

The Story Behind the Story

When my three daughters were little they were very excited about Christmas. The second they saw Christmas displays appear in the stores, usually before Thanksgiving, they began to ask about when Christmas would be coming.

Each morning they 'd rush downstairs and ask: "Is today Christmas?"

When we said that it wasn't Christmas yet, they'd look disappointed and then ask:

"Why not?"

"Why is it taking so long for Christmas to get here?"

"Why do we have to wait so long?" and on... and on ... and on...?

My wife and I tried to explain about calendars and time, but they were too young to understand. We realized that we needed to find a way to, at least, slow down the flood of questions and, just as importantly, to save our sanity.

So we decided that we would leave a small present at the breakfast table for each of our girls starting December 1st and ending on Christmas Eve day.

The presents were small, inexpensive, and often homemade (piece of candy, a Danish woven heart, a Christmas pencil or an eraser, stickers, an origami figure, a small book, and the like).

While this diverted their attention, it didn't stop their questions, just changed the subject of their questions.

Soon they were asking who was leaving the presents, why were they leaving the presents, and the like. Fortunately they never asked if other kids were getting presents each day. I don't know how we would have answered that question.

As for their questions, I told them that the Christmas Elf was leaving the presents, and so I made up the story of the Christmas Elf.

For many years the Christmas Elf left presents for them until one summer day when they discovered the true nature of the Elf.

I was working in our backyard one Saturday morning when Kris, my oldest daughter, brought me a permission slip to sign so she could go on a day camp field trip. The form required that a parent print and sign his or her name. I did both, and Kris ran back into the house.

Minutes later all three girls were leaning out an upstairs window, smiling and yelling as if they had discovered a buried treasure. They yelled out, "Dad, you're the Christmas Elf!" Kris waved the permission slip in the air as their proof. They had compared my printing and signature with those on the notes and letters the Christmas Elf had left them. The Christmas Elf never appeared again.

Over the years the Christmas Elf's notes and letters have all disappeared, but his story remained tucked away in a corner of my memory. Then one day I decided to write down the story that I had told the girls. And so the Christmas Elf was reborn.