

Jule Nisse's Adventure in America

by John M. Ramsay

There is a lady in Denmark who makes Jule Nisser. Yes, it is Nisser. The “r” makes the singular Nisse into the plural Nisser in Danish. We need the plural because she makes all the Jule Nisser in the world. She looks like anyone’s little Danish bestemor but she is really the ‘mother’ of all Jule Nisser. She has been making Jule Nisse for the past 996 years, ever since inheriting the job from her predecessor who had made Nisser for the 1,000 years before that.

In the year 2012, the Nisser woman, who lives in Christensfeld, will turn over her duties to another Dane and move to an orphanage which was set up in 4,012 BC at the South Pole for Nisser who have lost their farms and no longer have a place to live. There, she will be in charge of making new clothes for all the orphaned Nisser, and they, in turn, will give her all the attention and care that she has earned during the past 1,000 years.

Realizing, in October 2007, that her career as the Nisse woman would be over in five years, the Nisse woman—who is called Georgine Elizabeth Martin by her neighbors when they are visiting her in person, or Old Lizzie when

they are not—Old Lizzie decided to make a special Nisse to send to America. You see, America has no Jule Nisser. When thousands of Danes emigrated to the New World a century ago their Nisser didn't come with them because each Nisse was made specifically for a particular Danish homestead. Since nearly every homestead in Denmark already has a Nisse, Old Lizzie has not been kept busy enough making new Nisser.

Idle hands will soon find some mischief to keep them busy, as every Jule Nisser knows. But, not even the Nisser know who put the idea to send a Nisse to America in Old Lizzie's head. I can tell you how it happened:

Karen Bertlesen Rosgaard was invited to go to Berea, Kentucky to attend Christmas Country Dance School in 1995. Karen went to Georgine Elizabeth Martin and asked her to make a Nisse as a Christmas present for her American friends, John and Berni, who had made the arrangements with the Christmas School for Karen's visit. Georgine Elizabeth/Old Lizzie, who had nothing to do for too long a stretch of time, saw this as an opportunity to have something to do and was only too happy to agree. That is where the mischief began.

Old Lizzie spent an inordinate amount of time making a very special Nisse to send to America. He was 18.3 centimeters high or 7 ¼ inches in American measure. He had a plump, round body with jacket and trousers of

scratchy wool. But, his long, dangly legs were covered with spiffy, striped, shiny, synthetic stockings. Of course he had unpainted wooden shoes and a red knit Nisse cap with a soft white ball of cotton at the end looking like the underside of a rabbit's tail. Nissen (the final "n" refers to this particular Nisse, i.e. 'the' Nisse with the definite article), he definitely was quite a handsome Nisse, and Old Lizzie saw to it that every stitch was carefully spaced and made with the finest mercerized thread in a color to either complement or contrast with his clothing. The cap, for instance, had gold colored thread in a ric-rac pattern around the brim while the jacket buttons were held on by a thread that precisely matched the violet thread from which the warp of the jacket material had been made. The smooth, plain face of the silver buttons glowed against the complex pattern of the jacket weave, and the purple thread highlighted the purple in the cloth. Nissen was glad that Old Lizzie gave him deep pockets of sturdy sailcloth; a Nise needs lot of pockets, especially a Nisse who is going overseas. There was even a secret pocket inside his undershirt which, when full, made Nissen look very well fed indeed.

Karen Bertlesen was very pleased with this special Jule Nisse and promptly dubbed him a spiffy Nissy which is how he got his nickname, Spif. Georgine Elizabeth Martin also gave him his real name: Christopher Alexander Jacob Carrot Paulus Josephus Feldsen. Some Nisse

have even longer names but all of them have a nickname, too.

Karen decided to pack Spif in bubble wrap for which he was very glad because he liked to pop the bubbles. He would flop on them with his bottom to make them pop, whereas tissue paper, the most common packing material for presents up until 1965, makes an irritating rustle when moved even the slightest little bit. It is difficult to sleep when every move makes noise. Besides, sleeping on bubble wrap in a shoe box was almost like having his own water bed.

After Karen put Spif in his box on a bed of bubble wrap, she also put in the box a large bowl of rice gruel before putting the lid on, and that is a good thing because it wouldn't be safe to have a hungry Nisse on an airplane with you.

After they got to Kentucky, Karen wrapped the shoe box in Christmas paper, tied a big red bow on it, and gave it to John and Berni at a Christmas party on Christmas eve.

Karen explained to John and Berni, after they had opened the present, that they should feed Christopher Alexander Jacob Carrot Paulus Josephus Feldsen on rice gruel in a bowl in some secluded corner. She even brought a bowl of the gruel to the party to share with the guests so they could see why Nisser like gruel and nothing else. Karen

had also hidden an almond in the gruel, an old Danish custom. Whoever finds the almond in his or her bowl is given a prize of chocolate candy. Most of the guests cleaned their bowl of the gruel in the hopes that they would be the one to find the hidden almond. In fact, no one found the almond. John claimed that he had found it in a spoonful he had taken from his bowl but must have accidentally swallowed it before he could use his tongue to tuck it in his cheek. Actually, Spif had taken the almond from the serving bowl while the gruel was still in the kitchen and no one was looking. He had put it in his secret pocket and had only a taste of rice before Karen came in and took the bowl to the dining room. Spiff was only able to scrape out what was left in the serving bowl and a very little bit that was left in the dirty dishes after they were brought back to the kitchen.

By the end of the party, Spif was getting quite hungry and would have had to tighten his belt if it weren't for the almond in his pocket. With the rice gruel all gone, Spif was forced to eat corn flakes— which he detested because they rustled, reminded him of tissue paper, and left him as hungry as ever. Chocolate chips tasted much better but they got his hands and trousers all dirty and he had to wash his hands after each chip, something a Nisse does not like to do!

The Spiffy Nisse spent a more enjoyable week between Christmas and New Year in John and Berni's house where

he had the run of the house. John and Berni and their house guests, a young Danish family with two young boys, were gone every day to Christmas School activities. Spif was free to cook his own gruel and no one noticed the dirty dishes when they came home late at night. The kitchen was always in a mess anyway. John and Berni thought the Danish parents should have supervised their boys and taught them to at least wipe up the rice they spilled on the counter and under the elements of the electric stove. The Danes on the other hand, including the boys, thought John and Berni were not the best housekeepers.

Spif spent these days exploring the house which was on Estill Street. It had four levels from the basement to the attic. He was able to water ski in the basement by running as fast as he could on the dry parts and then 'skating' with his wooden shoes on the wet parts where water seeped in from the ground water. In the attic, Spif went through John's boxes of papers and got them all out of order. He couldn't read any of them because they were written in English. He did find one box of letters which smelled like violets and gardenias and had daintily colored pictures on the margins.

During his explorations, Spif made good use of his pockets. He would carry paper clips, rubber bands (which made great catapults for paper clips), coins, badges, sparkling earrings, knights and castles from the chess set,

tiny Danish flags, marbles from the Chinese checker set, and one heavy steel marble which John and Berni have never been able to find since then for their slanting board marble maze. Spif didn't like the game because he could only reach one dial at a time and had to run from side to side to make adjustments but the marble would drop into a hole in the meantime; so, he took the marble.

Actually, it was the marble which created a problem. His pockets were so full that he had to empty some things out before he could add anything else. He really wanted to keep the metal marble and so he got rid of the badges by flushing them down the commode. Since there was a commode on each floor, Spif was able to discard unwanted items quite easily and at the end of the week his pockets were filled with what were to him the most precious or useful items. Before he was done exploring, all the commodes were stopped up. In fact, even though there was more to do, Spif was so tired from all the running up and down stairs, cooking, and exploring that on New Year's eve, he fell asleep under the Christmas tree. That was a bad mistake.

John and Berni were out dancing all night New Year's eve and then, after saying goodbyes to their dancing friends, had to get the classrooms cleaned, chairs set up, PA system taken down, bookstore books and records packed into boxes, and the coats and shoes which were left behind by careless dancers taken to the lost and found.

They didn't get home until 1:30 in the afternoon. Nissen was still asleep under the tree in the middle of the living room but woke up when John and Berni came in the door. Then he pretended to be asleep because a Nisse must never be seen in action!

Berni was in a mood to continue cleaning up to begin the New Year. Starting with the Christmas decorations, she tossed Spif into a box along with the candy canes she took off the tree. Then she sealed the box with tape and labeled it CANDY CANES and CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER JACOB CARROT PAULUS JOSEPHUS FELDSEN, spelling out his full name because she knew she would not be able to remember it when she opened the box eleven months away.

John spent his time trying to figure out whether the commodes were frozen, which seemed unlikely since the water coming into them was not frozen so that whenever he flushed a commode it quickly overflowed. He had to call a plumber who put a corkscrew tape down the commode and fished out the troublesome badges and other items. John thought the two young Danish boys must have done that, too!

Poor Spif! He spent the next eleven months in the dark box, hibernating—a useful trait which Jule Nisser had learned from other creatures. He would wake up once a month and eat a candy cane for its carbohydrates and

then go back to sleep. He had no company for nine months—until October 1996!

During those nine months, in June, John and Berni moved to Saint Louis, Missouri. They moved their clothes, furniture, appliances, books, tools, computer, and their Christmas decorations including the box with Spif in it. All the shifting of boxes, loading them on the moving van, and the noise of the van on the way to Missouri, woke Spif up several times and he actually ate three candy canes in two days! Once in Saint Louis, John and Berni stored the boxes of Christmas decorations in the attic of their new house.

Spif was almost glad when a field mouse, looking for nice warm winter quarters, was exploring the attic and saw the word CANDY written on the box. She immediately proceeded to gnaw a hole in the box. The mouse, whose name was Mindy, was very surprised to find Spif inside. He was happy to share one of the last two candy canes with her. They chatted for a while and Spif learned that Mindy was expecting to have a family soon. She told him many wondrous things to see and do in Saint Louis but the hole she had made in the box was far too small for Spif to get through and after Mindy, filled with candy cane, drifted off to sleep to dream of what she would name her babies, how she would care for them, what things she would want to teach them, and what places she would take them,

Spiff, too, drifted off to sleep. His dreams were more like a nightmare.

Spif dreamed that he returned to Denmark and was walking through the old Moravian cemetery in Christensfeld when he was suddenly attacked by a ferocious dragon. The dragon had scimitar-like teeth which caught Spif by his jacket as he dodged this way and that as his jacket flared open. Spif managed to tear loose and clamber up the scaly tail where he commenced to kick the dragon's head with his wooden shoes. The dragon shook Spif off and leaving him pretty severely bruised in several places so that his sawdust started spilling out. Spiff managed to fish out a bottle of peppermint flavor he had put into his right pocket from the kitchen cupboard in Berea. He poured the entire contents of the bottle on the dragon's head which quickly made the dragon as sweet as a candy cane. Spif's sawdust already smelled of peppermint from all the candy canes he had eaten. Visions of candy canes danced through Spif's head and the smell, like an ether, lulled him off to sleep again although he continued to toss and turn and lost some more sawdust.

When Spif finally woke up, it was a week before Christmas and Berni had taken the box from the attic down to the living room where she was decorating the Christmas tree. When she opened the box labeled CANDY CANES and CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER JACOB CARROT PAULUS

JOSEPHUS FELDSEN, she was shocked at what she saw. A mouse had made her nest in the box and poor Spif's clothes and even some of his sawdust had been used to make the nest! The candy canes had all been eaten except the last one which had been nibbled on by Mindy and her six children. Mindy had no doubt eaten the J of the candy cane but the little mice had nibbled away at six little feeding stations they carve out along the straight part while Mindy was out of the box to hunt for more nutritious food now that she was lactating. The mice family had left the box just three days ago for their first visit to the Saint Louis Zoo where Mindy knew they could find lots of different kinds of nutritious food which the zoo animals would leave behind as they were penned up for the night. Berni noticed the hole in the box which Mindy had made.

The entire box was spoiled and the Nisse was so tattered that Berni quickly closed the lid and immediately took the box out to the trash can. She kept saying as she carried the box out, "Oh, poor, poor CHRISTOPHER ALEXANDER JACOB CARROT PAULUS JOSEPHUS FELDSEN. He was such a charmer, poor fellow, poor fella."

Poor Spif, indeed! He was a sorry sight even though he smelled quite nice. He was able to clamber out of the box and raise the garbage can lid enough to squeeze out although he lost some more sawdust in the process. He

knew that he must repair the damage before he “bled” to death.

Spif found a nice corner behind John’s boxes not yet unpacked after the move and stored in the garage. He emptied his pockets and found the tube of household cement which he had decided to keep as one of those things which a nisse might find a use for. He glued up the bruised holes in his body and, while waiting for the glue to dry, inadvertently spilled that tub of glitter (used for Christmas decorations he had kept in his left pocket) in his lap. The glitter stuck to the glue and made Spif sparkle so much that you wouldn’t have noticed where the bruises had been.

That evening, after the moon came up, Spif went out to explore his new community. Every nisse should know every bush, tree, tool shed, and path in their community. Spif headed for the stop light at the end of Old Bonhomme Road. It was sometimes red and sometimes green which seemed very curious as well as quite in the Christmas spirit to a nisse. After watching the stoplight change several times and exploring all four corners of the intersection of Old Bonhomme and Delmar Avenue, Spif went west on Delmar, following his nose which caught a whiff of cooked rice. As the odor became stronger and stronger, Spif walked faster and faster, finally breaking into a run. He had to dodge into flower beds and landscaped bushes when a group of teenagers came by and then he

had to detour down an alley behind a shopping center as couples and families came out of a late showing of *Miracle* on 34 th Street at the movie theater.

The alley brought Spif to the back of Mai Lee's restaurant. There, in a huge wooden bowl, was the cooked rice he had been smelling. It had been made into gruel and was set outside to cool down. Spif was so very hungry that he almost forgot his manners. He decided not to use the chopsticks which were sticking out of the nearby overflowing garbage can and chose a plastic spoon instead and a lightly soiled paper napkin which he tucked over his cravat. He sang a little blessing in honor of the Christmas season: "Silent night, blessed night, thanks for the rice, now for a bite," and dug in. When Mai Lee came out half an hour later to get the gruel, Spif had to scamper behind the garbage can. Mai Lee exclaimed, "Idi wa, idi, wa! Ship shuck!" Juan Peña, her cook, came running out. "Oh," he chimed in, "the possum has eaten the rice porridge." He dumped the gruel into the garbage can and went into the kitchen to make a new batch. Spif was almost swilling in a sea of gruel!

Spif happily found some takeout containers, filled them with the discarded gruel, put them in a bag along with the plastic spoon and headed for his garage. He slept soundly and had no dreams that night.

Before the sun was up, Jule Nissen woke up. Today he was going to visit the famous Saint Louis Arch. He walked up to Delmar Avenue, after a wonderful breakfast from the containers he had brought from Mai Lee's the night before, adding some raspberry yogurt from a container John had set in his cool garage because his refrigerator was overfilled filled with other food prepared for Christmas.

At Delmar, Spif caught a ride on the city bus, hopping into the back door before it closed, and hiding under the nearest seat. He got off at the Metro Station and took the Metro train into the city. The Metro was crowded with commuters on their way to work; many of these early birds were those who had service jobs such as janitors in schools and offices which had to be cleaned before students or customers began arriving. Spif noticed that the backpack under the seat of one of the young men dressed in coveralls was not fully zipped shut. He climbed in. This was to be his lucky day—lucky for Spif, that is, because the young man was a maintenance man at the Arch—but it was not going to be a lucky day for the young man. Nisser often bring good luck but they also seem to attract mischief.

At LaClede Station, the young man slung his backpack over his shoulder and headed or the Arch. "Morning Dan" the security guard greeted him as he let him pass from the entrance ramp into the visitor center in the bowels of the Arch between the two stainless steel legs. Dan went

straight to the employee locker room, put down his backpack, and took a mop and mop bucket back to the foyer and into the Museum of the American West in the base of the Arch's south leg. Spif followed Dan but at a distance.

Spif explored the animated figures of along the south wall of the Museum while Dan began mopping the floor around Thomas Jefferson's statue. Spif listened to Red Cloud explain how he tried to adjust to the changes which the arrival of white people brought. Then Spif climbed up the mounted longhorn cow and, balancing carefully, walked with tiny steps out on a slippery horn right to its tip. It was dangerous there because if he had slipped he could have been caught on the sharp tip, impaled like in his dream, and then would have been found by Dan or one of the other Park Rangers who showed the tourists around and gave talks about cowboys, prospectors, pioneers, and native Americans. But, Spif safely made it back to the cow's head and then to the tail which he shinnied down. He noticed that he had been wrong about it being a cow; from the back he could see that the animal was a steer. Then he spied a strange animal. It was an American bison bull. Spif stood in awe in front of the animal but did not try to climb him because he looked so ferocious with his eyes protruding very black and looking very hard right at Spif. He scurried, instead, into the sod house and found a nice grassy shelf up under the eaves where he could take a nap.

When he woke up, a Ranger was giving the first group of tourists a talk about the difficulties of farming on the prairie and living in a sod house. Spif listened carefully to what the Ranger said but was quite certain that the pioneers would not have had so many problems if they had had a nisse living at the homestead. There are so many things that a nisse can do to keep a farm and a house running smoothly. Nisser, when they are feeling good and have full stomachs, tend to be very lucky. It is only when they feel out of sorts or hungry that things don't go right.

Spif decided to ride the tram to the top of the Arch. There were eight cars in the south leg and eight in the north leg which counterbalanced each other. When one set were up, the other were down. He clambered on top of car number one on the south side. It was a fun ride to the top. The cars, shaped like a front-loading washing machine, are upright as they start up the incline of the leg but then must adjust themselves periodically to stay upright as the Arch curves toward the top. Near the top the cars are running more horizontally. Just before they get to the top, they stop and let the passengers out, five from each car. The passengers must exit the car one at a time, first the person nearest the door on the left, then the one on the right, then the second person on each side seat and lastly the person in the middle seat at the back of the car. The biggest person is almost always the last because those

huddled on the sides have to crouch to fit into the car while the middle person has the most headroom.

Spif watched all the people exit before he jumped into the backpack of the tall young biker who had been in the middle seat of car number eight. The lid was not closed because the biker would occasionally reach in for a drink from his water bottle. Spif got a marvelous view of Saint Louis from the windows as the biker leaned over to look—first to the east over the Mississippi River and then to the west with a view of the city streets, the Old Courthouse, the Cathedral, and the trees of Forest Park. He couldn't quite make out where Delmar was but knew it was somewhere in the distance to the west. Before leaving, the biker looked at the Mississippi River one more time because there was a paddle wheeler going upriver. Spif got a good look at the McDonald's boat which was docked down below and had families crossing its gangplank to purchase Egg McMuffins for breakfast. Spif decided that he would get a Big Mac on the boat for his lunch.

Spif grabbed hold of an exit sign as the biker headed back to car number eight and swung up onto the top of car number one for the ride down. About a third of the way down, Spif's stomach began growling and he decided to see if he could find something to eat before heading to McDonald's for lunch. He started hopping from car to car, but as he was hopping from car five to car six, the cars jerked to adjust themselves to the incline and Spif lost his

balance. Fortunately, he fell onto the stairs that go down the inside of the leg which were built in case the electricity failed sometime and people would have to walk down the stairs while an electrician might have to climb up them to find the problem.

Spif descended the stairs all the way down. By the time he reached the bottom, the tram had loaded up with a new set of passengers and it passed Spif on its way back up the Arch. At the bottom, Spif recognized the janitor's locker room as he took his bearings and decided what to do next. He went in and noticed that Dan had finished his mopping and had propped his mop up against the mop bucket. Just then, the door opened and Spif had to scurry behind the mop and bucket. He crouched there under the strings of the mop's head. The worker, thank goodness it wasn't Dan coming back for his mop, must have been getting ready to go out for lunch because he took off his coveralls and put on his coat, hat, and mittens before leaving. Spif's luck was back even though he was hungry.

But, as Spif got up and turned to find his own way out and down to McDonalds, one of the strings of the mop-head got tangled around his own stringy legs and he tripped! That set an incredible sequence of events into motion that was totally unexpected. The mop, which had a metal hook at the top of the handle, flipped and the hook caught on one of the circuit breakers in the switch box on the wall. The switch was pulled and the electricity to the entire Arch

and museum was disconnected. Some people in the tram went into near panic although others remained calm and trusted that someone would remedy the situation. People in the museum had a difficult time since it was underground and had no windows. They had to grope their way around trying to find an exit. A young boy bumped into the buffalo and was so frightened by the feel of something hairy that he gave a shuddering moan. The moan scared the lady in high heels nearby and she bolted into the campfire scene and kicked the gold-digger's pans which went careening across the marble floor making quite a racket. A pan hit a gentleman's calf and he bellowed like one as he reached out in front to try to make his way out of the confusion. Instead, he made more because his hands inadvertently groped a teenage girl's bare arm.

The Park Rangers had their hands full. They spoke in loud and authoritative voices telling people to remain calm and to stay where they were until they could find flashlights. When the first flashlight appeared, it was not too much trouble to escort the museum people outside into the bright sunlight. The occasion was almost hysterical and certainly was historical as you will see, but more about that in a moment.

The poor people left in the tram cars had to be released from their cars by guides who had to first run up 350 steps to get to car number 8 and then manually crank the doors

open. They asked each group of five to sit down and wait on the stairs until passengers in all cars were released and the entire group could descend the steps with the light of just one flashlight. It actually took only thirty-two minutes to clear the entire facility and to give everyone passes so that they could come back to the Arch another day. A sign was produced that said the Arch was closed for the rest of the day. Spif was happy enough about that because it meant that he could explore it to his heart's content without human interference. Fortunately, he had pocketed a small flashlight when he was in Kentucky and the batteries were still good. But, the longer he explored, the hungrier he got and that was not good!

The nightly news on local TV and the headlines in the Saint Louis Post Dispatch the next morning blamed the Arch blackout on the carelessness of a young janitor, which was, of course, most unfair to him. He was fired when they found that his mop was the problem, and here it was just before Christmas.

The head janitor was called into the Park Manager's office when the mop handle was found dangling from the electrical switch. The head janitor knew that he himself had never used a mop and that it must have been the new, young worker on the early morning crew who had hung the mop on the switch. He then called Dan into his office and fired him on the spot, no questions asked, no excuses given. The Saint Louis City Manager's office was

besieged with phone calls from irate adults who had been left stranded in the tram or left in the dark in the museum. The children didn't complain, in fact they rather enjoyed the excitement caused by the disconnect. But, the City Manager was not happy to have people expecting him to have to answer for the situation. After all, the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, in which the Arch is located, is owned and operated by the United States Park Service even though it is located smack dab in the center of the city. This was not the City Manager's responsibility, so he called his Senator. He chose the Democrat since Saint Louis had always voted for Democrats. The Senator was still in Washington.

Congress had not yet adjourned because the Democrats and Republicans were having a fight over who was responsible for the budget deficit, each claiming it was the other's fault. The Democrats said the Republican tax policies caused there to be too little money coming into the Treasury. The Republicans blamed the Democrats for spending more than was coming in. Both, of course, were *right* that there wasn't enough *left*, or what was *left* wasn't *right*. The Democratic Senator from Missouri got up and announced that the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Park had been closed due to power failure and that although workers: rangers, managers, janitors, clerks, secretaries, public relations personnel, and engineers were continuing to be paid while the Arch was closed, there was no income from tickets being sold to visitors.

He announced that one janitor had been made redundant but that his wages were so low as to have no impact on the balance sheet. He also noted that the Park Services in Washington had established a new regulation stating that electrical switches should no be used as mop hooks and that proper hooks should be installed in all national park facilities. Failure to do this would result in punitive action.

Immediately, several States began to make telephone calls in an attempt to get the government to place orders for the necessary hooks. This resulted in a shouting match between the Senator from Idaho who was wanting to diversify the economy in his state which depended too heavily on supplying McDonald's with potatoes, and the Senator from Kentucky who was desperate to find an alternative for the tobacco sales lost in his state because smoking had at last been labeled a drug and not a food by the Food and Drug Administration. It was already well into the wee hours of the night when the shouting match began, nerves were already frayed from non-productive debating, and everyone wanted to go home to be with their families for the holiday.

The House of Representative was also in session on their side of Capital Hill but were not aware of the latest arguments in the Senate. The Representatives also wanted to get home. So, they tabled their debate until January 10 th when they all would return to Washington.

That was really a reasonable suggestion made by the oldest Representative, a woman from South Carolina. But, when the Senate heard the House had adjourned, they were very angry and tabled *all* government activities until January 10. It will long be remembered in history books as the day Congress shut down the government of the United States. All government workers stayed home for the next three weeks. For the most part, they were happy not to have to go to work, but they also were finding out what it was like not to have enough money coming in while it was still necessary to keep spending money for heat, food, mortgages, and to pay the credit card bill for all those Christmas presents they had already purchased but not yet paid for. See what mischief a hungry nisse can cause?

And what happened to Spif while all of this was going on? He got down to McDonalds on the riverboat at 2:45, very hungry indeed. He crossed the gangplank and went around to the back kitchen entrance. Hamburgers are always made fresh at McDonalds. During the rush hours the crew put hamburgers together as fast as they can, not waiting for someone to place an order. When the crowd slacks off there are always a few hamburgers which pass the 10 minute limit. The crew stops making hamburgers at that point, discard the old hamburgers and begins making fresh ones on order only. Yes, Spif had his first Big Mac which he had selected from the discards placed in the can outside the kitchen door. He found a nice little corner

behind two boxes where he could savor the Big Mac and watch the river boats and barges plying the Mississippi.

It was late by the time Spif got back to his home in John and Berni's garage on Old Bonhomme Road. He slept all the next day, as did most of the Federal workers. Only the Congress men and women were unable to fall asleep.

In the evening, Spif headed over to Mai Lee's for some more rice gruel. He found his way into the Train Store on his way home and had a great time playing with the HO gauge layout and was even able to take a ride on the larger Lionel trains. Everything was set up for Christmas at the store with snow scenes, a putz with a brilliant Moravian star over the manger, and a tunnel through Toy Mountain which was Spif's favorite part. He liked to explore caves and dark places which is where Jule nisser spend much of their lives. Tomorrow would be Christmas eve and I doubt that the store owner ever noticed that all the toys had been transported from Toy Mountain to the Depot where Santa could more easily pick them up.

On Christmas eve, Spif was quite excited. He was expecting to see Santa Claus for the first time. He was a little afraid of him because he was so BIG, but he just had to see him shake his jelly belly. It was still two hours before midnight and Spif started to look for something to do to keep his mind off the clock. It was snowing outside by now, because Americans have this thing about a white

Christmas. This gave Spif an idea. He could go skiing down the front of Berni's Porsche; the front was shaped just like the ski slope he had practiced on up in the Mols before leaving Denmark for the United States.

He found two cardboard nail files. He used six screws with which to fasten his wooden shoes to the center of each nail file ski and glued strips of felt down each one being pretty certain that the felt would slide easily over the windshield and down the waxed hood. It worked great! There was even a bit of a ski jump at the air intake and again over the bumper and he landed into a foam pad he hauled out to act as a landing pad. Time slipped by so fast because he was having so much fun, that he didn't notice when Berni opened the garage door and looked for the present she had gotten for John and hidden in the Porsche. Strange things happen on Christmas eve.

Berni saw the Skif skiing down her Porsche. She screamed in panic, certain that it was a rat running over her car, or a possum, or maybe just a cat. Oh, if it only were a cat, she would love to have a cat. But, she kept screaming as she retreated into the kitchen door. By that time, John came running up from the basement where he was wrapping his gift to Berni. He hugged her and asked what was the matter. "Something is skiing down my Porsche," she choked out. John went into the garage with Berni following safely behind him just at the stroke of midnight. There was Spif trying to quickly remove the skis

from his shoes. It was unmistakable; this was not a cat, not a possum, and not even a rat, but was Christopher Alexander Jacob Carrot Paulus Jesephus Feldsen, the nisse they had thrown away into the trash a few weeks ago.

On Christmas eve, not only does Santa Claus fly through the air with his reindeer and come down the chimney, not only does the Rose of Sharon bloom, not only do oxen kneel down in remembrance of their part in sharing a manger with a newborn child, but Jule Nisser are also able to be seen and heard by humankind.

John was amazed at how cleverly Spif had patched himself together. He helped him get his shoes unscrewed. Berni told him how joyful she was to see that he was still here and hadn't been mashed in a trash truck. John put Spif's improvised skis in his pocket and took Spif by the hand; Berni took the other hand and they led him into the house and put him on a stool by the fireplace which was burning brightly. He told them of his exciting adventures in Saint Louis, and when Berni asked if he had been able to get anything to eat, he told them about Mai Lee's and his love of rice gruel. John said that he really should have known better than not to have fed his own nisse and apologized. Berni went into the kitchen to make rice gruel right away and they promised to have a bowl for him in the garage every night. They told Spif that he was a most welcome guest at 520 Maplevue Drive. John began to

make plans for nice, private quarters of Spif in the workshop he was constructing in the basement. It would be complete with a secret entrance which Spif could use for new adventures. Spif promised to look after the property for them during the coming year.

They heard sleigh bells. Hurrying outside into the full moon, a rare occurrence on Christmas 1996, they saw the reindeer pulling the sleigh and Santa engrossed in reading his list. The reindeer descended onto the roof of 520 Mapleview and John, Berni, and Spif saw the phenomenon of Santa Claus climbing into the chimney, laughing so that his jelly belly shook all over, and disappearing down the chimney.

They didn't go into the house to spy on Santa Claus. He does not like to be seen at work and would even know if they were thinking about looking in.

The next morning, John and Berni's presents were all piled neatly under the Christmas tree, their stockings were full, and at the door to the garage, there was a new little suit, colorfully painted new shoes, and an "I visited the Arch" badge for Spif.

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