

A Christmas Story –“ Nightmare on 34th Street”

I awoke at 4 a.m., shaking from a nightmare. I was in the hospital scheduled for elbow surgery after a fall on an icy sidewalk. Over my loud protestations, my lower abdomen had been prepped and I was being wheeled into the O.R. for a hysterectomy. I insisted this made no sense since I was a male, both by biology and gender.

However, the hospital staff declared the government computer reported I was due for a hysterectomy and this was what I would get. I kept hearing the chorus of my peers in the background chanting, we told you this, i.e., the effectiveness and efficiency of the U. S. Postal Service, is what you would get if you let the government run health care.

When I was fully awake I reflected on the origin of my dream and recalled my frustrating experiences of the last several weeks. Trying to order Christmas presents on-line, I was informed they could not be shipped to me because I listed a non-standard address and/or my address on my credit card did not match the address at which the post office declared I resided. Moreover, mail delivery services called stating they failed to deliver packages to me because there was no residence or street where the shipper declared I resided. I then realized some government agency (each declaring it was the other or a computer) had erroneously changed my address to a non-existent location and notified the world I had moved. The computer at Amazon was not receptive to my claim the government had made a mistake.

It all started with a legitimate exercise by the emergency service, 911, agency to standardize addresses to assist in rapid identification of street locations. I received notification of my new address and informed I would have one year to notify all parties that needed to know. However, someone (although everyone involved insisted it was not them but a “transformer-like” computer) decided to assist. When the first few letters began to arrive with the new address, I asked an acquaintance living on the same road what he thought of the new name of our road. He informed me the name of our road had not changed. I also noticed a few folks had added new numbers to their mail boxes that seemed out of sequence with my new address.

This prompted a call to the emergency agency. They explained a mapping error had occurred. I was told it would be promptly corrected and the post office notified. A few days later the correction notice arrived and I was instructed to inform my local post office, which I promptly did. I asked that the post office again notify the world that I was back home and let me notify all parties (as I had been promised I would have a year to do) of the pending address change. Then, the nightmare began.

Although government employees or contractors at various local, regional and national levels provided different explanations – and treated me with different degrees of empathy,

competency, attentiveness, indifference and rudeness – they all delivered one consistent message. *Nobody* was responsible for my misery by erroneously notifying the world my address had changed and *nobody* could correct the problem. Only the computer or I could fix the problem, although I tried to explain that computers located at various merchants, shippers, credit card companies, associations and agencies, talk to and trust each other, not me. One official informed me the same thing had happened to her and she would be grateful if I could spark a solution. Another informed me that according to the post office computer, none of the three addresses (old, erroneous, and corrected) were correct and informed me of a fourth address she asserted was the correct one.

All I could think about was a joke that circulated when I was an adolescent where a young man enters the hospital and insist that he wants to be *castrated*. The doctors try to talk him out of the procedure but he insists that a doctor he trusted told him he needed this done. The physicians comply against their better judgment. As the man is recovering, he starts a conversation with the fellow in the next bed, asking what he was in the hospital to have done. The fellow said he had a *circumcision* performed to which the young man responds, “That was the word”. Being the holiday season, I counted my blessing, thankful I had been circumcised before the advent of government health care.

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