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Frankincense, Gold,  
and Meconium

## Greatest Gift EVER (for a boy, that is)

by Joe Charbonneau

So... *this* just happened.

A few months ago, Simon asked me the question EVERY boy asks himself (at least privately, in the recesses of his most secret and unadvertised thoughts): “Dad, **why don’t people have urinals in their homes?**”

As a male person myself, I could only affirm the intuitively astute and patently evident *legitimacy* of such an inquiry – as I reflexively replied: “There’s NO REASON in the whole wide world, Si’. No reason at all.”

And so, I proudly present to you the latest member of the Charbonneau family – Simon’s Christmas present:



Ain’t she a beaut’?

ALSO: as it is still only the 23<sup>rd</sup> (two days BEFORE Christmas), **SIMON DOESN’T KNOW ABOUT ANY OF THIS!** We printed a decoy newspaper with a different lead story. So please keep this on the “down-low.” As it were. Thanks!

## A few of Joe’s favorite things...

I’m sometimes heard in a watering hole  
But don’t think I’m a carp!  
I’m more of an elephant...  
More – still – like a harp.

With heart and soul, each child clamors  
But what strikes me most  
are all those hammers!

**What am I?**

When I’m agitated  
Wheels are set, and stamped, and dated

When I’m expressed  
A child’s needs are all addressed

But, for holiday treats to be dispensed  
That’s when I need to be condensed

Thus – if you’re one to tolerate,  
I’m sure you, too, will think I’m great!

**What am I?**

If I’m good,  
you’ll want an ice-cream bar!  
Make me an adjective,  
and you’ll think bones are funnier  
than they really are

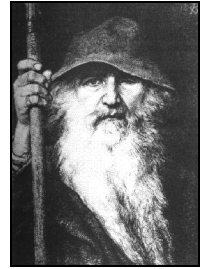
When I’m spoken of in fours?  
Melancholia, in store.

But when the gallows are my stage,  
Tensions are assuaged

**What am I?**

## Reason for the Season

Let's go back to pre-Christian Northern Europe. The Germanic people of the time gave us ODIN, grand patriarch of the Norse mythological pantheon. Each December, Odin (with his big white beard and fur-lined robe and winter cap) would fly through the air atop an 8-legged horse, visiting the housetops of all the children of the earth. A pair of ravens accompanied him, listening at the chimneys, to divine if the kids were "good" or "bad." As winter days grew darker and COLDER, families huddled around their fires, to survive. Children were especially vulnerable, so parents laid out treats, in an effort to curry the graces of Odin above.



Along comes the Catholic church! ...also "pantheonic" - given the litany of saints one was encouraged to worship. This included a fellow "patron" of small children (just like Odin): the one and only Saint Nicholas (called "Sinterklaas" in the Dutch tongue of the region). So, up on the rooftop he went! The ravens were replaced by little black slave boys. The date was fixed to December 6<sup>th</sup>, to align with the observed "name day" for St. Nick (a sort of second birthday, for anyone who happened to be named after St. Nicholas). And, the setting out of children's footwear, as a receptacle for the jolly specter's gifts, was added to the canon.

But lookout - here comes Martin Luther! And, just as the Catholics tried to push the old ways aside, the Protestant Reformation set about to "correct" the ills of the Catholic steam-roller. Wanting to undo the veneration of the saints, Luther replaced Sinterklaas with the "Christkindl" (what we call "Kris Kringle")... a little blond-haired baby Christ-child, who ALSO delivered gifts from the roof, ringing his little bells along the way. And the holiday was moved to Jesus' b-day, on the 25<sup>th</sup>.



Around the same time, England was having their own go at updating the story. They went and invented "Father Christmas," a large merry-making spook decked in scarlet robes, who brings cheer and revelry (and wine!) to the holiday season (think: the ghost of Christmas present, from *A Christmas Carol*). The Brits' also moved their holiday to December 25<sup>th</sup>. Sorry, Nick.

But Americans went another way. All of these moldy European traditions were amalgamated (as we do so well) into the packageable paragon we know and love as: SANTA CLAUS! ...when, in 1823, a New Yorker famously penned: "His eyes, how they twinkled!

Dimples, how merry! His cheeks were like roses. Nose, like a cherry! His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow. And the beard of his chin: as white as the snow! The stump of a pipe held tight in his teeth, and the smoke encircled his head like a wreath. He had a broad face and a little round belly that shook when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly."



It was Americans who made him: heavy set, married, and living at the North Pole with elves and reindeer. (And a mascot for Coca-Cola!) And an American who, in 1897, reminded us all: **"There is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, and romance can push aside that curtain and view the supernal beauty and glory beyond. As certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist - Santa lives. And lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."**

## SIMON SAYS!

Say... Simon,  
Why do restaurants always have signs that say "no shoes, no shirt, no service!" but they never say anything about "no pants"? Can I go to my neighborhood Denny's sans pants?

Signed,  
Cut me some slacks

Dear Cut me some slacks,

It is weird that they don't explain that, but - I think - as long as you're wearing Christmas stockings, it's all right.

## Find the Differences

Can you find the three differences in the following pictures?



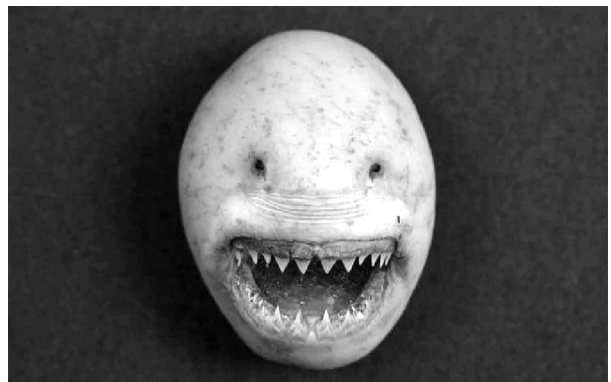
## MAGGIE MEANS WELL

Say... Maggie,  
I come from Idaho, and I recently attended a "Secret Santa" party down in Utah. For kicks, I brought a \$2 fingerling for the present pile. Turns out though, all my friends from Zion pitched in \$50, \$60, \$70 items! I feel so bad. What should I do now?

Signed,  
Poca-Cheapo

Dear Poca-Cheapo,

First of all, why are you upset? You probably got a nice fleece blanket or a pretty painting. If you feel that bad, just tell your friend that the potato was owned by Elvis or some other famous guy. And next time go for something more personal, like a potato carved like your friends face (See the very thoughtful gift below).



## Not a lot of people know this, BUT...

Okay, so, you know how people SAY: “The cops pulled us over that one time because - apparently - they *THOUGHT* we had an ‘open container’ in the car” ...where “**open container**” CLEARLY refers to some sort of alcoholic beverage – right??

But, did you know that that’s just how we lay-people have commonly COME TO regard the meaning of this statute?

Turns out, we’re way off!

The law was never (neither originally, nor now – as it’s written) *about* alcohol consumption. It’s NOT about the dangers of driving inebriated. Believe it or not, the law was set up SIMPLY TO: prevent the distractions (and loss of control) caused when the operator of a vehicle has ANY “open container” (of ANYthing!) in the car with him/her.

That’s why it’s called the “open container” law. And not the “beer” law, or something else like that.

Whenever you tilt your head back to swig a mouthful of that Diet Pepsi, you’re taking your eyes off the road. And, whenever you fiddle with your cup holder to keep your morning cup of coffee from spilling, you’re taking your eyes off the road.

Our common understanding, interestingly, has come to override this sense of the law. But, it IS what’s on the books. So... just saying... it’s worth keeping in mind. Stay thirsty, my friends.

## Local Instant Pot Takes on the Holidays

Instant Ida the Chrome Wonder, took some time out of her high-pressure Christmas schedule to give us a quick peek at her recipe for success:

“The entire month of December is our month to shine. It’s when we really get to test our mettle.

We multitask, speed up, slow down, get messy, and on occasion, pull an all-nighter.

However, sometimes, after a busy week of holiday casseroles, warm wassails, and figgy puddings, we can start to feel like we’ve been cooked hard and put away dirty.

But lest you feel we are not warming up to the idea of pulled pork tonight, and hard-boiled eggs tomorrow, remember that we cook at the pleasure of our owners. And we adore putting every other appliance of yours to shame.

And right now I really have my sights set on New Year's Eve, when I plan to finally let off a little steam.”