



There Goes Santa Claus:

A Boontown Christmas Story

by

Nowen N. Particular

© Copyright 2010. All Rights Reserved.

There Goes Santa Claus: A Boomtown Christmas Story

by Nowen N. Particular

It's been quite a while since I've been able to visit Boomtown during the Christmas holidays. In fact, until I stopped by in early December, I hadn't seen my good friend, Burton Ernie*, since he first tried to launch Santa Claus and his eight tiny reindeer into orbit.

He was the first person I wanted to see when I drove into Boomtown and I found him hard at work in his shed, putting the final touches on Santa's hat and beard. Considering the fact that he had just celebrated his 92nd birthday, Burton was looking as bright and chipper as I'd ever seen him. He gave me a great big bear hug that left my feet dangling in the air. Then, after I caught my breath, he offered me a cup of coffee from his old dented thermos and started to tell me about his latest attempt.

*If you recall, Burton Ernie had worked in Chang's Famous Fireworks Factory for many years. Then he became the Sheriff for Boomtown followed by almost 35 years as the Mayor. Since retired, he continues to play the saxophone for the Boomtown Bombers Jazz band and in his spare time, he thinks of new ways to blow things up.

“Ever since I started this project ten years ago, I could never quite figure it out,” he said, scratching the back of his head with a screwdriver.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, just look at them. Look at Santa. Too fat. And the sleigh. Too heavy. In spite of all the Christmas movies and what you hear in Christmas carols, Santa and his sleigh are not what you would call aerodynamic. Reindeer may look cute, but they aren’t built to fly.”

I knew exactly what he was talking about. I was there during his first, fiery failed attempt. Each reindeer had been made out of chicken wire and paper maché. They had plastic antlers and glass eyes. They were linked together with leather reins with silver bells that tinkled when they moved. Each reindeer had their names painted on the flank in bright, red lettering: Dasher and Dancer in front, followed by Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen.

The reindeer’s bodies were stuffed with rocket fuel and they were pulling a sleigh built out of used lumber and scraps of tin. It was painted a cheerful green with bright red and golden stripes. The runners on the sleigh had rockets

strapped to them and in the back was a huge bag of fireworks, set to explode as soon as the sleigh reached its highest point.

That never happened, of course. Instead, with half the people of Boomtown standing by, Burton lit the fuse and we watched as flames came shooting out of the rear ends of the eight reindeer. In a few seconds, all of them were on fire. In another minute, they swallowed Santa and his sleigh in a great ball of flames. The resulting explosion was spectacular, putting a five foot crater in the ground and filling the air with shooting rockets and thundering booms and crackling sparkles. The neighbors all said it was one of the greatest explosions they had ever seen in Boomtown. But the only thing that shot up into the air was Santa's head, which was found a half-mile away on the roof of Mabel's Diner.

Every year since then Burton had continued to tinker with his design. One year he strapped rockets to the sides of the reindeer and the sleigh. The rig never made it off the ground, but it did manage to skip along through the snow until it crashed into the side of the school gymnasium, where it blew a hole through the brick wall and caught all of the rubber play balls on fire — which really, really smelled. One of them melted into the rough shape of a hippo with its mouth

open. It still hangs in Burton's living room over the fireplace.

The following year, Burton built a ramp and put wheels on the reindeer and the sleigh. He figured that if Santa could pick up enough speed, it would be enough to get the whole thing up into the air. Burton's wife showed me pictures of what happened: Donner and Blitzen breaking free of their reins, along with the other six reindeer, shooting off in all directions like missiles, while Santa sat on the ground waiting for the burning fuse to blow him to smithereens. It made a ho-ho-whole lot of noise, but it didn't deliver lots of toys and goodies like Burton was hoping it would.

After that, the county Fire Marshall investigated and made a big stink about public safety and other such nonsense. The people of Boomtown ran him out of town, but not before they promised to move Burton's operation away from any populated areas. Since then, he'd been setting the sleigh down in the eastern corner of Tom Cotton's farm, still close enough to the main town so that people could come out and watch, but far enough way to keep from scaring the cows.

I joined almost two thousand people the next afternoon to witness Burton's tenth and final attempt to send Santa into outer space. With the help of his oldest son, Vernon Er-

nie, they had constructed a ten-foot high rocket, painted with red and white stripes so that it looked like a candy cane. The words "There Goes Santa Claus" was painted in shiny silver letters along the side. The rocket was held up by arms built out of metal pipes and two-by-fours. The rocket pad was a solid slab of concrete, surrounded by a metal fence to contain some of the blast.

Finally, to complete the arrangement, Burton had mounted the eight reindeer to the surface of the rocket with Santa and his sleigh at the back, including two small elves sitting on top of a giant bag of "toys," which, as always, was filled with firecrackers, rockets, sparklers and fountains. I had never seen him more excited than when I approached him next to the launching pad.

"Burton, you've really outdone yourself this time! A ten-foot rocket. Very impressive."

"I know, I know!" he grinned and pointed. "It took all year, but it was worth it. Did you see what was at the top?"

"I noticed. You put Rudolf in the nose cone. I really like how you lit up his nose with a red Christmas bulb. That's a nice touch."

“Rudolf is going to be my good luck charm this year, I can just feel it. I think he’s the one thing that was missing. After all: what’s Santa Claus without Rudolf?”

“Rudolf the Red Nosed Rocket. Nice. Have you tested it? The rocket, I mean?”

“Do I ever? That’s part of the fun, not knowing what might happen. Just push the button, hold your breath, and hope for the best.” Then he paused and winked. “I want you to do it this time.”

“What? Me? You want ME to push the button? But it’s your rocket. You built it. Why me?”

“Because you love Boomtown. You wrote about it. People wouldn’t even know we were here if you hadn’t written the book. So go ahead. Count down from ten...and then push the button.”

He handed me the metal box with the red button in the middle. I held it up for everyone in the crowd to see. They greeted the sight with a huge cheer and the Boomtown Bombers Jazz Band started to play “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” and everybody started to sing along:

“You better watch out, you better not cry, you better not pout, I’m telling you why. Santa Claus is coming to town!”

Then after everyone got done singing, they started the count down: Ten. Nine. Eight. Seven. Six. Five. Four. Three. Two. ONE!

I pushed the button.

The rocket started to rumble; the rocket started to shake; smoke poured out from underneath; then a blast of flames and sparks. The entire cornfield was lit up by the shimmering light. The eyes of the Boomtown children glittered as they jumped up and down in the snow and clapped their hands. They cheered as the rocket lifted off and gained speed. It shot upward into the winter night sky like a flaming comet. Rudolf led the way with eight tiny reindeer following behind. Santa’s scarf flapped in the wind. One of the elves tumbled off the sack, but the other one held on tight. The rocket went faster and faster, higher and higher until it started to arch overhead, until it suddenly and spectacularly burst open and blasted red and green and silver and gold rockets in every direction. Boom, crackle, fizz, sparkle, whiz, pop, bang.

It was one of the coolest things I’ve ever seen.



After the smoke cleared, Burton Ernie was surrounded by a mob of appreciative spectators. Each of them insisted on shaking his hand and slapping him on the back.

“Way to go, Burt!”

“Never seen anything like it!”

“You’ve outdone yourself, that’s for sure!”

“That was the best ever!”

“Merry Christmas!”

About an hour later, Burton and I walked back to his house where his wife had hot cocoa and cookies waiting for us in front of a cozy fire. As we walked, it gave me a chance to ask a question I’ve always wanted to ask. “Why do you do it, Burt?”

“Why do I do what?”

“Blow stuff up. I know it’s a Boomtown thing, but why fireworks? Why on Christmas?”

“Do I need a reason? Maybe it’s just for fun. Kids know how to do that. Maybe us grown-ups could learn something from them. Just have fun.”

“Okay. Sounds good to me. But now what? Now that you’ve shot Santa sky high, what do you do next? How do you top that?”

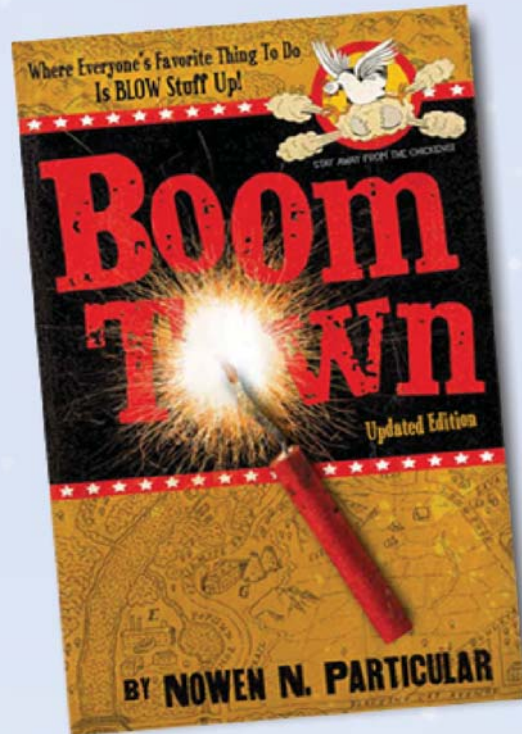
Burton stopped for a moment, just as a light snow began to fall on our heads. He got a twinkle in his eye and his belly began to shake like a bowl full of jelly. He put his finger next to his nose and winked.

“I’ve been thinking about that. How about a Nativity theme next time? Maybe three camels on sleds. With rockets strapped to their sides. And the three wise men riding on top? Maybe some exploding frankincense and myrrh? What do you say? I figure with enough gunpowder and enough rockets, I could get them from here to Bethlehem in less than an hour. What do you think?”

I put my arm around Burton’s shoulder and pulled him through the snow. “From Boomtown to Bethlehem in less than an hour? I don’t know. I’ve never seen a camel go that fast. But I’m telling you, Burt. If anybody was going to do it, I’m sure it’d be you.”

I can’t wait until next year!

Nowen



This short story was based on my book called "Boomtown", available in the new Paperback Edition.

To learn where you can order a signed copy, visit my Facebook page for more information

www.Facebook.com/NowenNParticular

Or, you can order it from Amazon.com (search for "Boomtown by Nowen N. Particular")