



Chopin and Santa Claus

One of the great pleasures in being a parent is that you are sometimes able to re-live pleasurable episodes from your own childhood, except that you are now seeing things from 'the other side', as it were. In my case, when my two daughters were quite young, I particularly enjoyed playing the whole Santa Claus 'mystery' all over again.

As a very young child, I had been told that there was a Santa Claus, and that - if I were good - he would deliver a present of some kind on Christmas Eve. And he always did! Although I was aware that some of the presents I received for Christmas were prepared by family and friends, there was always something 'special' delivered by the jolly elf himself, presumably from his magic sleigh, although of course I never managed to stay awake to see that wonderful sight myself.

So when I became a parent, I eagerly continued this tradition, and when they were young, my two daughters were convinced that Santa Claus was very real. After all, their father said so, and as they well knew, he never lied to them!

As the years went by, I became aware that an interesting twist was developing in our family's interpretation of the Santa story. As a bit of background, I should mention that right from the time my daughters were born, I never spoke to them with any kind of 'baby talk', or with childish language. I spoke to them - from the very first day - in the same tones and words I used with adults. Another thing I did was to treat them like adults as much as possible; for example, when we played games or activities, I never 'let them win'. I wasn't brutal with them of course, but they always had the implicit message that I treated them the same as other people - with politeness and respect.

And so, when the times came when they would ask "Dad, is there really a Santa Claus," I would reply quite seriously, "As far as I can figure out, there certainly seems to be. I myself don't understand how it works, because it's hard to see how one guy can deliver all those gifts in one evening, but the evidence is quite clear - just look at all the presents you see on Christmas morning!" I didn't wink knowingly at them, and I didn't give them any clue whatsoever that this might be a 'story'. I was just straight.

So they were torn; on the one hand they heard some of their friends at school telling them that there was no such thing as Santa Claus, yet here was their very trustworthy father with another side to the story. I played my part so well, that even when they were well into elementary school, they still had some doubt about the whole thing. Christmas had an extra 'frisson' for them - would Santa Claus bring something?

Until I blew it. My daughters were both taking piano lessons during these years, and although neither of them showed any particular musical aptitude, they were enjoying themselves, so I encouraged them along the way. One year, Himi's present from Santa Claus was a set of CDs of the complete works of Chopin, music that she had expressed an interest in learning more about. (Some of Santa's presents of course were things that could be used and enjoyed by other members of the family too!)

Move ahead a couple of years; perhaps the girls were now about ten and eight years old. We were walking through one of the shopping streets in Shibuya, where there are many interesting little specialty shops. As we

walked past a discount record shop, I gestured and started to say, "By the way, this is the place where your Chopin CD set came from ...", but realized too late that this was a mistake.

The girls pounced immediately. "Aha! So you bought those! So there is no Santa Claus!" They were half laughing, half crying. By this age they knew inside that the Santa Claus story was just a children's story, but this was the moment when the pleasureable game could no longer be continued ... My moment of carelessness had finally put an end to it.

As I write this, they are now twenty-five and twenty-three. And I like to think that if I hadn't made that slipup that day in Shibuya, they would be looking forward to Christmas Eve later this week and wondering what Santa might be bringing ...

After all, they know that their father would never lie to them!

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