

Bad Santa: Mom worries about long-term effects of a well-intentioned lie

By Gina Mazza

This could be the year I finally confess to my children that I've been the co-conspirator of an elaborate, well-intentioned scheme to deceive them since birth. I fear being found out because it means the end of Christmas innocence for my daughter, 11, and son, 9. But I must come clean and tell them:

There is no Santa Claus.

The lengths to which my husband and I have gone to conceal this reality have gradually reached massive proportions. Of course, it helps to have your scheme backed by the entire Free World. Even so, it's a bit scary how adroit we've become at raising lying to high art. And it all started out so simply, wanting them to believe that life can be magical.

We've always taken the kids and their wish lists to Santa's House on Main Street in Zelienople, near where we live. This is the Santa to whom our kids became accustomed. When my daughter began spotting other Santas in parades and malls, putting two and two together and asking how he could be in two places at once, we nonchalantly informed her, "Oh, those aren't the *real* Santa. The man in the Main Street House is." A few years later, when my daughter detected that Santa uses the same wrapping paper as us, we methodically began to wrap "his" gifts with different paper.

By the time they entered kindergarten, we stopped allowing them to watch the videotape of my husband dressed in the requisite red suit because they began to recognize Santa's ho, ho, ho as, well, very familiar.

Oh, the depths to which we've stooped to justify the fraud that has already spilled from our lips! Here's the irony: Lying is the very thing that elicits the greatest wrath in our house. Never does the anvil fall harder than when we catch one of our kids being untruthful.



James Hilston, Post-Gazette

I can hear it now.

"OK, Mom, I fibbed about leaving my \$150 retainer on the bed where the dog mistook it for a chew toy ... but, but ... you lied about Santa!"

Or, when they're grown:

"Son, how could you blow your partnership at XYZ Wall Street firm by becoming involved in insider trading?"

"Well, Dad, I was just following your lead. You know, the Santa thing."

Or my daughter, circa age 30, lying on a psychiatrist's couch, being told: "It appears that you suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder brought on by an acute period of parental deception between the formative ages of birth and 6, from which you've developed a psychological propensity to believe that all men -- particularly those bearing gifts -- are merely a figment of your imagination."

Okay, maybe my guilt is making me prone to exaggeration. Besides, there are positives in 'fessing up to all this Claus posturing. For one thing, I've become a tad bitter about Santa getting all the credit for the holiday purchases. Hey, we work hard for the money that Santa uses to buy our presents, and he doesn't seem to appreciate that hundred-dollar bills don't grow on evergreens.

I'm also not convinced that Santa has earned the privilege of being placed on such a high pedestal. This thought occurred to me after my son (then 4 years old) said, "Mom, only two guys are magic: Santa and God." So let me get this straight: Santa has reached the exalted status of the Almighty because he came through on the Nintendo 64 system and deluxe Erector set?

It's settled. This time, I'll stop perjuring myself and come out of the Claus-it. But how to broach the subject? Maybe I'll borrow words from *The Polar Express*, explaining that Santa is symbolic of the kindness and mystery that I want them to experience in the world, and that they'll never be too old to see that beauty and goodness if they truly believe it exists.

If I said that, I wouldn't be lying. And they might just forgive me for not being honest with them sooner. On the other hand, maybe they've quietly discerned the truth on their own, and the entire joke is on me -- their comeuppance, of sorts.

Either way, I'll start the new year with a clear conscience ... at least until March, when the Easter Bunny arrives.

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