

Interview – Father Christmas

In a surprisingly candid interview, Father Christmas speaks exclusively to Alistair Schofield about his background, the pressures of the job and reindeer.

I am sure that a lot of our readers will be curious to know how long you have been doing this job and what persuaded you to become Father Christmas in the first place.

"Being Father Christmas is not a job, it is a vocation. I don't look upon it as something I chose to do, but rather as something that chose me."

"It all began one Christmas when I was working as a farm labourer. My wife and I had not been getting on too well and she had left me, taking the children with her. Not knowing where they had gone or how to get in touch, I decided to give the children's presents to the next door neighbours kids."

"However, being rather embarrassed by my circumstances, I thought it best to give them anonymously. So I crept into their house on Christmas Eve and hung their presents in old stockings on the fireplace, with a note saying that they were from Father Christmas. After that the whole thing snowballed."

Wasn't sneaking into your neighbour's house rather risky?

Not really. Before getting the job on the farm I had been involved in a bit of breaking and entering and so was quite used to getting in and out of other people's houses."

Are you seriously telling me that before becoming Father Christmas you were a burglar and that Father Christmas is not your real name?

"Look, I only did a bit of burglary when I was desperate and of course my name's not Father Christmas, it's Eric actually. I know a few people who were named Noel because they were born on Christmas Day, but what kind of parent would call their kid 'Father' for goodness sake?"

Is there any truth in the rumour that the colour of your coat is as a result of a Coca Cola advert?

"Absolutely, as our sponsors they wanted me to dress in their corporate colours."



Christmas is sponsored?

"Oh don't be so naive! I mean, who do you think it is that pays for all the presents? Did you really think that a bunch of elves could make an Action Man or a Playstation?"

Tell me about your operation in Lapland and how you came to be based there?

"Why does everyone assume that I live in Lapland? I live in Croydon. It's not the best of places, but it's not too expensive and only 15 minutes on the train into London."

Perhaps it's the reindeer that make people think you come from Lapland?

"I realise now that the reindeer were a big mistake. The farmer I used to work for had thought that reindeer steak was going to be the next big thing and, by the time he realised he was wrong it was too late. He was heavily in debt to the bank and was forced to sell up. I took some of the reindeer simply to stop them from being slaughtered. I also thought that I could build a sleigh and it would save me the cost of a van."

"It was a silly move as I only need them for one day a year, but looking after them is a fulltime job. I can never get any time off for a holiday as it's impossible to find anyone willing to look after reindeer in Croydon - and you tell me where I can find a hotel that accepts reindeer?"

"The problem is that the kids have become kind of fond of them. I would be ruined if I got rid of them now. But I do regret that I didn't get a van."

But would a van be able to fly?

"Good point, I hadn't thought of that. I have to admit that it came as a bit of a surprise when I discovered that the reindeer could fly. Actually, 'surprise' is something of an under-statement. I was on the A21 coming out of Croydon when they just took off! I was glad that I had been to the toilet before I left otherwise it would have been a very unpleasant Christmas!"

Presumably you also need the reindeer to get you to the chimneys?

"Why is it that people assume I get in to houses down the chimneys for goodness sake? It completely flies in the face of logic! I was a burglar, not a chimney sweep. I mean, how many houses do you know that have a chimney at all, let alone one big enough for me to get down. The simple fact is that a lot of people just don't like to admit that their homes are so insecure that a fat bloke dressed in red can come and go as he pleases".

So have you ever found a house you can't get into?

"Not yet, but I have to admit that it is getting more difficult. The houses I really hate though are those ones with bloody lights that come on when you walk past. I mean, why is it that people who have 60w bulbs throughout their house feel the need to put a 500w bulb in the light in the driveway, and then position the sensor so that comes on every time a car goes by?"

"The easiest house though has to be Buckingham Palace. You just climb over the wall and tell the Police you are going to a fancy dress party."

As someone who has brought joy to millions, you must be delighted with the way things have gone?

"Well yes and no. I mean, Boxing Day is brilliant, I'm completely knackered of course but everyone's happy and I can have a bit of a drink. But if you ask me whether if I had my time over I would do it again, the answer is no. My advice to anyone thinking of setting up a similar operation, like becoming the Easter Bunny or something, is don't do it. Become a merchant banker instead. It's just like being an estate agent but much better paid." 🍷