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## A non-traditional Santa Claus in town

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I never believed in the Easter Bunny at our mall. Unlike the obviously real Santa Claus, this bunny was disingenuous. Even as a young child I saw through his furry disguise for what he truly was: a fake.

Even at the age of 5, this disgusted me. My reasons for not believing were very simple, if it can't talk, it's not a real bunny. But Bobby, real bunnies just don't talk, my mom would argue.

Ha, I thought. Those bunnies are just too slick for the likes of her. Obviously these bunnies spoke in secret, lurking in the shadows of our homes, every minute plotting against us. I had Bugs Bunny, and his speech was all the proof I needed to support my theory.

Santa Claus was another story. This holiday symbol was entirely real. Every American child in the history of forever has seen this man. It was apparent this guy was the real deal. After leaving L.S. Ayres with my mom, we would finally reach it -- Santa's home away from home at the center of the mall.

Yet something wasn't quite right. I expected to see thousands of kids lined up to meet this celebrity, their eyes lit up and eager to sit on his lap.

"I called, and I told them I wanted a traditional Santa," a woman said to her friend as they walked past. Her daughter was struggling to keep up with them, though they didn't appear to notice.

A traditional Santa? There's only one Santa, how could this be? What was this traditional Santa whose presence was missed?

When I reached the line I was quick to learn my first lesson in prejudice. Unlike the Santa I had

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seen on the Power Rangers, this Santa was black. I inquired to my mom about this. Unlike the other parents, she didn't seem mad or

upset that this wasn't a traditional (white) Santa. She stood there for a second or so, a gentle smile on her face and said, "This is the real Santa. All those other Santas are just actors pretending to be him, but this is how he really looks."

I looked at her, then looked at Santa. And in my mind this made sense. Santa probably needed people to think he was white so that way he could go about his business. He could buy groceries, buy millions of toys at Wal-Mart, whatever. No one would be the wiser. I finally saw Santa for the true master mind he was.

By the time we had reached the end of the line, which took about 10 minutes, I was incredibly excited. I dove under the rope, ran past the security elves, and gave Santa the biggest hug. There I was; my head at his fat tummy, arms around his. My small life felt fulfilled.

Santa and I were engaged in a great conversation when finally a security elf told me my time was up. I was about to protest, when Santa said, in his voice that you only develop after years out in the cold at the North Pole, "Ho, Ho, Ho, don't worry Bobby. I'll see you Christmas Eve."

I tried staying up all night waiting for him to show up. But I was young, and it was late so I soon fell asleep. I woke up on the sofa that morning to the sight of presents. This Santa was definitely a clever guy, sneaking in while I was asleep. Yet as I looked at those presents, spread under our tree, and I knew he had come.

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