

# The Father Christmas Diaries.

Greg Forster, Nov. 2015.

1. Honestly, I don't know! They've given me a new job, and I'm not sure about it. It's all about generosity, you know, and even that is a bit of a mouthful. "Generosity!" Yes, I can get my tongue round it if I try. I'm supposed to persuade people to be kind and generous, and it's not just people! No, it's everybody! How am I supposed to do that?

I suppose I sort of asked for it. It was way back, you see. Yes, seventeen hundred years way back, and that **is** way back, I can tell you. I'm a bishop, you see, or I was; Bishop of Myra, and nowadays you'd say it was in Turkey, but back then we called it Lycia. In those days people didn't just fall in love and get married. Well, I suppose some did, but the proper way to do it was for your dad to arrange things for you, and then he'd give a great gift to your husband-to-be just to confirm it, so *he* couldn't back out.

Now that was OK if you had the money, but there were three girls in the Church that I knew of, and they had fallen on hard times ~ a fire at the farm, I think ~ and their dad was as poor as a church mouse. There was no way he could sort out a good marriage for them all ~ no, not even for one. What could they do? Nice girls, they all were, and I really felt sorry for them, but I couldn't embarrass them, even though I'm worth a bit.

I thought a while, and hit on an idea. There was an alley running behind their house, and one night I got three bags of gold from my safe, and sneaked along there. I tossed them over the wall, into their courtyard, one, two, three. They made a bit of a noise, but I scurried off home.

I thought no-one would know, but it got out. Someone must have seen me, or guessed, or maybe the servants saw me sneaking out that night and put two and two together when the girls' weddings were

suddenly arranged. So I got this reputation ~ Nicolas the generous. And now I've got this job too. How am I to get it done?

**2.** "Make my day!" I said, so they did. I deserved it. I was a bit sarcastic when they gave me this job, but they went and took me at my word. They've given me 6<sup>th</sup> December, right at the beginning of winter. I suppose I asked for it. We get given the day of our death as our special day, and that's when it was. "Why?" you ask. Well, it's a day to celebrate, isn't it? You don't think so? Everyone should be sad, you think. Well, I don't think so. It's promotion, you see; promotion to glory. In your world things can be a bit sad and grim, but that's not how it is in the world to come; in heaven it's all glory, in God's presence, and Jesus there too, wiping all the tears from our eyes. I suppose people were sad to lose me, but they were glad for me, and that's why they gave me this day, and who am I to argue?

**3.** They're calling me a saint too. That's a bit rich! Why me? We're all saints, aren't we? That's what God has made us, thanks to Jesus. We're made holy just because we trust him, and ask him to forgive us and be our friend, and then he says to live up to that and behave like saints, like being kind and generous, and grateful to God for what he's done for us. And it's him that's given us the example really. 'Although he was rich he became poor,' ~ that's about Jesus, you know, ~ 'so that through his poverty we might become rich.' Being generous like that; that's what I tried to do, like I hope we all do, so why call me *Saint* Nicolas, any more than Saint Lizzy or Saint Pippa or Saint Milly? Anyway, they've given me this title, and this job, and a nickname too ~ Claus, Santa Claus. I suppose I'll have to live with it.

**4.** They said, 'Look after the children, too. And the sailors!' As if I haven't got enough to do! I supposed I asked for those jobs as well. There was this famine, you see, and kids sometimes got overlooked, or dumped. A nasty business! There were some kids in the Church just

went missing. I made a few enquiries, and called at a few places ~ rather unsavoury places, I can tell you ~ and there we found them and got them out.

And the sailors? That's another story. I was going to the Holy Land, on pilgrimage, like you do. A storm blew up, like they do, and everyone came up and asked me to pray for safety. Occupational hazard that, for bishops. To be honest they didn't need to ask. I was saying quite a few prayers of my own already! But, God be praised, we came through it OK, and they gave me the credit, which was nice ~ except now everyone expects me to put in a word for them when they sail anywhere. Good seamanship and a sturdy ship are what they really need ~ they're God's gifts to us too, you know, but a prayer or two doesn't go amiss either. But people could do with making their own prayers direct to Head Office. They don't need to ask me to do their job for them, do they?

**5.** So now I've got the generosity contract too. 'Set an example,' they said. (Well I have done, haven't I? That's the problem!)

'Get everyone in on it,' they said. How am I supposed to do that?

'Get round everywhere,' they said. Now that's a tall order.

'We'll give you transport,' they said.

'Thanks for nothing,' I said.

'You'll need flying lessons,' they said.

'I'll need what?' I said, and they showed me a sledge and some reindeer. At least, that's what they said they were. We're more used to donkeys and carts in Lycia.

'Will that thing fly,' I said.

'Give it a whirl,' they said. 'Go fast enough and the skids will give you lift,' they said, and added something about lifting bodies and aerofoils.

'What are they?' I said, but I couldn't understand the answer. 'And how do I go fast enough on that anyway?' I asked.

'We've given you Donner and Blitzen to pull you,' they said.

'Who?' I said,

'Thunder and Lightning,' they said. 'You see them before you hear them ~ and Rudolph will light up the route.'

'What about health and safety?' I said. That should have put an end to it all.

'Just don't let the parcels fall off over crowds,' they said.

'Thanks for nothing,' I said ... again! It looks as though I can't get out of it!

'Can't I let out the franchise?' I said, 'and get everyone to do their bit?'

'Got it in one!' they said. 'Get the mums and dads to do the research, and then you see to the deliveries ~ and don't damage the chimney-pots.'

'What about air traffic control?' I said. 'And what about places without chimneys?'

'Not our problem,' they said. 'Stop making excuses and get on with it; you've got till the 25<sup>th</sup> to get it sorted.'

**6.** 'And by the way,' they said, 'there's accommodation that goes with the job.'

'Oh,' I said, 'and where's that?'

'North Pole industrial estate,' they said. 'Turn left at The Plough and go straight on.'

So I did. Actually I'm a bit worried about it. I think it might melt away into thin air ~ or at least into a watery wilderness. I met a bear there, The Great Bear, all white and wonderful. But he looked a bit worried. He'd had too much swimming to do of late. 'Can I help?' I

asked, without thinking. That's my trouble. I take on too much, and now it looks as if I've got another job.

'You're OK,' he said. 'That sledge of yours doesn't emit carbon. But while you're doing your rounds you could tell people to look after their own back yard. After all, they live in it as well as me. If they want snow at Christmas they'll have to do something about it.'

Oh, dear. More jobs! But he's got a point, you know.

**7.** At least, they've given me a suit of protective clothing, but it's all red and so bulky that I look like the Michelin Man. I don't need it so large. I used to fast two days every week to remind myself about people who have to go without, and to give me time to pray better. I'm quite skinny, really. It does keep me warm though, like an old fashioned flying suit. I asked about that, when I found an old set in the office. That was green, and looked more comfortable.

'Oh, that.' They said. 'Don't bother with that. Since the drinks company gave us sponsorship you've got to wear the red.'

'Can't I use the green as away kit, when I'm out on the rounds?' I said.

'Sorry,' they said. 'It's in the contract.'

'But tradition,' I said.

'Red's the new tradition now,' they said. 'Don't cause trouble. It's Hi-Viz, too. It increases your public profile.'

Oh, well. I suppose I did wear red a few times as a bishop, but not *that* red.

**8.** I've got a grouse! No, it's not in the sandwich that someone left out for me by the chimney with the glass of port. No, I've got a complaint, a grievance and a grumble. It's the antisocial hours. I think I should put in for time and a half, and double time on Sundays ~ except there's no pay for the job in the first place. I'm just supposed to be generous with my time.

You see, they expect me to work on Christmas Eve, right up till the wee hours ~ two and three a.m.! Don't they know? I'm a bishop. That's when I'm supposed to be in Church, celebrating the greatest story on earth ~ and beyond it! Sometimes we are there from sunset till the wee hours; sometimes it's just over midnight; ~ but celebration it ought to be.

Yes, Jesus was born, and all the angels were singing Glory to God and peace on earth, and that's what I want to be singing too. How do they expect me to be in two places at once, let alone two hundred million? (And if I sing too loudly as I go out on my rounds I might scare the children!)

How would it be if I came out on strike, or asked for my cards and resigned? Mmm! Now there's a thought. What do you think? Perhaps I'll try it ..... but not this year!

**9.** And another thing! It's all these stand-in Santas. I went to a big shop the other day, and the posters said I was coming at 3 o'clock, and suddenly there I was; an old fellow with a pillow pushed down his jacket, and big Wellington boots, saying Ho, ho, ho, all the time. What do they take me for?

He came in a pony and trap, which shows some imagination, but the poor pony had antlers strapped onto its head. I ask you!

There was a kid there, sat by this Santa's knee, asking for all sorts. It's not generosity that that encourages, if you ask me, but greed. Mind you, I did listen in carefully, so as to know what he might like when I drop in on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

But then he looked mischievous, and grabbed my look-alike's beard. "I bet that's not real," he said, and pulled. But it was! Ouch!

Someone else complained that she'd seen him ~ me ~ half an hour before in the other shop. "Oh, that must have been my brother," he says. Quick thinking that. "And what would you like," he adds, putting his hand in his sack before she has time to ask any more awkward questions.