

CHRISTMAS NEWS FROM A PARALLEL UNIVERSE

Brent Huckabee: Welcome back. We're now joined by child psychologist Doctor Marietta van den Polt, who's been at the centre of today's unfolding story. Marietta, thanks for joining us. You were involved in the identification of the many families who were the subject of the mass social-work intervention this morning, is that correct?

Marietta van den Polt: Thanks Brent, glad to be here. Yes, my colleagues and I worked with police and social-work departments across the nation, to ensure that we could get as many of these children as possible into protective custody today.

BH: And Marietta, so far we've been given to understand that this massive concerted action was undertaken because of some bizarre Christmas-related ritual enacted by these families. Do we have that right?

MvdP: That's right. The parents were following a practice that we believed might be harmful to their children's mental health.

BH: Tell us more.

MvdP: Well, Brent, they were largely celebrating Christmas in the traditional way—hanging lights and decorations, meetings with family and friends, sharing celebratory meals, gift-giving and so on.

BH: So nothing wrong there.

MvdP: No, no, not at all. Except that these parents, instead of giving their children Christmas gifts in the usual way, chose to deceive them. They represented to their children that their gifts had been delivered to the house, while the family slept, by a ... well, by a supernatural entity.

BH: A supernatural entity. You mean like a ghost?

MvdP: No, Brent. It has a closer resemblance to some sort of Jungian archetype, like Slender Man or the Chupacabras. This ... thing ... is described as having the appearance of an elderly, obese male. It laughs a lot, in a stylized and disturbing way—a sort of deep repetitive “Ho Ho Ho” that doesn't resemble normal laughter. And it wears some kind of costume, something that perhaps has its origin in the garb of comic-book superheroes. There's a red suit, trimmed in white fur, and black boots. We're also getting narratives that involve some sort of matching headgear, but we really haven't gotten far with our parental interrogations yet.

BH: We have an artist's impression here, Marietta. Does that look about right?

MvdP: I guess so. I'm not sure we have reports of fangs though, Brent. Not yet, anyway.

BH: So the parents are telling the children that this ... archetype, as you call it, is delivering their Christmas gifts? For some reason the parents don't want the child to know that they, the parents I mean, are buying, or maybe I suppose making, these gifts for the child?

MvdP: That's right. But what they're saying, and we're getting this over and over again in our initial interviews, is that this entity *breaks into the family home* and leaves these gifts, unobserved, during the night.

BH: Breaks in? Like, kicks down a door or something? Yikes.

MvdP: No, the creature is actually commonly represented as gaining access to the house *via* the chimney.

BH: Wait. Wait. You said it looked like an obese man. Is this a full-sized obese man? Coming down a regular chimney?

MvdP: Yes Brent. I know it seems weird, but this is what these parents have been putting into their children's heads. This thing comes down the chimney at dead of night.

BH: So does it fly, or what? How does it get on the roof?

MvdP: It's said to travel in something called a sleigh—

BH: Whoa, whoa, whoa. A "slay"? As in "killing someone"?

MvdP: No, no. It's a *sleigh*, with an ee, eye, gee, aitch. It's actually an antique form of transport, like a sled. It's a very unusual word.

BH: So it gets on to the roof using a *sled*? How is that supposed to be even possible?

MvdP: What we're being told, and these parents seem to feel this is a rational and normal thing to tell a child, is that the sleigh is pulled by flying reindeer. They all have names—

BH: Wait. Wait. I'm having trouble processing this. The parents conceal the fact that they have bought their children Christmas gifts, and instead tell them that the gifts come from a supernatural fat man who travels in some sort of killing machine—

MvdP: It's not a killing machine, Brent. It's just a sort of sled pulled by animals.

BH: *Flying* animals. And he breaks into people's houses while they sleep. And that's the story these people are putting in their kids' heads. To conceal from them the perfectly natural and reasonable fact that loving parents give their children gifts at Christmas. Am I right?

MvdP: Pretty much so. There's another bit about elves at the North Pole that we haven't really clarified yet. They don't seem to be anything like the elves in the *Lord Of The Rings* movies, though. It's difficult to know where they fit in to the narrative, right now.

BH: [Rocking in seat, clutching head theatrically] These poor kids. These poor kids. God bless you, Marietta, for rescuing these poor kids. How long has this been going on for, do you think?

MvdP: Well, it's obviously just come to the attention of the child-care services, because of information these parents have been sharing on social media sites, but we believe for decades. Probably generations.

BH: Generations! You're kidding me. This stuff has been going on for *generations*?

MvdP: Yes, there's evidence of a sort of cycle of abuse, in which children subjected to this delusive behaviour go on to visit it on their own children. Grandparents then seem to act as enablers, sometimes elaborating the story in various ways. There's a recurring theme in which this entity keeps children under constant observation, so as to be able to punish them for bad behaviour, or reward them for good.

BH: Oh my dear Lord. And why are they doing this thing? What possible reason can there be for it?

MvdP: We don't really understand it. There's a phrase they repeat, but it doesn't make much sense.

BH: What is it?

MvdP: They say, "We just want to see their little faces light up."

BH: My God. My God, Marietta. How does all this ... *hallucinogenic nonsense* do that?

MvdP: We don't know Brent. At this point we don't really understand much about the motivations of what we're calling the "Santaic cult", but be assured we're going to be asking a lot of very serious questions in the next few days.

BH: I'm sure you will Marietta. Thank you for that, on my behalf and I'm sure from all our viewers too. Thank you. [Turns to face camera] And I'm sure we'll hear much more on this bizarre and deeply troubling story over the next few days. But after the break, we're getting early reports of another mental health threat to our children. It's called "the Tooth Fairy". Stay tuned.