



James Bailey

Is there or is there not a Santa Claus? Every year about this time, pro- and anti-Santa forces clash over their beliefs in the existence or non-existence of a certain portly gentleman whose last known whereabouts is believed to be the North Pole.

A great believer in investigative journalism, I decided this week to attempt to track down this elusive figure with the assistance of my many confidential sources throughout the city.

Eventually, after many fruitless attempts, I managed to make contact with a mysterious individual known to me only as Mr. C. It was to be one of the strangest interviews of my career.

I was picked up at my apartment by a man about three feet in height who appeared to be wearing pointed shoes with small gold bells on the toes.

The man insisted that I be blindfolded

for our trip, so I have no idea what kind of car he was driving. That's unfortunate, because the car provided the smoothest ride I'd ever experienced — almost as if we were flying. Once during the trip I heard him say "Donner" and, on another occasion, "Blitzen" but an exhaustive search of foreign automotive manuals has failed to reveal any vehicle model called a "Donner-Blitzen."

After several hours drive, I was ushered into the presence of the enigmatic Mr. C. For some strange reason, Mr. C. insisted that I conduct the interview sitting on his knee. Before I could utter my first question, he asked me, "And what would you like for Christmas, little boy?"

As I attempted to explain the purpose of my visit, he began to chuckle heartily, with the result that I was nearly bounced off my perch by his

T'was most strange, indeed!

ample and rapidly-vibrating belly. It was an unusual laugh, sounding something like "Ho, Ho, Ho!" Then I realized I had inadvertently grabbed him by the head to maintain my position on his knee. He had, in fact, been painfully calling out "No, No, No!"

At that point, Mr. C. took command of the situation. He warned me that I had better watch out, I better not cry, I better not pout and he was going to tell me why, namely that he was coming to town. He claimed that he saw me when I was sleeping, he knew when I was awake, he knew when I had been good or bad, so I had better be good for goodness' sake.

Even more frighteningly, Mr. C. said he was making a list and checking it twice, and that he was determined to find out who had been naughty and who had been nice. Then, he again warned,

he was coming to town.

At first, I tried to talk myself into believing that he was bluffing. The resources required to obtain the type of information Mr. C. claimed he was collecting were simply beyond the capabilities of any one man.

As my questions continued, however, I grew more apprehensive. I already knew that he was a big, powerful man, so I asked him what kind of work he did. He replied that his job involved flying all over the world and in the next breath he said he only worked one night a year. The rest of the year he spent "preparing."

A shiver went through me. I had covered the police beat long enough to know that there was only one job that required knowledge of when people were sleeping extensive airplane flights and only one or two days work per year.

Further, Mr. C. admitted that he only

worked "when not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse." And he conceded to using a number of aliases in his work, such as "Kris" and "Nicholas." To top it all off, he said he carried around his "toys" in a large, gray bag and that he was usually accompanied on his trips by an accomplice nicknamed "Rudolph."

Peering through the bottom of my blindfold, I observed that he was wearing an ominous-looking pair of large, black leather boots.

That was enough for me. Forgetting entirely about the rest of my interview, I hastily said my goodbyes to Mr. C., jumped off his knee, and stumbled from the room. Without a word, the little man directed me into his car and drove me home as I sat cowering in my seat.

Is there really a Santa Claus? I guess I'll never know.



Karl Schuessler

Perfect presence

On that first Christmas on the fields of Bethlehem, when the angels announced the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, the writer Luke says, "And the angels went away from them into heaven."

And the sight of that first angelic choir faded from the eyes of those terrified shepherds. The angels were gone, vanished forever.

That's the plight of the angels today — vanished. Perhaps vanished is a better word. The vanished angel, swept away by reason and right thought, buried under the ruins of worn-out ideas, irrelevant images and discarded theories.

Who in his right mind ~~can~~ believes in angels? Oh, at Christmas time we do let them make a little comeback. We dust off their plastic bodies and straighten up their cardboard wings and stick them up on the mantel piece; or we hang them on the Christmas tree. Then we put them all away for another year.

We let them fade into the dreamy world of fairies, gnomes and elves; or the sweet world of chubby baby cherubs; or the beautiful world of sleek angelic goddesses.

ones, the praying ones, the praising ones and the soul-carrying ones.

Then there are the writing ones, those with the pens who keep all the records. And don't forget the singing angels, those with psalter and harp.

Most of us just aren't aware of angels. We live quite well without them, thank you. Besides, how would we ever recognize them anyway?

They're spirits, non-material, without bodies. So what are we doing with all this wing business and aulos and long white robes?

For how can we mortals picture a pure spirit? How can we describe it? What is it? What is it like? A misty glow? A spark? A focus of energy? Light? A blurr? An incandescent bubble?

Are these satisfactory descriptions any more satisfactory than a winged-creature?

No matter what the image, we're still trying to convey an idea. The idea that God is present in our life at a particular time and in a special way.

Now it's true. God is with us all the time, but it's these particular moments, these certain times when he makes Himself known in an extra special way that we call on the angels.

For at this point language limps; words fail to describe this reality. We settle for the company of angels, not insisting on wings or robes, but only on the reality of their presence, that is God's presence.

So it's very natural that the shepherds saw those angels, the message-bringing ones.

They were made aware of a very special child born that night. He was — in fact — the presence of God, our Immanuel, the-God-with-us.

Yes, Christ was greater than the angels' presence. He was and still is the perfect presence of God.



John Stewart

Gift ideas

It's the season to be stretching the imagination for gift ideas and to be employing all of your ingenuity to make Christmas more successful for those around you.

Beyond the circle of family and friends who gather to celebrate the season, it would be nice sometimes to give appropriately to others we may not personally know.

So, in that spirit here, are some tokens of esteem in the form of Christmas gifts.

Here's hoping Premier William Davis finds a new electric train system under his tree to replace the one that was so rudely derailed earlier this year.

For the Toronto Maple Griets, a winning streak that lasts more than one or two games would be in order, along with a pair of earmuffs that will block out those chortling sounds wafting across the Lake from Punch Imlach's office in Buffalo.

For NDP firebrand Dr. Morton Shulman, Santa should leave an amateur detective kit and a do-it-yourself home-protection system for the family. Unfortunately, no belly dancing will be allowed in the house in the future due to the sensitive alarm setup.

A free business-trip pass to Europe for Mississauga Mayor Martin Dobkin complete with two books of articulated bus tickets would be appropriate (On the back is printed "Do not pass a GO station, do not collect \$2,000 expense money.)

For Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau a copy of Lenny Bruce's "How To Talk Dirty and Influence People."

For Portly agriculture minister Eugene Whelan, Christmas should bring a copy of a special crash diet employing up to 28 million rotten eggs. Any leftovers might make excellent cannon fodder for the opposition.

For Peter Demeter, our most famous Mississaugan of 1974, a 10-year subscription to Der Spiegel, along with a correspondence course in creative writing ("You too can turn your everyday experiences into an exciting reading).

Under every SOTAS member's environmentally-protected Christmas tree may their rest a law handbook, carefully placed there by Santa to avoid legal actions in the future stemming from the free expression of opinion before elected municipal representatives. The introduction should warn that the woods are full of lawyers as well as developers and trees these days.

Lastly, for federal labour minister John Munro, from an anonymous campaign donor, comes a copy of the recording "You Don't Get Me, I'm Part of the Union."



Stewart Page

It's been a long trip downhill

Every healthy Canadian aged 31 can remember getting up on a cold winter morning, heading out for a frozen pond and playing shinny all day, probably ending up half frozen.

And if he became good enough at shinny, he earned the right to call himself a real hockey player.

On Saturday nights those same kids would tune in Foster Hewitt and listen to the Saturday night game, which always featured the beloved Toronto Maple Leafs and the Hot Stove League — there just was no other team you could possibly like other than those Toronto chaps.

There was a lot of talk about who was a good player, who was not so good, who would win the Stanley Cup, and who was better — Richard or Howe.

In those days, there were six teams in the National Hockey League. In fact, there were far fewer teams in nearly about all major sports leagues than now,

especially in football and basketball. Interest in particular teams was high, and often a team from a certain locality actually contained a good many players who really came from that area. Only players of the very best calibre could play for a major league team — the others simply didn't make it to the top.

Gordie Howe, the finest player in hockey history, used to get a Detroit Red Wings contract in the mail from Jack Adams, sign it, and return it the following day. Most other players essentially followed suit. Howe found pride in playing professional hockey and in playing for the Red Wings.

Major league sport has come a long way since then, most of it downhill. As the popularity of professional sport reached its pinnacle — around 1960 or so — a lot of eagle-eyed promoters and potential club owners were lurking around athletes like vultures. They pounced quickly on athletes, packaged

them, turned them into a rapidly expanding array of teams with promises of big, easy money.

The immense demand to harness and sell the skills of hockey, basketball and baseball players, for example, coupled with the advertising talents of owners trampling over each other to get in on the gold rush, led to the rapid league expansions. This meant the creation of such dubious, wobbling, collections of talent as baseball's San Diego Padres, basketball's Seattle SuperSonics, and hockey's Kansas City Scouts, Washington Capitals, and Oakland Seals.

Sport is no longer sport; it is big-time showbiz, which admittedly at times is entertaining and exciting.

However, most big league games are generally boring.

Watching the Toronto Maple Leafs now has the adrenalin potential of Romper Room, perhaps without the

ambiguity. The dilution of talent as the result of league expansions is such that some "star" players on most teams are those who, in other years, would have been fringe players at best. There are still others who wouldn't have made the big time in the first place.

The result of all this is that the great potential of sport as an enjoyable, intrinsically pleasurable activity may be obscured forever by the desire to win, at all cost. Apparently, sport cannot be itself anymore; it is only a way to make money. People who are doomed to play shinny — rather than "hockey" — feel self-conscious showing their modest abilities. They can't get much ice time, anyway, since it is usually taken up by "team" practices and games where youths act out the tough-guy roles they see on television. These images are condoned by owners or major league clubs. In other words, masculine boys

must play hockey.

One notes that the coach of a suburban Toronto peeewee hockey team was recently fired by the team's "general manager". The coach said it was because the team was "not winning enough." Somebody is getting a lot of vicarious gratification out of kids' hockey and it isn't just the kids. In fact, for all but a few kids, once they reach that heart-breaking moment when they can no longer "make the team," most of them essentially give up the game. What good is it, if you're no good?

And things are so bad that when the Toronto Maple Leafs get beaten by the Los Angeles Kings, the announcers are reduced to trying to invent some semblance of excitement by exclaiming, "He's got the crowd on the edge of their seats!" as Ed Shack leaps to the ice. Now, in grade 3, this exhortation may be fairly effective, but this seems to be where sport is at.

Neil Davis

The answer is clear: turf 'em out

The major characteristic of the Conservative government of Ontario is its singular lack of courage.

In its policies and programs, it pays far more attention to its "popularity" among selected segments of the population than it does to its responsibility to take bold and decisive action on behalf of all citizens.

For example, the Tories backed off on a plan to introduce legislation to make use of seat belts compulsory. It argued that "public opinion" was against it. But what public?

Obviously, many people are not convinced that seat belts would reduce death and injury in automobile accidents. Yet, research indicates that they would be of immense benefit.

Instead of listening to the cries of one faction, the government should act in the best interests of all of us. It will not, of course. With re-election as its prime concern, it does not wish to alienate its supporters who caused the change of mind. As a result, hundreds of people may be killed or maimed. The Tories

lack the courage to avoid such carnage. Thousands of acres of prime agricultural land are being buried under sod and asphalt as developers relentlessly pursue their profits. The government should step in and declare that excellent farmland will be protected. It should act to ensure that farmers can continue to work their land for a satisfactory return.

The government will not act, of course. Many farmers would protest, as they are part of a society coerced into believing that the chief end of man is the pursuit of the fast buck.

As a result, the society suffers and shortages of staple products are inevitable.

Through their collective myopia, the Tories will ignore future peril in an effort to win present support. Such cowardly inaction is inexcusable. Civil servants, teachers and other public employees are being paid at a level that fails to compensate for inflation. They are denied full collective bargaining rights, and frustration grows.

Will the government "free the servants"? Will it grant the same rights to public employees as those enjoyed by other workers? Of course not. With its eye on the past, blind to the overwhelming evidence in support of granting free collective bargaining to all, it will continue to precipitate conflict, antagonizing thousands of public employees. Why? Because it believes that "putting those people in their place" is more attractive to the electorate.

When it comes to a decision between what is right and what the voter will buy, the Conservative government will invariably opt for the latter. As a result, we all lose in the long run. But of course, the long run is far off; an election is nearer. Using public employees as pawns in their political game is cowardice of the first degree.

Apartment rents rise at unprecedented rates, and those forced to live in apartments because of a totally inadequate government commitment to housing, have little choice but to pay.

Will the Ontario government curb these exorbitant rates? The British Columbia government did. Of course, the Tories won't. Too many developers and landlords are financial supporters of their party. Many other examples — in education, in environmental policies, in housing, in auto insurance — could be cited, but the list would be too long for this column.

A smug, self-satisfied government, in office for over a quarter century, is unlikely to develop backbone now. Its priorities are consolidated, its prejudices firm. It is senile and irresponsible.

There is only one solution: we have to turf them out and replace them with a government that puts people before profits, public interest before private aggrandisement. Now here comes the pitch. I believe the people of British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Manitoba did just that. They replaced aging parties with dynamic leadership. They voted NDP.

Despite the adverse reaction of many

interest groups, those three governments developed bold policies to meet real needs. Sure they've made mistakes, but they've been errors of action and not sins of omission.

I think we should do the same in Ontario. I have obviously made my commitment. You may disagree, but I urge you to spend some time in the next few months in sober reflection. Try to cast out preconceptions, and really study the policies of all three major parties in Ontario. Then make your choice at the polls. Will it be more of the same, or do you have the courage to make a change?

And that brings us full circle, back to the question of courage. The Tories have none; the Liberals offer little. I think it's time for a real change, a meaningful change. I've made my decision. Do you have the courage to join me?

Neil Davis is a member of the Peel South New Democratic Party.

Tony Abbott MP



MPs need some supplement

May I take the opportunity of wishing all the people of Mississauga a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

The issue which has dominated the last week in Parliament has been the bill to increase MPs' ministers' opposition leaders, "and parliamentary officers' salaries.

I wish to say at the outset that when I stood for Parliament I knew the salary and did not arrive in Ottawa seeking a raise. Like all other Canadians, I have found that inflation is making it more and more difficult to make ends meet. For this reason, I sincerely believe some supplement must be paid to MPs to take account of the erosion in their earnings over the last four years since the last increase.

It is quite clear, however, that whatever explanations can be offered, the proposed 50 per cent raise was a disastrous proposal, which has been

properly rejected. It is, to say the least, distasteful for MPs to be placed in the position of seeking such an increase and I sincerely hope some alternative method of re-adjusting salaries can be devised.

In February, 1970, the government asked for independent recommendations from a commission headed by the late T.N. Beaupre, which included Arthur Maloney, a former Progressive Conservative MP and Marc Lapointe, who had been active on behalf of organized labor in industrial relations.

The commission, as reported in 1970, recommended that MPs' salaries be raised from \$12,000 to \$25,000. At that time, the commission's recommendations were ignored and the MPs' salaries were increased to \$18,000 per year, plus \$8,000 tax free expense allowance. Since October, 1970, the dollar has declined in value to less than 75 cents; at the present time, the \$18,000

purchases only \$13,472 worth of goods and services compared to the prices in November, 1971.

When introducing the pay legislation, Mitchell Sharp argued that the federal government could no longer escape the responsibility of refusing to give MPs a raise in pay.

He pointed out that recent actions taken by some municipal and provincial governments makes MPs' salaries and expense allowances inadequate in comparison, for instance, to the \$36,000 per annum paid to members of the City of Toronto's executive committee, of which \$12,000 is tax free.

Sharp said that unless compensation is adequate, few competent people will run for Parliament. In Sharp's opinion, "We would be derelict in our duty if we did not face up to the necessity of bringing our remuneration into line with the levels that prevail elsewhere in private and public life."

When Sharp tabled the bill in the House of Commons, a 50 per cent increase in salary was proposed in conjunction with a \$4,000 increase in the tax free allowance. A substantial portion of the public was understandably outraged at this increase at a time when the government has been recommending voluntary restraint for labor in salary demands and undertaken measures to curtail inflation.

The revised recommendation of 33 per cent seems to me to be more reasonable in light of the Canadian economic situation.

I am firmly in agreement with the need for salary increases for MPs, at reasonable intervals, just as I believe that any person in the private sector should expect to get a raise to cover periodic increases in the cost of living. The 33 per cent salary increase compensates for the loss of purchasing power of the MP's salary, since 1970

and is, I feel, fair and justified. I would reiterate that I knew the level of what when I ran for Parliament and was quite prepared to accept the situation as I found it.

However, knowing the very considerable expenses MP's face in such areas as maintaining two homes, extra costs of travel and entertaining visiting constituents. I am now aware that many MPs are forced to go into debt. I do not believe Canadians wish this to happen and that they expect their Members of Parliament to live respectably and to be able to educate their children properly out of their income.

I hope that if I haven't answered those of you who were outraged at the proposed pay increase, that I have at least presented the viewpoint that all but a very small minority of MPs share. Tony Abbott is Member of Parliament for Mississauga.