

## Santa's Helper



By Bobby Glass

As the clock hits 5:30, I am anxious to leave the office and start my trek home. I open the car door and inhale deeply. My little red car smells faintly of peppermint candy canes—thanks to my youngest son who decided to crush the candy and mush it into the back seat of my car. I climb in, and promise myself a steaming cup of hot chocolate, made with milk and topped with marshmallows. It is a bargain I make to get over my dread of the rush hour traffic that awaits me. To my amazement, there is almost none. I look over as I pass the Dolphin Outlet Mall and realize that my fellow commuters have all stopped on their way home to get in some extra shopping. I smile as I remember my recent trip to the mall on Black Friday. I never get tired of protecting my wife's "great deals" at 6 a.m. I am pleased with our recent gift conquest for others and decide the minimal traffic is an early holiday gift from the universe. Making this realization then allows me to further enjoy my surroundings. I cannot help but grin when I see a smiling Santa gripping the Coke billboard to a red-berried, holly green wreath hanging on a white wooden door to ice-blue icicles drooping off of roofs. The spirit of Christmas is ultimate joy.

This is my favorite part of the year. Miami gets.. um.. cold, all of the stores decorate for the season, and holiday music plays all day on Love 94. As I continue my commute, I think about my holiday memories, the feel of ripping open a beautifully wrapped package early in the morning, the smells of a special dinner, the enjoyment of spending time with my family when I was younger, and now, how I am working to re-create these warm loving memories with my family. Stopping at a red light, I get excited when I think about my family traditions, watching our favorite holiday classics: *It's a Wonderful Life* and that Red Ryder BB gun special, *A Christmas Story*. I can't help but smile when I remember the line, "You'll shoot your eye out kid!" I remember how I wanted an "Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action Two-Hundred-Shot Range Model Air Rifle" as a child, and I chuckle when I think about how I turned out... a Safety Manager for over eight hundred people. For some reason (I am guessing it was the Burl Ives' Rudolph DVD I watched with the kids last night.. the one with the land of the reject toys), I think about Santa on the toy shop floor, overlooking the health and safety of the

super fast toy producing elves. I notice the glow of the ruby light has now changed to an entrancing shade of emerald. My engine roars to life, and my holiday spirit leads me to back to all of the good fortune I have in my life.

I get excited as I increase my speed to merge into the turnpike traffic. I allow myself the liberty of imagining Santa in his sleigh, with gigantic reindeer attempting to do the same feat. Just how fast could a sleigh boasting nine veggie powered reindeer would fare against my 400 horse power engine?

I think Santa might have to stick to the city streets, because he would cause some serious accidents! I wonder how he stays safe with no seat belt, no doors to protect him from the elements, no helmet, and of course, an obscured view as he faces the backside of his reindeer. By now, I am almost home. My motorized sleigh knows the way through the warm winter streets.

Looking left out my window, I see station wagon laden with bags and bags of store-bought presents and an elderly man who looks like the guy in those Coke billboards: white beard, round face, and wire-rimmed glasses. He is talking on his cell phone. I observe his lips are pursed and can almost imagine him saying, "Ho, ho, ho!" I shake my head at my exuberant holiday spirit, and in a split second, my brain relayed something that instantaneously drained me of my holiday spirit. I had passively noticed his front passenger door was ajar, but when I was laughing to myself, my brain processed a danger that no family would ever want to think about. I looked further into the front of the car confirmed what my brain had already processed. Sitting next to the Santa-man was a small child, about three, with gleaming blond hair, and a face as beautiful as a tiny cherub. My alarm bells that sounded were screaming... door ajar. No child seat. DOOR AJAR. NO CHILD SEAT. NO SEATBELT! DO SOMETHING! I yell to the man and pointed at the girl, "You're door isn't closed!", but my timing was bad. The Look-a-like-Santa didn't hear me and drove away. I would be willing to bet he was probably thinking of a holiday to-do list. I accelerated and pull up along the side of his car. I check traffic in front of me, honk the horn, and signal to him that his passenger door isn't closed. The rosy color in his once happy cheeks drained when he too realized the danger his precious package was in. Faster than you can say, "Deck the Halls," he pulled off to the shoulder of the road.

As I pulled into my driveway, I was still thinking about the catastrophic events that could have happened. I got out of my car and walked into my house. I put on my green baseball cap to play catch with the kids. I love Florida in the winter. My youngest son ran to the door, took one look at me and said, "Daddy Elf". I laughed and picked him up. I glanced back at the mirror and realized I was wearing all green. My holiday spirit came back with a vengeance. I saved Christmas for one little girl. I had become, for a few seconds today, Santa's helper. I smiled again as I thought to myself, "No coal in my stocking this year!"

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Have a lovely, glorious, beautiful Christmas and a happy healthy Hanukah!

From all of us to all of you on behalf of Dr. Lillian Rivera, the Senior Leadership,  
Bobby Glass and the Healthy Stories team.