



Santaology – The Series:

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Six Things Every Storytelling Santa Should Never Leave Home Without:

When I first started portraying Santa over twenty years ago, I thought I needed a sleigh full of magic props. What I discovered was just the opposite. The most powerful props I own are the ones already on me before I ever walk out the front door. In fact, the best props are the ones you never have to remember to pack because you're already wearing them. Every one of these items invites a child to ask, *"What's that?"* And when they do, you've been given one of the greatest gifts a storyteller can receive: an invitation to tell a story.

"The prop isn't the magic. The story is."

A prop may catch a child's eye, but a story captures a child's heart. Without a story, a prop is simply an object. Give it a history, a purpose, and a place in Santa's world, and it becomes something magical. Children don't remember the feather, the key, or the ring because of what they looked like. They remember them because of what they meant. **The greatest magic a Santa can carry isn't hidden in his bag; it's carried in the stories he tells.**

Today I'd like to share five things I believe every Santa should carry, not because they're expensive, but because each one has the power to start a conversation, build belief, and create a memory that may last a lifetime.

1. The White Feather Story:

The White Feather story is probably one of my best-known Santa stories. I created it over 22 years ago while answering questions from elementary school students. At the time, I was still very early in my journey as Santa, and I had no idea that one simple question from a child would grow into a story that has touched thousands of children and countless Santas around the world.

Deb and I actually devote nearly three hours to teaching the White Feather story, so today I can't possibly cover everything. Instead, I want to introduce you to the prop itself and

share the basic story behind it. If it resonates with you and you'd like to explore the deeper mythology, the variations, and the many ways it can be adapted, we'd love to have you join us in one of our classes.

Prop Needed:

White Feather:



Figure 1 White Feather

Belt Pouch:



Figure 2 black pouch

Feather Case:



Figure 3 feather case

You will need the three items above for the White Feather Story.

The White Feather Story by: Stephen Gillham

While speaking to a group of children, I usually start this story by saying something like this:

“Hey boys and girls, let me ask you a question. Does anyone know what will happen if you catch me putting presents under your Christmas tree?”

Most of the time, there will be a lot of discussion from the group, with statements such as, “You’ll take all the presents back!” or “You’ll put pepper in our eyes!” That last statement really surprised me the first time I heard it, but I’ve heard it enough now to know that it is part of the stories some parents tell.

I listen and laugh at their comments, then raise my hand until everyone gets quiet and begin the story like this:

I stand up and act out the part of placing presents under the tree, saying:

“Here is what really happens if you catch me. I’ll be in your house putting presents under your tree when suddenly I hear a little voice say, ‘Santa?’

“When I turn around to see who it is, you’re standing there in your pajamas, sometimes holding your favorite stuffed animal, looking at me with wide eyes.

“Now, this is where it gets fun.

“How many of you leave milk and cookies for me?”

Almost every hand will go up.

Then I’ll say, **“Well, what I’ll do next is come over to you and take your hand, and together we’ll go to the kitchen. We’ll get another glass and pour some milk for you. Then we’ll go back into the Christmas tree room, have milk and cookies together, and you’ll help me put your presents under the tree. It will be great! I’ll answer your questions, and maybe you’ll even get to see the reindeer.**

“But here’s where the magic comes in.

“When it’s time for me to leave, I’ll reach into my black leather belt bag...”

At this point, I reach under my coat and show them the black leather bag on my belt. I wear a belt around my red Santa pants and suspenders.

“And I’ll open this bag and pull out one little white feather.”

I explain to the children that this is a very special feather that only grows on a bird that lives at the North Pole. I tell them to look very carefully at it so they’ll remember exactly what it looks like. Then I will continue:

“I put my empty toy bag over my shoulder, take the white feather, and drop it...”

As I say this, I explain that I won’t be dropping this feather, but I use my hand to show how the feather floats gently to the floor.

As the feather falls, I use my right hand to demonstrate it drifting back and forth.

“As the feather falls, do you know what happens when it hits the floor?”

I pause and listen.

The children are usually so excited at this point that they can't help but tell me what they think. I don't continue until they become quiet again.

Then I'll pick one child, look them straight in the eyes, and say: **"You'll be back in bed."**

I'll pick another child and say: **"You'll be sound asleep."**

Then I'll pick a third child and say: **"And you won't remember anything about catching me putting presents under your Christmas tree!"**

"Isn't that something?"

The children are usually extremely excited by this point, so I wait for them to calm down.

Then I will continue:

"But now that you know the story, let me tell you how you can tell if you caught me.

"How many glasses of milk did you leave for me when you went to bed?"

They'll all answer, **"One!"**

"That's right, just one. But how many empty milk glasses will you find in the morning?"

They'll answer, **"Two!"** Then I'll say: **"Now, most of you just run into the Christmas tree room on Christmas morning and start tearing into your presents. But if you caught me, there will be one other thing on the floor. Do you know what that will be?"**

Most of the children will say, **"A small white feather."**

I repeat each word slowly:

"That's right... a... small... white... feather."

"And now you know how to tell if you caught me."

This story is one of my favorites for the adults listening as well.

In the telling, I have given them a formula that helps keep the magic alive for another year.

I have put together red envelopes that I carry with me to hand out to the parents. Inside each red envelope is one special white feather, the White Feather bedtime story, and a letter explaining to parents how to set up the story for Christmas morning.

Small white feathers can be purchased at Michael's or almost any hobby store. You'll get a bag of small white feathers for just a few dollars. One last thing:

If I have worked the children up to a high level of excitement, I do one more thing.

I raise my hand and wait for the children to settle down.

Then, looking around the room at all the children, I say: **"I have one more thing to tell you..."**

I pause and make eye contact with as many children as I can.

"Three of you... sitting right here... caught me last year."

I say this with pauses where the dots are, staring at a different child each time. Then I add:

"And none of you can remember!"

Usually, that statement creates a great deal of discussion, excitement, and wonder, as every child begins to wonder if it was them.

2. Santa's Key:



The second item I never leave home without is my Santa Key. The wonderful thing about this prop is that it hangs right on your belt, so you never have to remember to pack it. It's always there, waiting for a curious child to notice it. And believe me... they notice it. This oversized, ornate key is so unusual that almost every child eventually asks, **"Santa... what's that key for?"** The moment they ask that question, you've been given permission to tell a story. Deb and I actually teach an entire class built around this one little prop. We share three completely different stories that all begin with the very same key. One takes about two minutes and is perfect when you're standing in line greeting children. Another can easily fill five to ten minutes. The third, inspired by **Abbott and Costello's classic Niagara Falls routine** from the 1950s, can entertain a family for twenty minutes or more. The beauty isn't the key. The beauty is what the key allows you to become. A key is just a piece of brass... until a child asks about it. Then suddenly...

***It opens homes that don't have chimneys.**

***It unlocks every door in the world.**

***It was handcrafted by the elves at the North Pole.**

***It quietly puts alarm systems to sleep.**

***It asks security cameras to close their eyes for just a few minutes.**

***It reminds you of the first time Santa accidentally tripped an alarm system back in 1853.**

Now that simple key has become an entire library of stories.

Once again... the Key isn't the magic. The Story is.

3. Santa's Little Prayer Book: There is one item I carry that isn't a prop, isn't a magic trick, and should never be rushed. It's my little **Santa's Prayer Book**. Of all the things I carry, this may be the most important.



Eventually, every Santa will meet a child or an adult whose greatest wish is something no one can place under a Christmas tree. A parent may be fighting cancer. A grandparent may be very ill. A mother or father may be serving overseas. Sometimes you'll meet a child whose only request is, "**Santa, would you please pray for my mommy?**" In those moments, there isn't a toy in

the world that can answer their need.

That's when I quietly reach into my pouch, take out my little red Prayer Book, write down their name, and promise them that I will pray for them. Not because I have magical powers. But because praying with someone and praying for someone is one of the greatest gifts we can ever give. Deb and I spend over half a class teaching the Prayer Book because there is far more to it than simply writing a name. It becomes a small ceremony, a quiet, meaningful moment that many families remember long after the presents have been opened.

I honestly believe no Santa should ever leave home without a Prayer Book. I don't care if you use mine or create one of your own. But have one. Carry it with you every time you put on the suit. Just as your belt holds your **Santa Key** and your feather, your pouch should always hold a little notebook and a pen, ready for the moment when a child needs something that only compassion can provide. Sometimes the greatest gift Santa gives isn't found in his sack. Sometimes it's found in a simple promise:

"Tonight, I'll say a prayer just for you."

4. Santa's Glasses:



Figure 4 Focusers.com eyewear

The next thing I never leave home without is something most people never think about. **My glasses.** And while we're at it... **My watch.** Most people think glasses are simply there to help Santa read. I don't think that's true at all. I believe they're part of the character. Children don't study Santa's glasses analytically. They read them emotionally. A pair of traditional round wire-rim glasses quietly tells a child that Santa has been around for a very long time. They suggest wisdom... kindness... patience... and experience. They don't draw attention to themselves; they draw attention to your eyes.

On the other hand, oversized plastic frames, brightly colored designer glasses, mirrored lenses, or trendy modern styles pull a child out of Santa's world and back into ours. Santa shouldn't look like he shops for eyewear every two years. He should look like he has worn the same beloved glasses for generations, perhaps carefully repaired by the elves many times over. That doesn't mean Santa can't enjoy modern technology. Quite the opposite. Children today know about smart glasses. They know there are glasses that can answer questions, translate languages, take photographs, make phone calls, and even record video. Who do you suppose invented all of that? The elves, of course.

Human technology is just beginning to catch up with what the North Pole has been using for a while. My glasses can magnify my eyesight to read an address, provide night vision for a house where the lights are turned off, help me see through the darkest snowstorm, and even let me quietly communicate with Bernard at the North Pole with no one else knowing, thanks to a built-in communicator. The technology is there... How cool is that?

5. My Watch:



Figure 5 My watch from 1914

The same is true of my watch. At first glance, it looks like an old wristwatch that may have once belonged to your great, great, grandfather. In reality, it's one of the most sophisticated pieces of North Pole equipment I own. It keeps track of North Pole time and Earth time simultaneously. It reminds me of when reindeer feeding time is approaching. It alerts me when an elf needs my attention. It lets the elves know where I am at all times, and most importantly... It always knows exactly how many days remain until Christmas morning.

Like the glasses, it doesn't need to look modern. In fact... The older it looks, the more believable it becomes. That's really the lesson. Every piece of clothing and every accessory you wear is helping children decide whether they're looking at a man in a suit... or Santa Claus. Choose the things that strengthen the story. Because every detail matters.

People often ask me about my old watch. It isn't expensive, but it's one of my most treasured possessions. It was given to me on Christmas Day, 1914, during the Christmas Truce. While I was making my Christmas deliveries, I stopped for a few moments near the trenches where British and German soldiers had laid down their rifles to celebrate Christmas together. One of those young British soldiers was **Bruce Bairnsfather**. History remembers him because he survived the war and later wrote about that extraordinary Christmas, helping preserve the story for future generations.

As I prepared to leave, Bruce removed this watch from his wrist and placed it in my hand. He smiled and said, **“Santa, I think this watch belongs with you now. Wherever you go, let it remind people that even in the darkest times, Christmas can still bring peace.”**

I’ve worn it every Christmas since that night. Every scratch on its case reminds me of a young soldier who believed that kindness could overcome hatred, if only for one precious Christmas Day. When children ask me why I still wear such an old watch, I simply smile and tell them,

“Because some gifts are too important to replace.”

6. The Santa Ring:



Figure 6 Santa rings

The final item I never leave home without is my Santa Ring. Years ago, a Santa ring was difficult to find and very expensive. Today, you can find beautiful rings that look as though they belonged to a king. The style isn't what's important. What matters is that it catches a child's eye and makes them ask... **"Santa... why do you wear that ring?"** And just like that... You've been invited to tell another story.

My ring isn't just jewelry. It's my translator. When I'm in another country, the ring allows me to understand every language spoken there. If I'm visiting children in China, I hear perfect English while they're speaking Chinese. When I answer, they hear perfect Chinese, even though I'm speaking English. The ring quietly translates our conversation, so every child hears Santa in their own language.

There's one interesting rule. The ring only works when I'm actually visiting that country. It doesn't work if I'm in this country and someone asks me a question in Chinese. Otherwise, children would spend all day trying to fool Santa by speaking another language!

The ring has another wonderful ability. It allows me to understand animals. Reindeer don't speak English. They have their own language of snorts, grunts, whistles, and little sounds that mean very specific things. Because of the ring, I understand every one of them. It works with

every animal. That's why I always know whether a dog is happy to see me... or would rather I stayed on the other side of the fence! Perhaps my favorite feature is one almost no one knows about.

The elves have written hundreds of books filled with North Pole history, fairy lore, reindeer care, sleigh maintenance, recipes, maps, and all sorts of things that humans were never meant to read. Without my ring... Every page is completely blank. The moment I slip the ring onto my finger... Every page becomes filled with writing. It's one of my favorite demonstrations for children. I'll hand them one of the North Pole journals and ask them to look through it. **"It's empty,"** they always say. Then I slip my ring onto their finger. When they open the book again... Every page is suddenly covered with beautiful writing. If several children are holding hands, the magic travels right down the line, allowing every one of them to see the elves' secret writing together. It's one of those moments they never forget. Once again... the ring isn't the magic; the story is.

**One day someone will ask you,
“Santa... why do you wear that ring?”
That's all you've been waiting for.
Because now... the story begins.**