

Santa's Voice Menu System

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A telephone voice recognition menu system for talking to Santa heals a family.

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"Pwésent!," my daughter shouted. "Pwésent!" "I'm sorry," the elfin voiced on the telephone said. "I didn't understand that. If you want a present for yourself from Santa, say 'Present.' If you want Santa to get something for Mommy or Daddy, say 'Parent.' For anything else, please say 'Other.'" "Pawent!," my little girl shouted. "Pawent!" "I'm sorry. I didn't understand that....." My daughter Penny was now crying. I hung up the phone and we tried to comfort her. "Oh, Honey," my wife said as she stroked Penny's hair. "Don't be upset. Santa will be there tomorrow." But later on, alone in our bedroom, my wife Laura blamed it all on me. "It's your fault, idiot!" she screamed. "And don't look at me that way. You know exactly what I'm talking about. I've been telling you for years that something like this would happen." "My fault? Why is it my fault? I'm not the one who told the place to implement a voice detection talk-to-Santa phone menu system! Blame them!" I replied. Laura would not let up. "You know it's your fault. There is no reason why Penny should have been so frustrated. There is no reason why at her age something like this should happen. It's because of years of neglect on your part. It's because of the horrible role model you've been. She is Daddy's little girl. She idolizes you. She wants to be like you. You have to acknowledge your own shortcomings and do something about it! And you should march right into her room right now and apologize to her!" "I assume that sex tonight is out of the question?" I queried. A pillow hit my face. "I'll take that as a 'no'," I said. "I'll go see Penny now." And so I walked to Penny's room, head down and shoulders hunched, and tapped on her door. "Hon? It's Daddy. May I come in?" "Yes, Daddy," Penny said. I opened the door. Penny was reading in bed. "May I sit?" I asked. "Yes, Daddy," Penny responded. There she was, my little girl. I sat at the edge of the bed and took her hand and looked at her. I realized that I would always see her as my little princess in pigtails. "Penny," I said, "You got badly upset, didn't you?" "Yes, Daddy," she said. "I wanted to talk to Santa." "Hon," I said, "Please don't be mad at me." "I'm not, Daddy," she said. "Did Mommy yell at you again?" "Yes, Baby," I said. "And she has a point. Had I not all this time been so..." "No, Daddy!" Penny said. "No! No! I am big now! Mommy should not yell!" We hugged. "Thank you, Baby," I said. "I wove you, Daddy," she said. "I wove you too," I replied. "What book is that on the bed?" "An Intro to Quantum Physics Daddy," Penny replied. "Finals Friday." "Wow.

Good luck!" I said. And I got up and left. When I returned to our bedroom, Laura was smiling. "Everything o.k. now?" she asked. "Yes," I said. "And hon, I love you so much. I don't know what I'd do without you, my precious Lawa." "You're making an appointment with the speech therapist tomorrow and you're keeping it," Laura said. "I will," I replied. "Pwomise."