

Santa's Vacation, by Paul Arinaga

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Santa was feeling sad. His favorite reindeer, Elsie, had disappeared. She'd gone out one evening alone and never come back.

The elves thought she'd fallen into a hole in the ice. The other reindeer thought she'd gone off with another herd of reindeer. Nobody knew what had happened.

At any rate, Santa was feeling blue.

One morning in January he slept unusually late. He crawled out of bed at 11:00. It was still dark outside and very cold.

Santa yawned and said to himself: "What shall I do today?"

After sitting there on his bed for about 15 minutes he said to himself: "I think I'll take a few days off."

So, instead of starting to work on making toys for the next Christmas season Santa just lay around in bed all day.

Of course, he WAS tired from his Christmas work. Not many men can criss cross the whole world in just one night, even if they have a magic sleigh.

The next morning Santa got up even later. And the day after he got up after lunch.

The day after that Santa got up just in time for dinner. He seemed to be very tired.

But Santa still had his appetite. In fact, every day he ate five roast ducks, a mountain of mashed potatoes and seven loaves of bread. Even for a man of Santa's size this was a lot. And pretty soon dear old Santa started to become as big as a giant snowman.

"My little snow goose," said Mrs. Claus, "aren't you getting a little big?"

"Just re-building my strength for next season," said Santa with a wink.

Food wasn't the only thing Santa had too much of. Pretty soon he was drinking egg nog by the barrel. Even the good-natured elves started to complain. "At this rate, there's not going to be any egg nog left for Christmas," they lamented.

The next time Mrs. Claus said something about Santa's increasing appetite, he just laughed and said: "Well, I need these extra calories to stay warm."

Things continued this way for several weeks. And weeks stretched into months. Before he knew it, it was already March.

"Shouldn't we start making toys for next Christmas?" asked one of the elves.

"I just need a little more vacation," said Santa, turning over in his bed.

Some of the elves grew restless. They were worried that they wouldn't have enough time to make toys for every little boy and girl in the world.

"If we don't start soon, some children won't get presents this year," said a worried elf.

So finally the elves started working on their own. But without Santa's direction they were a little lost. You see, only he knew what every little boy and girl in the world wanted. And the elves didn't dare to open Santa's mail to try to find out.

Santa's mail was also becoming a problem.

Normally, Santa opened his mail immediately and noted down what every boy or girl wanted in a big red book that he kept in his workshop.

But since he had started his vacation he hadn't opened any letters. In fact, a pile of over one million letters was starting to overflow out of the closet in the workshop.

Finally, Mrs. Claus put her foot down.

"Come here, my little ice cake," she whispered gently to Santa, who was dozing in his bed.

She snuggled up next to Santa and then said: "Since you're on vacation anyway, why not have a REAL vacation? Here!" She pointed to a group of islands in the middle of the Pacific Ocean.

"Hawaii?" said Santa. "But it's too hot there for an arctic person."

"You won't melt!" said Mrs. Claus laughing.

The next morning a magical outrigger canoe pulled up in front of the Claus' house. It had a triangular sail and several dark elves with paddles that were dressed only in shorts and shivering from the cold.

Santa hopped in and the captain of the canoe shoved off, eager, no doubt, to be heading towards warmer seas again.

Within only an hour or so, the island of O'ahu came into site. The canoe rode giant waves on the north shore, passing by lots of surfers, and then rounded the coastline to Honolulu, the capital city. Santa could see the famous volcanic crater, Diamond Head, and the hotels dotting the shoreline at Waikiki.

The canoe pulled right up onto the beach and the elves helped Santa get off.

Santa had changed in the canoe. Now he was clad in shorts and a colorful Aloha shirt. His big belly spilled out from under the shirt and had turned the color of guava jelly thanks to the sun at sea.

At his hotel, Santa was met by a very dark and muscular man. "Aloha, Mr. Claus," he said, "I'm Kimo and I'll be your guide and personal trainer during your stay."

"Personal what?" asked Santa.

"Personal trainer," said Kimo. "Mrs. Claus told me that you want to lose some weight."

"I don't need to lose weight," said Santa, "children all over the world love me just as I am."

"Well, let's talk about that tomorrow morning," said Kimo, "I'll see you at 6 a.m. sharp."

The next morning Santa went down to the breakfast buffet. "Mmm...fresh pineapple, papaya, mangoes and pancakes, bacon, omelettes...this was a good idea after all," Santa thought to himself.

Just then Kimo walked in. "Good morning, Mr. Claus," he said cheerfully. "Sorry", he said taking the breakfast buffet plate from Santa's hands.

"Just plain toast and a cup of coffee for Mr. Claus," he said to the waiter.

That day Kimo took Santa all over the island. They swam in the clear blue sea, biked around the island, ran ten miles and lifted weights in the hotel gym. By the end of the day Santa was exhausted and his muscles hurt. "I should have stayed at the North Pole," he thought to himself.

The next day they did the same workout but in the afternoon they went kite sailing at Kailua Bay. "Wooo-hooo!" shrieked Santa as he skimmed over the water and waved at passing green sea turtles, "this is better than riding in my sleigh!"

Then they went to Waimea Bay and jumped off the famous rock. Santa made a huge splash. The waves were huge and the current was strong so Kimo and four lifeguards had to pull Santa's large, water-logged frame out of the water.

"Guess you're not ready for that yet," said Kimo.

The day after that they went hiking in the Ko'olau Mountains.

"It's so green up here," exclaimed Santa. He was really starting to enjoy his vacation. While Kimo consulted his map, Santa wandered off. Pretty soon he was lost and he couldn't see anything except trees and bushes. He heard Kimo shouting his name in the distance but couldn't tell which direction the sound was coming from.

Presently, the sun went down. It got really dark and started to rain. The normally jolly Santa started to feel a bit scared.

Then he remembered his favorite reindeer. "I wonder whatever happened to Elsie?" he thought to himself. A big tear welled up in Santa's eye. "Maybe I'll just stay here and retire. I can stop being Santa...the world doesn't need me anyway" he said to himself.

Just then Santa heard a voice: "Aloha, Mr. Claus."

A little creature stepped into the moonlight. The creature was wearing a yellow and red hat and cape made from bird feathers.

"Who are you?" asked a surprised Santa.

"I'm a menehune and my name's Sam," said the little creature. "We work at night to help our human friends build bridges and repair houses. We're distant cousins of your elves."

"Anyway, why do you want to stop being Santa?" asked Sam.

"It's a lot of work," said Santa, "and some children aren't happy with the presents they get. Plus, I miss Elsie."

"Mr. Claus," said Sam, "you can come here anytime for a visit, but don't you think the children of the world need you?"

"Oh, no," said Santa "what would they want with an old, fat man anyway?"

"Santa, it's good that you've gotten back into shape so you can squeeze through chimneys again, but really, kids love you just as you are. Who ever heard of a skinny, young Santa?"

Sam and Santa talked on through the night about what it was like to be Santa. As Santa talked about all the countries he'd visited and the children he'd made smile he started to feel better.

In the morning Sam led Santa back down the mountain. Santa said goodbye to Sam and gave him a hug. "Come visit anytime," he said. "I'm sure my elves would be happy to meet you and your friends."

Santa went back to his hotel. Kimo was waiting in the lobby.

"Kimo, I want to go back to the North Pole," said Santa.

"I know," said Kimo, "Sam told me."

That afternoon, Santa got back on the outrigger canoe and sailed off. The islands faded into the horizon, getting smaller and smaller until they disappeared completely from view.

An hour later, Santa got off the canoe at the North Pole.

"Ahhh-chooo!" he sneezed. "Gosh, it's cold up here," he said "...but it's still good to be back."

He gave Mrs. Claus a big hug and kiss and said: "Thanks for the trip. That was the best vacation ever!"

Then Santa went into his workshop and said to the elves: "Well, let's get started, we've got a lot of work to do...but it's going to be fun!"