**Instead of leaving cookies, let’s give Santa the boot** By Dante Chinni, Published: December 21, 2012

The reign of Santa Claus has nearly ended in our home. Our 9-year-old daughter told my wife and me earlier this year that she had figured out the truth about Saint Nick. And my 7-year-old son has clearly grown skeptical; the logistics just don’t make sense to him. I’m fairly certain this will be his last go-round.

But as we put this childhood ritual behind us, I do not find myself misty-eyed or wistful. In fact, I am relieved. As I have flipped through the regular parade of holiday specials over the past few weeks, I’ve realized that if I had it to do over again, I would leave Kris Kringle out of our holidays altogether at least when it comes to depicting him to our kids as a real person.

No, I am not an anti-Clausite or a foot soldier in a [war on Christmas](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/guest-voices/post/the-war-on-christmas-a-holiday-tradition-for-all/2012/12/11/d066da66-43e2-11e2-9648-a2c323a991d6_blog.html). I do not want all traces of Santa expunged from society. I respect the role of [the man in the red suit](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/santa-around-the-world/2012/12/13/32a4d7fc-4549-11e2-9648-a2c323a991d6_gallery.html) in our holidays, in their mythology and commercialism — from “ ’Twas the Night Before Christmas” to Macy’s painful “Believe” campaign. I still watch [“Miracle on 34th Street”](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000HT3PPG?ie=UTF8&tag=washpost-opinions-20&linkCode=xm2&camp=1789&creativeASIN=B000HT3PPG) and smile, though mostly to see William Frawley’s slick political consultant telling Gene Lockhart’s judge that he must rule in favor of Santa Claus if he wants to be reelected.

But Santa, the magical ­down-the-chimney-with-presents guy? I’m not sure about him anymore.

We parents often tell ourselves that we keep Mr. Claus alive for our children, because of all the fun they get out of believing in him. But in truth, we do it for ourselves, for the fun we get in watching them believe. And yes, it is highly adorable — “Look! He ate the cookies!” — but I’ve come to think that there are reasons to send jolly Saint Nick back to the North Pole for good.

First, Santa leads to unfortunate parental contradictions. Children do not fully understand reality. They fear that there are monsters in their closets and goblins under their beds. As parents, our job is to explain to them that those things aren’t there. When you turn off the light, it’s the same bedroom — just darker. We teach them to understand and to reason.

And yet, with Santa Claus we carve out an exception large enough to fly a sleigh through. We tell our kids to turn off logic and embrace magic. They just have to believe. But why? Why is some of what they believe silly and unfounded — such as ghosts — while Santa is noble and true?

Think for a moment about other lessons you teach your children. Planes fly because of aerodynamics and thrust. Kids shouldn’t put their heads in the railing because they could get stuck. And yet, here we are talking about a guy who pilots a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer around the world in one night, going up and down people’s chimneys. How? Well, he’s magic. He’s reality’s exception. America doesn’t need any more people who deny reality — at any age.

Second, Santa raises all sorts of questions about justice. For children, Saint Nick comes off as the ultimate judge and jury. Here’s a guy with this massive list of all their annual good deeds and transgressions. He knows all — even sees them when they’re sleeping!

And yet, Santa doesn’t dole out justice all that well. I mean, no one gets an actual lump of coal. He always seems to conclude that everyone has been pretty nice — and that the wealthy kids deserve a little more. How is it they have always been better? Good Lord, is Santa a Calvinist?

Yes, at some point kids have to learn that life isn’t always fair, but the whole point of Santa is that he is above all that. What kind of world is it where this wonderful, all-knowing grandfather figure — who spends his year tracking who has been naughty and nice — gives the school bully a PlayStation and the poor kid not much at all?

And that brings us to the third and most important reason I’m over Santa. We simply don’t need him. The world, the real world, is an incredible place all by itself. It is big and complicated and fascinating, and Santa Claus and magic cheapen it. This is something we grasp when children ask us questions like “Why is the sky blue?” or “What’s it like on the other side of the world?” The answers are amazing, thought-provoking and illuminating.

Sit down and talk to your kids about space. Try to explain how it all works. It’s more incredible than a magical fat man in a red suit.

Trust me, I know the arguments for Santa: Childhood is the only time you can believe in someone like Santa Claus. The world can be such an awful place, so why puncture the innocence of our children by spoiling their anticipation for Santa?

There is without question much sadness and tragedy in the world — we’ve been reminded of that, so painfully, in recent days. But all those things will be there with or without Santa Claus. The wonderful innocence of childhood will still be there, too. It’s not a seasonal event.

The thing is, despite all the talk of the magic of Christmas and the wide-eyed wonder of children on Dec. 25, the real point for most kids is what’s in the boxes, not who brought them. So why pretend that they came from a magic old man who lives at the North Pole? Why not say instead, “They came from the people who love you most”?