

The Day Santa's Reindeer Went Back to Work

by Art Stevens

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Santa's reindeer ended their strike against Santa Claus and are now back on the job.

If you recall, we reported last week that Santa's reindeer had walked off the job as a protest against their working conditions and relationship with Santa Claus. They had sent a statement to me outlining their grievances and explaining to the billions of children around the world why their Christmas presents wouldn't be delivered this year.

I invited John Kerry, our distinguished Secretary of State, to serve as a mediator in this dispute to try to bring all the parties together to see if the strike could be ended before it was too late. Mr. Kerry agreed to play this role wholeheartedly and chose a blue ribbon delegation consisting of Pluto, Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and a five-year old girl from the Sanibel School to accompany him.

Arrangements were made with NASA to whisk the delegation to the North Pole in an Apollo rocket ship. The Secretary and his delegation just returned from the North Pole with big smiles on their faces.

A disaster has been averted. Here is Mr. Kerry's statement:

"Our delegation arrived at the North Pole earlier this week. The Apollo flight was amazing, so fast, all those stars, the tundra and icebergs, the polar bears. What a planet!

"We were met by four of Santa's elves who seemed quite despondent over the situation. In fact, one of the elves was blubbering uncontrollably. Pluto walked up to the elf and planted a big kiss on his forehead which seemed to stop the tears for the moment.

"The elves escorted us to a hybrid sled and took us directly to Santa's workshop. The reindeer were picketing in front of the workshop carrying banners which read: 'Santa's a Meanie' and 'We Don't Get No Respect'.

"When we approached, Prancer spoke on behalf of the other reindeer: 'Welcome, Mr. Secretary. We recognize you from your chimney. We've flown Santa to your chimney each and every year. It's a shame we won't be flying Santa to your chimney this year. "

" 'Prancer' Mr. Kerry said. 'We're here to bring you and Santa together to see if we can work this thing out. Pluto, Mickey, Donald, Ellen (the five-year old) and I will try our best to talk some sense into Santa.'

"The elves escorted us into the workshop where we found Santa in front of a TV set watching a rerun of Seinfeld. He was sipping on egg nog and looked very tired. He had been notified in advance that we would be coming and had set a table for us of snow burgers, blackened cookies and pie in the sky.

"Donald Duck took out a loaded revolver but Secretary Kerry told him that this wasn't a good way to begin a negotiating session Mr. Kerry reminded us that he had once used that approach in a meeting with Putin and it had gotten him nowhere.

"Santa," Mr. Kerry said, getting right to the point. 'It took the reindeer 5,000 years to come to the conclusion that their working conditions aren't very good and that you showed them no love and appreciation. Don't you think they've been patient long enough?'

" Santa took a sip from his egg nog, looked him straight in the eye and said: 'Mr. Secretary, do you know what it's like being Santa Claus? The responsibility? The hard work? My staff and I work long and hard all year long to determine who's been naughty and nice and make a list of toys and presents for delivery on Christmas Eve. Thank God for computers. We used to do this by hand.

" 'I'm the one who should go out on strike, not the reindeer. They only work one night a year. I work every single day all year long. While I'm sorting out who should get what, the reindeer are prancing around in the back polishing their antlers. Yes, they work

very hard on Christmas Eve but they don't help me at all the rest of the year. At the very least they should show a little interest in my work."

"Secretary Kerry was beginning to get the picture. He asked Prancer to come into the workshop. 'Prancer,' he said. 'Santa makes a very valid point. He and the elves work all year long while you and the other reindeer are on call for just one night. Santa seems very annoyed that you and the other reindeer don't lend a hand.'

"And turning to Santa, he said: 'Santa, my delegation and I understand your point of view. But are you aware that the reindeer begrudge you for not giving them enough magic corn to increase their stamina and magic dust to allow them to fly more easily?'

"And they don't have a medical plan that's competitive with the plan you've put in place for the elves. They shouldn't have to rely on Obamacare. And, above all, they feel you don't love and appreciate them for their loyalty and commitment these past 5,000 years."

There was a long pause. No one spoke. You could feel the tension in the air. Which way would it go?

At this point a wonderful thing happened. Little Ellen, the five-year old from the Sanibel School, sat on Santa's lap and said "Santa, on behalf of children everywhere, I bring you a gift. We all love you and want you down our chimneys again."

She presented Santa with a neatly tied box with all the Christmas ribbons and bows. Santa was flabbergasted. "In all the years I've been bringing presents to the children of the world no one has ever brought Santa a present before. I'm touched, really touched."

Santa opened the box. It was hair coloring for his beard. "This is to make you eternally young," said Ellen, "so that you can bring my own grandchildren presents and their grandchildren, too. "

Santa heaved a huge sigh and said: "I didn't know that the reindeer felt I didn't love and appreciate them. I took them in when they were this high and raised them. I told them when they were very young that one day they would become famous and admired throughout the world because they would be part of my team to bring presents to the children of the world.

"I love them more than any parent could love his children. Maybe like other parents I've been so busy that I've been neglectful. I didn't let them know how much I loved and appreciated them. Well, Prancer, I do love you and the other reindeer. You are my family."

Tears began to flow from Prancer's eyes. 'That's all we ever wanted to hear from you, dear Santa. We thought you took us for granted. We love you too.'

Then all the reindeer came in and one by one nuzzled Santa with their antlers and licked his face. Santa was a bit embarrassed by all the emotion and said simply, "Ho, ho, ho."

The strike was over. There were a lot of hugs and kisses but then Santa, the elves and the reindeer had to get back to work. Before the delegation left, Santa cornered Secretary Kerry and said, "Secretary Kerry -- you, Donald, Mickey, Pluto and Ellen have done an amazing job of bringing me and the reindeer back together. I'm very grateful to you.

"Tell all your friends down below that this will be an especially wonderful Christmas for them this year and that you four are the reason why." At that point Secretary Kerry hugged Ellen and told Santa that she was the one who made the difference for us all.

They were then rocketed back to Sanibel by way of the Apollo rocket ship and after more hugs, the delegation dispersed, each with a wonderful story to tell friends and family. Secretary Kerry was immediately ushered into the Oval Office to report all this to the president. The president, in turn, has invited Santa Claus to the White House to be presented with the Medal of Honor. Secretary Kerry will be meeting with the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate to make a special report on his journey to the North Pole. Thanks to him we can all anticipate a wonderful Christmas with lots of presents. And also thanks to him Sanibel now has a special place in Santa Claus's heart.