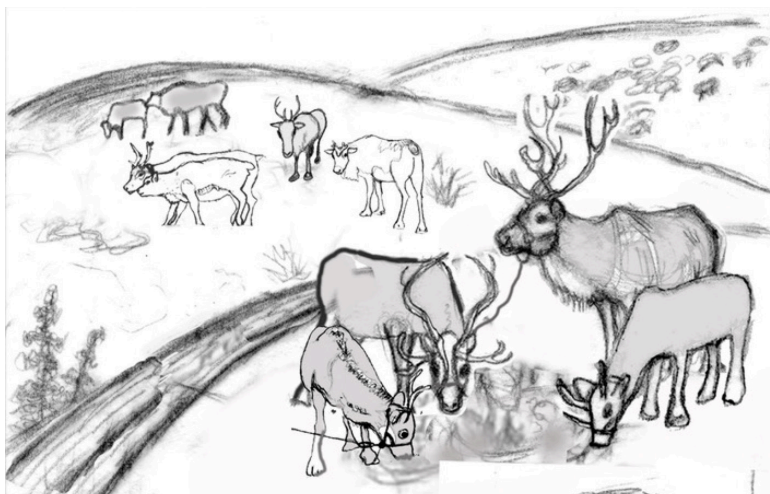


Elf Judy Wrangles Reindeer



Story by **Santa AL Capehart**
Pictures by **Stacye Leanza**



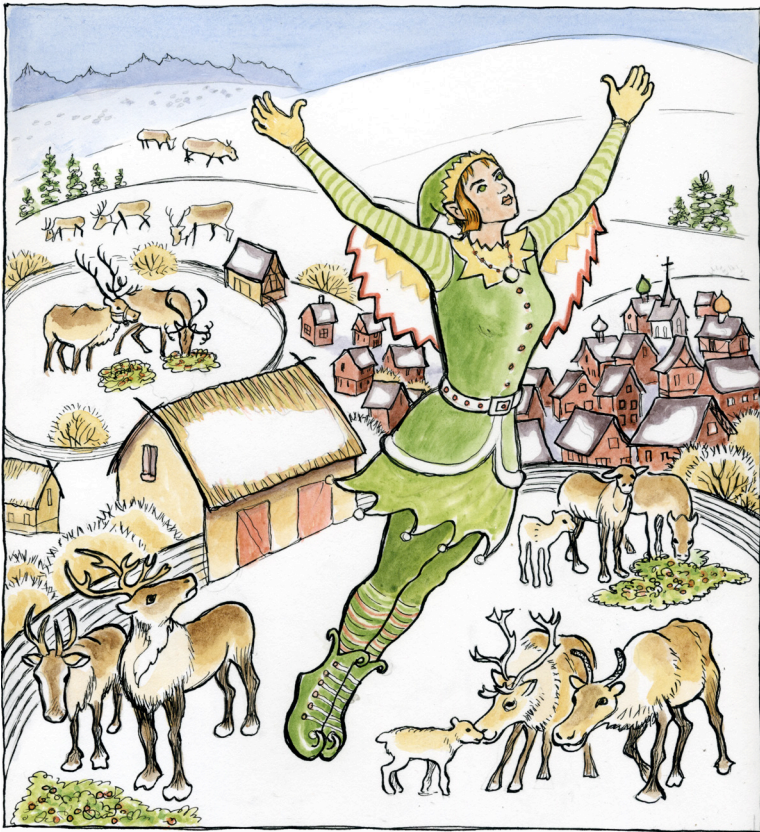
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In Elf Elementary I learned basic Elf skills, crafts and knowledge, including how to levitate and fly. However, my first job after Elf Elementary was to learn to care for reindeer. The flying reindeer and their families live in fenced corrals near their trainers in the Santa Village at the North Pole. Other reindeer live in herds outside of the village.



Using their tiny lower jaw teeth, they graze free range on lichen, blaeberrries and cowberrries. Their sharp and wide hooves are good at digging snow and breaking ice. Reindeer are highly intelligent, very sociable, calm and brave.

Baby reindeer begin to grow antlers at three weeks old. The male sheds his antlers in November to be replaced the next year by a larger identical shaped rack. The female reindeer is the only deer that grows antlers. She does not shed them until May. In many pictures the reindeer pulling Santa's sleigh in December have antlers. That must mean they are all female.

Spring born reindeer training begins by getting them used to us. Once familiar with us, we introduce the halter. As adults they will use a harness for pulling. The young are paired with experienced reindeer. In this teamwork the young learn the art of their trade.



One reindeer game matches teams to determine which can pull the heaviest load. Which team is the fastest? What team displays the greatest cooperation in getting the job done? The team with the best teamwork wins.

We round the reindeer up for moving to new grazing areas. We milk the mothers for their nutritious milk and to make our delicious North Pole reindeer cheese spread.

I learned to saddle up, ride the round ups and lead drives to the next range. I made sure each had its own special reindeer name marked in its right ear. Sam was my “mentor” reindeer and my ride for nearly two years. He showed me what I needed to know about how to care for him and the herd. For example, how to find good grazing sites, wrangle the herd and lead the drive from behind.

My experience included playing reindeer games. Sam and I were pretty good at the reindeer snow/ice land races. With his big hooves he could run in the snow and on ice. They were like snowshoes with cleats. I didn’t worry about Sam’s sharp antlers. He always knew where they were pointing. At full gallop he was amazingly fast, almost like flying.



During one reindeer game, Sam and I were rounding the second turn when his girth strap slipped. I must not have pulled it tight enough. I slid off him and hit the ground on my left side, getting bruises and a small case of “road rash” on my forehead. To stop the bleeding and to relieve the pain, Santa, who was watching the games, pulled down a hand full of sparkly stardust from the sky. He rubbed it into the scrape on my head. It soothed the pain. My forehead healed almost immediately, leaving only a slight star-shaped scar.

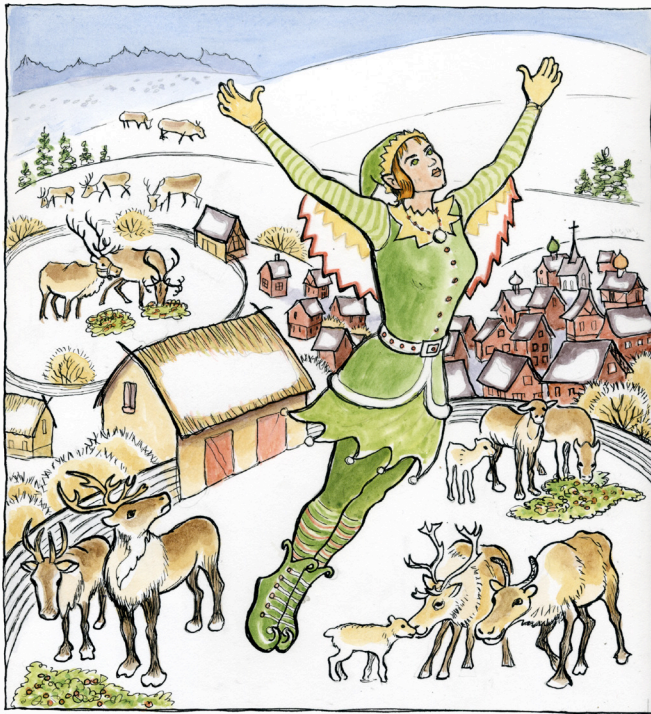


The stardust became part of my body. When I think very hard about it I can mentally “switch on” my stardust forehead. I can focus my energy into light so I’m never in the dark. I have a variety of lights like: nightlight, soft ambient light, reading light, spotlight, floodlight, searchlight, running light, and if needed, a metal-cutting laser beam. Using my stardust light requires mental concentration and a focus of personal energy.

My reindeer wrangling days ended when Santa assigned me to the Elf on the Shelf Division. During the season of Advent, Elves on the Shelves make overnight round trips to the North Pole. They report in person and face-to-face to a Santa Helper on their child's behavior, helping to build a report of naughty and/or nice for Santa Claus's list.

But that's a story for another time.

Love, *Elf Judy*







AL Capehart began Santa work in 1992 and has done it all from parades to malls. He published his first book **Behind Santa's Smile** in 2014, available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Elf Judy emerged as a character in a speculative fiction writing class at Central Carolina Community College in Pittsboro NC in 2012. She is here now to tell her stories beginning with her first of many adventures: wrangling reindeer.



Stacye Leanza is an illustrator, art coach, & teacher who is happiest when she gets to use her imagination to serve the greater good of the planet & its people. Find her artwork & ideas at www.leanza-art.com