to ridiculous lengths—*Merrrrrry Christmasssssss*. So did W.C. Fields.

All this I could accept, after all, he was the man with the goods. Even at a base level, for two minutes of feigned shyness, the sucker gave you a sucker.

Meanwhile the rumors about the man grew . . . "He knows when you are sleeping, he knows when you're awake . . ." "He's keeping a list and he's checking it twice

. . ." If he meddled in South American politics he'd be with the CIA. If all that wasn't enough, he even knew about your personal life—whether you'd been good or bad. This was always followed by the formidable warning, "So be good for goodness sake!" (which always struck me as a stupid reason for being good.)

With that sort of power, I couldn't help but be in awe, who was this man? That bubble shattered quickly during my second year on his lap.

This man who supposedly knew every-time I played doctor and wrote it down—this man who actually cared if I ate my peas or not, asked me a question he should have never asked.

"And what's your name little boy?" I was in a state of shock.

Shock moved quickly to anger. He cared about my peas, but not me. *My name!* I even told him what it was the year before. *My name!*

"Come on, don't be shy, what's your name?"

The fat poo-poo head! I was too angry for words, so at the tender age of 4½ I discovered civil disobedience. It was a wet but totally appropriate comment. One I've been tempted to repeat many times in my life. I peed on his lap.

He was less than pleased.

I raised a clenched fist (with extended thumb) and jammed it into my mouth and walked.

My parents weren't going to get off the hook for this one. "Fraud!" my silence cried. Spinach isn't good for you! I didn't come from my mommy's tummy! I won't grow up and be big someday! I'll always be small and victimized. But no more lies will I take. I'm going to pee on the world!

Like the gas I obtained from dinner that night, my anger passed. Christmas came and I got what I asked for—a Lone Ranger suit. But there were no illusions, I knew where it came from, and it made me happy.

Mom and Dad didn't always know what games I played behind the trash cans or with who, but they knew my name.

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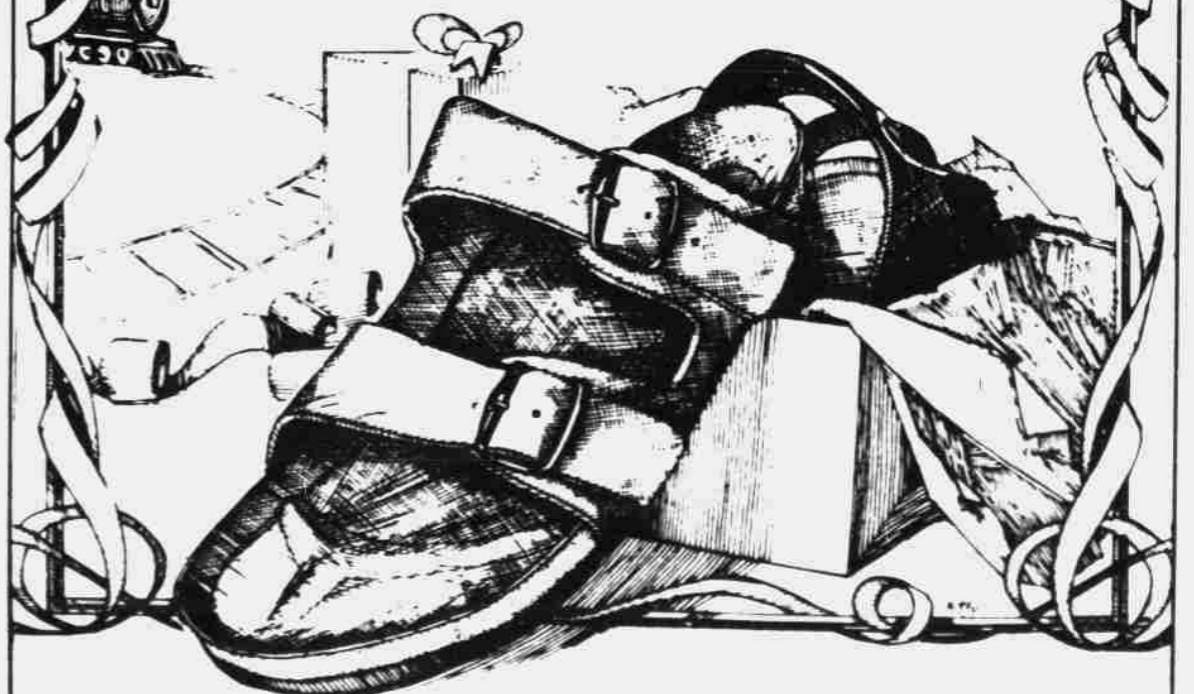
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