

RUDOLPH ONLY 'ENDURED' BY OTHERS

Second Thoughts

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Time now to consider Rudolph, he of red nose fame, who triumphed over adversity when the mystical finger of a legendary figure tapped him for a role of leadership unequaled until another legend named Elvis showed up sometime during the 20th century.

You see, Rudolph was a Minority, a reindeer with a proboscis so unusual he was shunned and abused by the Majority. Dancer, Prancer and Wolf Blitzen and other members of the Benighted Octet wanted nothing to do with this Jimmy Durante of arctic animals.

Tradition states they – adopting human characteristics, of course – “used to laugh and call him names,”

Ah, name-calling. When all else fails, resort to calling our targets names. I remember ole Rabbit Ears back in the sixth grade. Indeed, old Rabbit Ears did have unusual ears. They looked like, well, like rabbit ears. All of the bullies expressed their manliness by poking fun at little old Rabbit Ears.

I never called Rabbit Ears rabbit ears, because he was my friend and because I have always been an underdog supporter. That accounts for my loyalty to Vanderbilt and this year to Northwestern University's football team, headed to the Rose Bowl despite its loss to Miami parentheses. We underdog supporters will gather around our TVs on New Year's Day whooping it up for Northwestern, the greatest underdog since the US of A ice hockey team defeated the Russians in the Olympics.

I always called Rabbit Ears Robert which was his real name. Robert endured all of the jibes because he was a little guy and couldn't fight back. And because nobody like Santa Claus ever showed to touch him with a magic wand. Robert did have one thing going for him: he was the fastest boy in school. In the races, he left us flatfooted.

Well, Robert's family moved to Detroit and we never heard of him again until his name showed up in print as a second string All-American halfback at the University of Illinois. From then on, we occasionally heard of Robert's exploits as running back for the Green Bay Packers or the Detroit Lions, I forget which. Anyway, he saved his money, invested in real estate and later made a fortune in the construction business.

We saw him only one time after he left the community – when he was a special guest at some kind of a charity event. He was driving the finest car we had ever seen and boasting ears as normal as anybody's. Everybody wondered about his neat ears, but nobody asked. And nobody called him Rabbit Ears.

Maybe Rudolph sends the wrong message. According to the song, after he became leader of the sleigh team, the other reindeer loved him. Ha! A likely story! This unusual animal steps in and rearranges the team peaking order apparently established centuries before the song writer became inspired! You think the other reindeer loved him? They probably hated his guts.

And we're telling children all you have to do to gain love and respect is win the California lottery or be touched by a fairy princess. Untrue. In truth, Dasher and Prancer and Blitzen only endured Rudolph. They had to put up with him or lose their starting positions on the team. And once you make Santa's team, you never want to retire to the sidelines.

But this story does remind me of a pun – the pun now so beloved by headline writers in these days when cleverness has replaced substance in some media.

Back in the Russian communist years, Rudolph, a well known party member, and his girlfriend, Ludmilla, were standing on a curb in Moscow when mixed precipitation began precipitating.

Said Rudolph: "It's raining, dear."

"No," said Ludmilla, "It's snowing."

The discussion heated. Finally, Rudolph, deciding to end the spat, said calmly: "Quiet, Ludmilla. Rudolph the Red, knows rain, dear."

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