

Red Suit Gazette

Unlock the World of Santa



The Brotherhood of the Direct Descendents of Santa

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Kris Kringle's Wisdom

Are You Ready For Christmas? By Kris Kringle

Summer is quickly waning and fall is on the way, with Halloween not far behind. If you haven't already started your Christmas preparation, you are already behind. July is key.

There are many Santas out there who just wing it every year. They think that just looking the part is all there is to being Santa, or that their years of experience will carry them through yet another season.



If this is your thinking, then you are not doing justice to the red suit. Now is the time to prepare.

Begin by making sure your suit is up to par. Look carefully at every detail, checking for soiled areas that the cleaners may have missed. Check for areas that need to be repaired, or just touched up, to ensure it doesn't come apart during the season.

See how you look with your new hairstylist, designer wig and beard or

bleach job, or even just see what you look like in your wardrobe. Have you gained or lost weight? How do the additions you made to your wardrobe look? Do you have current pictures of yourself?

Here's another important question ... Do you know what the new toys are and what the popular toys are? If you don't know the answer, you had better find out. The kids will surely be asking you about them.

You will need to know what they do and the age limit for each. Do they need batteries or parental supervision?

Are you ready for the questions children are going to ask you? Are you prepared for the parents?

What would you say to a child who

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From the Heart of Santa Claus

A Journey of Seeing

By Bill McKee

Observing and documenting the world around me, from presidents to paupers and extraordinary people living ordinary lives, my many years seeing the world through the lens of a camera opened doorways and unlimited views to me.

The life of a professional photojournalist allows extraordinary access to the story behind the story. Occasionally, the very heart is revealed and opened to view. As in being Santa, this does not come without responsibilities for repercussions of actions from exposure to such public view.

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Kris Kringle's WISDOM cont.

complained that you didn't bring them what they asked for last year? Would you say they were a bad child, would you tell them that Santa doesn't bring everyone what they want? What will you say to these children? You do need to plan ahead.



Kris Kringle

You certainly cannot plan for every situation, but you can always be better prepared. The time to begin is now.

Ask yourself some difficult questions that children may pose to you. Not the easy ones like, where do you live, and do you live there year-round? Maybe they want to know what the reindeer eat.

Have you ever thought about their questions of how you get into their home? What can you say to the children that won't make them paranoid or scare them? How do you get down the chimney? What if they don't have a chimney, then how do all the gifts fit and how do you carry them?

Now. What about the parents? They also can pose some interesting questions. For instance, they may ask you about private parties in the presence of the child. They may even ask your price in front of the child. What do you do or say then?

How about the parent who keeps talking for the child? What do you do?

This time of year is my busiest because I am also out researching toys and talking to lots of children. With the help of their parents, I enlist a few local children who help me research the toys. They always ask me lots of difficult questions.

July is also the month for pictures.

You need the pictures you want to use for advertising (now). You may need to have some new photos taken. Decide now how to use them and get them printed. This all takes time and time is passing quickly now.

This year, I added one new item in addition to the usual business cards and flyers to pass out for new business efforts and contacts. I had made, a small story book about Christmas, with pictures of me used to illustrate the book. These I intend to hand out during some of my appearances. If things work as I feel they will, this should generate even more contacts for me next year. I will keep you informed.

These are just some of the questions, actions and items I recommend.

I like having things planned out. I even mark out time on my calendar during the month of December for personal time. This allows me to get my sanity back and have a short breather during the busy season.

There are a lot of other hints to use, but I suggest that you create your own (personalized) checklist. If you care to share it, this is a great venue for that. I wrote this to assist those who are looking to better themselves and want to present a better image. Like anything else in this world, the more you practice, the better you get. Remember, you are not just representing yourself, you are representing all Santas everywhere and the image of Santa that are on the minds of everyone everywhere.

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In Search of Santa's Suit

by Lou Knezevich

About this time of year my thoughts turn to purchasing a new costume.

Maybe I won't purchase one, but I am going to do some thorough shopping.

Maybe you're thinking about a new "Red Suit" or something specially made, so I have some tips I hope you may find helpful.

First, costumes may look alike but they may not be alike.

Here is what I mean. If you shop the internet you must be careful of the costume picture, description and above all "the price." These pictures are used by all the costume shops, or sellers of Santa Suits. Seeing the picture of the suit you want may make finding it easier from one web site to another, but you will soon find out there may be some price swings. If the price is too good to be true for an item you've seen repeatedly and more expensive, then you've been fooled. When I shop I'll put the ones I want or like in my "Favorites" and compare each to make sure I'm comparing "Apples to Apples"

Read the descriptions and match the descriptions to the more believable advertisements. Also, make sure you understand the sellers return policy or "lack" of a return policy. The one thing you don't want to happen is to be dissatisfied with your purchase and not have a remedy to correct the problem.

Now let's talk about how to make choices. First, give some thought to what you want in a costume. Do you want durability because it's the last suit you're ever buying or because a few thousand kids are going to be on your knee? Maybe you need a lighter weight because your winters are a lot warmer than Buffalo, NY.

Velvet is one of the more popular fabrics for its luster, drape and durability.

One of the price variations may be that the suit is not satin lined. Satin lined suits help absorb perspiration. Will you be wearing a belly stuffer or are you enough to stuff the suit. Think about this; do you need pockets? A lot of suits have none, others have one inside the jacket and others one or two pants pockets and still others have all three.

What style interests you? Maybe the Coca Cola look is in your mind. This look was made famous by Sundblom and the holiday advertising he created for Coke Cola products. Presently there is a resurgence of this costume style. Most of these costumes are a rich red color and they are distinctive because there is no fur down the front of the jacket. Purists of this look will not wear fur on their boot tops either as Sundblom did not add this detail in most all of his Santa characterizations. You may also note the early paintings depicted Santa in a Brown Belt and Brown Boots. Sometime in the 1950's the belt and boot color became black. The general public may not realize it but the Coca Cola look established the image most everyone has in their

minds when they expect to see Santa.

Another style is Traditional. This is by far the most popular look and has the greatest variety to choose from. There are some distinctions to be wary of. The jackets of these costumes have fur down the front from the neck line to the bottom hemline of the jacket. The things to watch when buying these suits are if it has a zippered front or is it a pullover jacket, the picture will fool you so read the description and inquire if in doubt. Pullover jacket costumes are cheaper but the



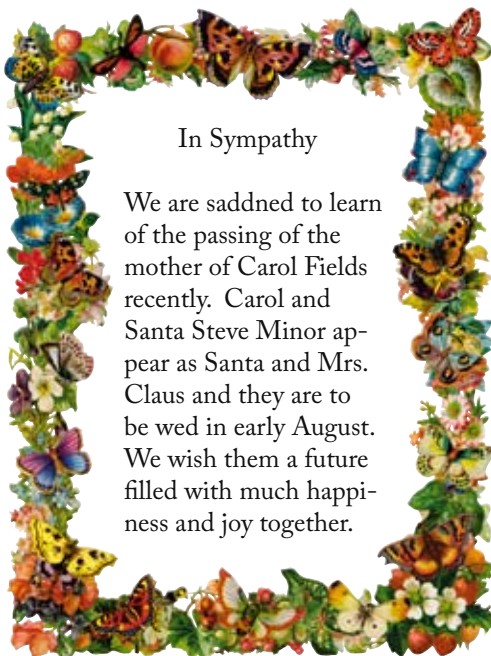
obvious drawback is you can't ventilate your self without taking the jacket off. Some of these costumes are now offered with bib style overalls. Without the jacket the bib style overalls can be used for a casual or work shop look. This gives you two different costume looks within one costume and one price.

Another item that may play a big role in your comfort is jacket collars. You may be scratching your head wondering what I'm up too but here is what I want to point out. There are two basic fur styles which are the Mandarin and Cape collar. The mandarin collar is small and circles the neck area. This style is less likely to get in the way of your beard and you'll probably be better groomed at the end of a session. The cape collar is large and comes down over the shoulder. This may rub on your beard and you'll have to pay more attention to your appearance if you're doing photos. A seamstress has made some costumes for me with the neck opening larger to accommodate my beard.

Next issue we will look at - Trousers. Boots. Costume Care.

"Zivili" Celebrate Life
Santa Lou

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In Sympathy

We are saddened to learn of the passing of the mother of Carol Fields recently. Carol and Santa Steve Minor appear as Santa and Mrs. Claus and they are to be wed in early August. We wish them a future filled with much happiness and joy together.

Words of Wisdom From the Children

A group of professional people posed this question to a group of 4 to 8 year olds. "What does love mean?" The answers they got were broader and deeper than anyone could have imagined.

1. When my grandma got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandpa does it for her now all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love. Rebecca - age 8
2. When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You just know that your name is safe in their mouths.
Billy - age 4
3. Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving Cologne and they go out and smell each other. Kari- age 5
4. Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French Fries without making them give you any of theirs.
Chrissy - age 6
5. Love is what makes you smile when you're tired. Terri - age 4
6. Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip giving it to him, to make sure the taste is OK.
Danny - age 7
7. Love is when you kiss all the time. Then when you get tired of kissing, you still want to be together and you talk more. My mommy and daddy are like that. They look gross when they kiss. Emily - age 8
8. Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen. Bobby - age 7
9. If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend who you hate. Nikka - age 6
10. Love is when you tell a guy you like his shirt, then he wears it everyday. Noelle - age 7
11. Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.
Tommy - age 6
12. During my piano recital, I was on stage and I was scared. I looked at all the people watching me and saw my daddy waving and smiling. He was the only one doing that. I wasn't scared anymore. Cindy - age 8
13. My mommy loves me more than anybody. You don't see anyone else kissing me to sleep at night. Clare - age 6
14. Love is when mommy gives daddy the best piece of chicken. Elaine - age 5
15. Love is when mommy sees daddy smelly and sweaty and still says he is handsomer than Robert Redford. Chris - age 7
16. Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day. Mary Ann - age 4
17. When you love somebody, your eyelashes go up and down and little stars come out of you Karen - age 7
18. Love is when mommy sees daddy on the toilet and doesn't think it's gross. Mark - age 6
19. You really shouldn't say "I LOVE YOU" unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.
Jessica - age 8

And then there was a 4 year old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly man who had just lost his wife. When the child saw the man crying, the little boy went over into the man's yard and climbed on top of the man's lap and just sat there. When the boy's mother asked him what he'd said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry."

(Editors Note: The origin of the above is unknown - but the truth in the words is without doubt)

“Santa Gets Caught” Christmas Eve Visits

Submitted by Debra and Santa Steve Gillham



The Premise

Wouldn't it be great if on Christmas Eve, the parents, after hearing a noise wake up and quietly get the rest of the family up? They tip-toe through the house and then, from a hiding place, they watch Santa put the presents under the tree, eat the cookies, drink the milk, read their Santa letters and anything else that is a tradition in their home. No one would dare talk to Santa because everyone knows that if Santa catches you watching him he will drop that small white feather he carries in his pouch and the household would fall back to sleep with no memory of seeing Santa. So the trick is just to watch and not get caught.

This was the concept that Debra and I had for our version of a “Santa gets Caught” visit. We have spoken with many Santas and compared notes about their Christmas Eve visits and when we compared all of our notes, we came up with what Deb named the “Sneak a Peek” visit. So it was that on Christmas Eve 2006 we tried our first “Sneak a Peek”.



The Watch on Christmas Eve by Thomas Nast

The First Time

Debra and I celebrate Christmas about a week early. This means that on Dec 24 we are able to go to a local hospital during the day and at night we are able to conduct “Sneak a Peek” visits until morning.

For the first time, we hand picked the family for our trial run. I approached the parents well before Christmas and asked them if they would be interested in having Santa come to their home on Christmas Eve and put out their children's presents under the tree. They immediately said yes. They were thrilled.

I had already seen their home and knew the layout. There is a walkway between the second floor bedrooms that allows you to look down on the family room which had a nine foot tree that was absolutely stunning. The parents wrapped the children's presents in a special paper that only Santa uses.

At 11:30 p.m. we called the parents cell phone and asked if the children were in bed. The father had set all the clocks forward by one hour and informed us that the kids were sound asleep and everything was ready for us to come over. I suited up in full gear and had an empty toy bag in hand. Debra drove to the house and I manned the cell phone. When we arrived in the neighborhood we placed another call to the parents. We turned off the headlights and parked out on the street away from the house. As we walked up to the front door I was met by the father on the front porch who then escorted us into the foyer. With the father and mother, Deb and I set up the plan for the visit. For the event they had all the presents on the dining room table which was next to the foyer. I loaded my bag from the dining room table, Deb went into the kitchen where she could see me and I could see her but the family

could not see her from their vantage point. I walked into the family room and waited for the family to take their place on the walkway above. The mother was carrying a video camera ready to record the whole event from their view point. The parents had been instructed that when it looked like I was just about done they were to take the kids back to bed so I could leave by the front door without the children knowing how I left. All I had to do was to play the part and not look up. There were a few challenges with this visit but learning took place. Overall it was a successful first visit so we made plans to do more for 2007.

Christmas Eve 2007

We set up five “Sneak a Peek” visits for Christmas Eve. What follows are notes made about these visits. By writing down our thoughts we hope to encourage other Santas to work out their own variation of the experience. All five visits were very successful with no complications or issues.

How we Pick the Families

This was a hard one for us. We are volunteer Santas and when I speak of Santas I mean Deb and me. I could not do this without

CAUGHT cont.

her. If we were charging a fee it would be easy to pick which families to do. It would be the ones that can pay. Without this structure it becomes a little harder since we have a limited number of families we can visit. Deb and I let all of the Doctors and Nurses know about these visits as well as our church members. We feel that God sent us the names of the families we visited. Our list started growing about October; though up until two weeks before this Christmas we still didn't have our last child. Sometimes we'd meet someone and feel a connection. We trusted our gut completely and even offered some families with no illness a visit. We don't believe in Coincidences. God works in mysterious ways so listen to your gut.

What We Do Once a Family is Picked

Go Preview the house –If you believe what Tom Valent says at the Charles W. Howard School – “Children remember sitting on Santa's lap for their lifetime so make sure it's special.” then be sure you don't skip this step. I can't tell you how many times those words came back to me this year. Now imagine what we are talking about here. They will be watching Santa work in their own home putting out their presents. Talk about a memory.... So please take this seriously and go preview the house. We would call and find out when to go by. Obviously the children could not be home and we usually met with the mother.

Explain the process and take notes – When we met with the mom I would explain the entire process. Many times they had a different vision of what they thought would happen. Some parents thought that the children would talk with Santa and some wanted to place a video camera in a hidden location in the room. What we decided was to outline a certain procedure and stick to it. The child would get to peek and the camera was with the parents. I did make very detailed notes about the house and my procedure for this house.

Here is an example of my note taking:

_____ Time of Visit To be filled in later
Child's Name: David Jones Age: 7
Parents: Diane and David
Address: 1234 ABC Lane, Chapel Hill, NC 27516
Phone Numbers: 555-555-5555 home 555-555-5555 Cell for Dad Call this number 10 minutes out.
Visit Notes:
Leave bells at back door
Go in front door and load toys wrapped in special Santa paper
Peeking will be from hallway
Lit tree in family room , cookies on piano by tree
Write note to child from Santa
Pet dog will be in upstairs bedroom Locked up.
Stockings will be filled by parents
Big toys already in place around tree.
Parents know to leave room when empty toy sack is thrown up and over Santa's shoulder.
Leave by back door and ring bells
Car will be at the end of the driveway (to the right when facing the home)



Toys for Santa's Bag

Here we explain to the parents that what will fit in a 33 gal garbage bag is what will fit into my Santa's bag. Any additional toys or large toys needed to be already under the tree such as bikes or canoes. The children would come and find Santa already at work and would not know that these toys did not come from the bag. Some families wrap Santa's toys and other don't so you can go with what ever their traditions are.

Stockings – Filling stockings is usually harder than you might think. There can be quite a few and the longer you are in the home the more likely something might go wrong, we asked the parents to fill the stockings. I sometimes waited for the family to get in their hiding place while standing at the stockings and pretending to fill them.

Decide where the Family will hide

This is very important. Some homes are absolutely perfect for a visit while others are really hard. We had one this year where the entire house is 1100 sq. ft. The tree was in the dining area next to the kitchen and the hallway from the three bedrooms was six feet

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away. Santa had to stay focused on the tree and could not look back at the hallway. The family did not have a video camera to record the visit so they used a flash camera and took two pictures. Santa had to ignore the flashes. It helped that the child was five that we were doing this for but you get the idea. You will sometime hear noises and see flashing lights but you have to ignore everything but the job at hand. In contrast, sometimes a family is so quiet you won't know they are in place. This can be a real problem also.

How does the family let you know when they are in place- This is actually the number one problem I had with these visits. The very first year we did the one visit, I had not even thought of this. There I was ready to go and I couldn't hear a thing coming from the walkway above. By the grace of God I started the show at the right time. This year I wanted something better. What I thought of were the small mirrors that you can buy at an automotive store for blind spots on car side mirrors. They are small convex mirrors that are about two inches in diameter and have sticky pads on the back for sticking to walls or fireplace mantles. Sounded like a great idea until I got in the homes. The tree lights were just not enough light to see the family. So we came up with a quite cough signal. Everyone coughs when they sleep so it would be only natural for Santa to ignore a cough. At least that's the story. I told the mom or dad that when they were in place and ready to lightly cough once and I would start. This worked great for this year. Next year we plan to buy a half dozen of the small two way radios we use for communicating back and forth. We will give one parent one with a plugged in head set. We plan on removing the earpiece from the headset and just letting them push the call button which will beep in my earpiece. The signal that they are in place will be three beeps. After we leave and Christmas is over, the parents will use a small self addressed box we will provide for them and mail us back the radio. This should be the perfect solution but I will keep you posted.

After the visit ... Then what?

When it is time to leave Santa leaves very fast. There can be no hesitation at all. When I am done and I throw that empty bag over my shoulder I give the family about 5 to 10 seconds to leave their hiding place and then I make a beeline for the exit. I have already dropped my bells at the appropriate spot outside and I ring them for everything they are worth. Then I walk briskly to the car and leave with no headlights on. More on this later. The thing is you don't get to watch what happens afterwards. So inform the parents that you would like for them to call you when it is safe and let you know what happened. I asked if they can think of anything that I can improve on. Did they like the performance or could I have done something different to make it better. This year we heard from the parents the day after Christmas.

The Big Night - Now What?

Plan your route - We sat down with Google Maps and wrote a preliminary route with drive times between houses. Then we programmed all the addresses into our GPS in the car. By this time we could determine our estimated time of arrival for each home. Before it got dark we checked in with each family and give them this ETA. If there had been a major problem we could have adjusted route and times. We informed the parents that we would call when we were ten minutes from the house.

Carry 3 copies of your notes because you don't want to lose this valuable information. We made 3 copies to be sure we didn't lose one in the car. You will be up all night and things can happen when it's four am.

Prepare your car

We drive a Prius which is a perfect car for this. We have an on board GPS and we can turn out all the interior light including the display screen. We had entered all the addresses and knew exactly where we are going. Deb used to work nights as a Pediatric nurse so she knows all the tricks of the trade to stay awake. I would like to say that we were smart enough to get some sleep but with the hospital work and the prep for Christmas Eve night there wasn't any time. I will tell you that as Santa I did not have any problems staying awake...it was the driver who stayed sitting in the car while I was up walking around. I have never been more alert in my life than when doing these visits. My adrenaline was pumping overtime. Deb made up sandwiches, chips, hot cocoa, coffee, and all the plates, napkins, etc... Whenever we had a time lag we were eating. It was great. I do highly recommend you have someone help with these visits. In my opinion you need two people to do this right. A two person team is perfect. Deb was my navigator, driver, and Bernard. Yes that right she played the part of Bernard. We used the same two way communication radio we use for Santa and it was great. I carried the radio in my leather card pouch and had the ear piece in my ear. The mike was attached with the clip to my suspenders. After I put my coat on, all I had to do to talk to her was reach up and squeeze the talk button. I spoke with her in every home about the kids and checking the list and I have everything done etc... It was great... just like in The Santa Clause with Tim Allen movie. If you do have a time lay-over take an alarm clock. Nothing would be worse than to miss an appointment because you both fall asleep. By the way, take a fleece blanket for the driver and to drape over Santa when he is eating.

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CAUGHT cont.

Eat the cookies and drink the milk

I didn't realize how hard this would be until we did five homes. After number two I got smart. I used one of the Ziploc bags Deb had put a sandwich in and carried it in my belt. I was then able to eat one or two cookies and place the rest in a Ziploc bag for later. I always made a big deal of taking some back for a snack and the reindeer carrots went in this bag also. But, I did drink a lot of milk! I didn't realize what effect this might have until the fourth visit was over. Then I had an unmistakable urge to find a bathroom. Do your homework and find out what's open all night on Christmas Eve. Thank goodness for "Sheetz" gas stations. When deciding where to put the cookies, make sure the children put them where Santa can reach them without looking at the family. I also ate cookies at several different intervals.... Eat a cookie and put out a toy ...eat a cookie and put out a toy. Only at the end do I gather up any uneaten cookies in my Ziploc bag.

Putting On Coat and accessories

Deb and I parked in well lit parking lots while waiting for appointment times. We also use these parking lots to suit up for the visit. I would get out of the car and turn on my two way radio, put on my coat, belt, and hat, get my bells ready, and fold up the empty toy bag as well as my cookie bag. Then I would get back in the car and we would call the family and tell them we were just 5 or ten minutes away. A parent would then meet me at the designated spot and I would get into position. After the visit I would get into the car and wait until we were back at the lit parking lot to get out of the suit.

Talk to Bernard

Using a two way radio is too cool not to do. Please let your assistant live through the radio. We had a ball playing the part of Santa and Bernard. I was able to tell Deb when I was in the house and when I was leaving and had there been a problem she would have known about it.

Be sure all pets are secure

Pets are great but they will not understand what you are doing in their house. Be sure to arrange this ahead of time. You do not want to get eaten by the pet dog. Imagine that memory for the children. "I saw Santa get attacked by my dog on Christmas Eve." Good Lord!

What about the Video

We told our families that this would be a nice family moment to have on video. But, we also informed them that we had some recommendations on making this video. Deb and I both feel that the filming should focus on the reactions of the children with Santa in the background. We also explained that a really nice touch of Christmas magic might be to review the video on Christmas day with family and friends but after Christmas the playback of the tape will be blank. The parents would replace the recording with a blank tape and the kids would be told that you really can't capture Santa on tape. The playing of the taped moment could be reserve for Christmas Eve only or perhaps reserved for the children until adulthood.

In Conclusion

We had a ball doing these visits. We were out from 10:30 p.m. until 5 am and it was great. This year we drove a total of about 225 miles between the houses. The maximum number of visits we were comfortable scheduling was five though, in looking back we could have added maybe one or two more. However, we would rather err on the side of having too much time than not enough.

If you are in the position to have your Christmas Eve open and are not doing these visits you should consider what they bring to the families. In all five of this years visits the response has been incredible. We used a speaker phone when talking with each family and there has been much laughter as well as some tears when listening to the parents tell us about what happened and is still happening due to these visits.

There are many, many magical fun moments as Santa and this is definitely one of the best. Our special moments occur sitting in the chair, in restaurants, malls, churches, hospitals, senior homes, and in stores to name a few. From our perspective, this seems to be about as close to the "gift giving" job of Santa as you can get. Sneak-a-Peeks are just one more special way to make Christmas magic happen. I would love to hear how your own Santa visits go.

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Love, Hope & Joy Wrapped in a Warm Santa Hug for Special Children & Their Families 365 Days A Year!

For nine months, the nine-year-old Hurricane Katrina survivor did not speak. He and his mother rode out the killer storm in the attic of their home. His next-door neighbors were not so lucky and the young boy heard their screams as Katrina took the lives of his best friend and his friend's mother. When the mother and son moved to Mobile, they sought help for the boy's post traumatic stress. Week after week, month after month, the boy was silent during therapy sessions. A professional in the medical community called Santa-America for help. When Santa Ernest walked into the counselor's office, the young boy jumped up, flew across the room and hurled himself into Santa Ernest's embrace shouting, "Santa, I thought you were dead." The boy's mother and counselor wept as the boy told Santa Ernest about his nightmare experiences.



How We Build Community



Santa-America volunteers unite generations and work together to build community through service to our children. The gifts

of Love, Hope & Joy transcend politics, culture, race and religion. These gifts are treasured universal values.

Santa-America Changes Families' Lives!

Founded in 2003 by Daphne resident, Ernest Berger, Santa-America is a national non-profit volunteer service organization that offers Santa visits to children and families in crisis...365 days a year! Santa nurtures children and their families by giving compassion during an emotionally stressful time of their life. Following the initial visit, the same Santa will continue to visit the family year after year, helping in their grief and bereavement. Santa's visits with children come from the medical community, hospice, and special needs educators. We build relationships with medical societies and alliances. As one of our initiatives, Santa America is conducting a clinical pilot study to reveal the value of Santa's love on chronically ill children.

Gifts for Our Children

When we visit our special children, Santa-America gives gifts that symbolize Love, Hope and Joy. Our signature Santa Hugs™, sleigh bells,



and our special book, *An Angel in the Sky*, continue to remind children and their families of their special visit with Santa.



Caring For Our Children

Santa-America is the leader in advancing the highest standards for its volunteers. We conduct rigorous national background checks and intensive training ... the same background check as a doctor or nurse.



For more information about Santa-America, visit Santa-America online at www.Santa-America.org or contact our Executive Director Cathy Barnette at 251.379.0462 or info@santaamerica.org

Photos courtesy of Elizabeth McGonagle Graham, Lasting Memories Photography.

From the Heart of Santa cont.

There is a misconception about photojournalists (real photojournalist). (I do not include paparazzi in this definition) The good ones, the really good ones are sometimes made out to be ghouls but they are not ghouls at all. Just the opposite is true for many!

Being able to see from the subject's view, walk in their shoes for a few steps, or a small journey, helps make a really good photojournalist. Really Good. It is that moment captured (a certain set of the eyes, muscles tightened and momentary expressions exposed) that allows a view, maybe just a microscopic look, deeply beyond the surface layer of skin to the person within.

Photojournalists are witness to, literally, the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Also they are witness to the best and worst actions a human being can manifest. Most carry with them for a lifetime the unnumbered children crying or screaming for their mother or father, who lie dead and lifeless on the highway. These scenes of countless crashes, and human beings with their bodies ripped and ravaged from jagged metal and glass cannot be erased. The smell of oil mixed with blood with bodies broken, and lives lost. Houses burning to ash with the entire lives of families gathered over decades that were captured in pictures and possessions now returned to dust. On the lawn these people huddle, emptiness in their eyes, no reflection given, just tears and agony.

A life lived behind the lens of a documentary photographer can give one a different perspective on life and the human condition. Capturing moments in time through vistas of joy and happiness, along with views of violence and sorrows inconsolable, can help one find their own heart.

Sometimes, rare opportunities can open.

One such opportunity for me came as I was strapped into the back seat of Blue Angel No. 7. Flying with one of the finest the Navy has to offer (a Top Gun school graduate) through all manner of aerobatics available in a supersonic jet. That was a childhood dream come true. This was one afternoon in the sky I will never forget.



Javier Alarcon, Aztec

Another emerged from a strange encounter on a mountain top in Tennessee with an Aztec.

It was a beautiful, sunny early-summer day in late June (1995 I think it was). I was on assignment, a mostly routine, summer festival promo type of feature, in a very small community in Northeastern Tennessee. We were literally on the edge of the North Carolina border. The annual Trade Days Festival (as it was called) held an opening ceremony each year the day prior to the festival's official opening. Television, print and radio media were invited to preview what the festival organizers had to offer each year for the 3-day weekend's events.

On this day Patsy (having the day off) had accompanied me on what turned out to be an extraordinary encounter of the third kind, "you might say."

Arriving early at the former school house in Trade, we stood outside along the sidewalk awaiting the entourage. This group would load into cars, trucks and busses, to make its winding way up the rocky mountain, pothole marked road to the gap in the mountain very far above.

We were just standing around, talking with friends and greeting some new acquaintances while we waited. As people emerged from the school building, among them flowed this flamboyantly dressed and elaborately decorated individual. His body was painted with colorful symbols and adorned with beautiful flowing feathers, costuming the like of which I had never seen before. As he passed us, I felt this incredible wave of energy, as if a strong, warm summer breeze bathed in radiant sunlight, just blew around my soul. I looked at Patsy just as she was turning to look at me, and I think we mouthed the words, 'who the xxx is That!' simultaneously.

Who that was, became a life-long friend and my brother (in Spirit), Javier Alarcon, Aztec.

I grew up in the country, in middle-Appalachia, protected from the harshness of the world. We (the children of the community) were sheltered, safe in a cocoon created by parents, grandparents, extended family and community. Family, community and sharing were highly valued. The children and their welfare most of all. The old adage 'it takes a community to raise a child' was never more true than here and in that time. (Christmas here was truly magic)

HEART cont.

Patsy and began to take vacation each June, hosting Javier, and whomever might be with him any given year, for the annual festival. We encountered many friends as we opened our door and shared our table with some who are now family, and life-long friends.

A few years ago we hosted Los Voladores de Papantla (the Flyers of Papantla) who came with Javier to perform at the festival. For nearly two weeks, we lived, worked, laughed, photographed, shared and traveled with 5 Totenac Indians from the Papantla region of Mexico.

I will never forget their last day here. We had all returned to the house, overflowing with new friends and family, for food, stories and a bit of R&R for us all. From their arrival it had been a very hectic, heart-straining progression of days, leading to and through the festival. Their performances were divine.

Miguel Juan, the Priest (or leader) of Los Voladores and I sat in my North Pole room all afternoon. I was printing photos and making CD's for all of them to take home. What still amazes me, is how he, speaking an ancient Totenac language, some Spanish and no English, and I, speaking English and only enough Spanish to say hello, good day and welcome to my house, were able to communicate.

We spent the timeless, lazy summer afternoon sharing stories of family, knowledge, talking of life and the human condition and spirit of living life fully. Not only were we in the same book most of the time, we seemed to be on the same page. Most of the time.

Over the years this sharing of life, has enriched my life and the lives of my family and friends in ways I may never know. Beyond that, it has helped open my eyes to the greater family of human beings who inhabit this small blue planet in this vast universe.

Encountering and sharing with many from varied cultures, my view of the world began to encompass more of the world. I began to understand the family of man and the Sacredness of all the children of all ages around the world. For me, as I was becoming Santa, this seemed a natural, and somehow necessary progression.

I found, among many native cultures and peoples, priorities somewhat different than those of our fast-paced, helter-skelter, electronic age. Among so very many native cultures, children are the center of the family and community. I found, among strangers, and in strange places, what I knew as a child. The sense of community, family and Sacredness of the children.

Opening to other peoples and cultures has helped open my eyes to a deeper understanding of the Heart of Santa Claus in my own heart.

The pathway to wearing the red suit, leading into the Heart of Santa Claus, IS cluttered with detours, diversions, false destinations and roads leading nowhere, feeding egos instead of Hearts.

How we can learn and grow from each others cultures - if only we open a path. By learning another language we open worlds and lives unknown. Consider what Dr. King said; 'the arrogance that we think we have everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.'

Next Issue 'The Journey Within'

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Los Voladores, Trade, TN, June 2005
photo by Patsy McKee



Long Leaf Pine Santas Feast at Castle McCulloch

By Bill McKee

A recent July evening finds a room full of friendly folk who were not afraid to 'step off the cliff.' Gathered at Castle McCulloch in Jamestown, NC, were red-suited men with white hair and beards, ladies in Christmas colors and a clown or two along with other guests seated at round tables, brought together in the Spirit of Christmas.

The cliff, so aptly described by a special invited guest, storyteller Kelly Swanson from High Point, NC, detailed how so many people live their lives, afraid to take that daring step off the cliff to their dream. She kept the jolly gents and ladies laughing, thinking and sometimes almost crying, as she wove tales from life into visions and inspiration dancing in our heads.

Receiving a standing ovation, her tales topped off desert during that Saturday Christmas feast, on a warm summer evening in a castle in the woods.



Towards the end of the evening, a bride and groom entered the hall. The newlyweds, Heather McCarthy and her husband, George Richardson had learned of Santa's presence in the castle. They had asked to have their photo taken with Santa. Little did they know there was more than one. Entering the great room, the surprise on their faces was evident, seeing the sea of white beards and jolly gents dressed in red. Their appearance and astonishment brought smiles, laughter and applause throughout the hall.

Many attendees to the weekend's festivities began arriving on Friday. Greeted with milk and cookies in the lobby of the Raddison Hotel, each new arrival was checked in and handed bags of goodies.

Later, but not much, as all seemed to be rather hungry, Friday's evening meal found old friends, along with new friends introducing and reacquainting themselves. There were tales and laughter and talk of the events of the upcoming weekend.

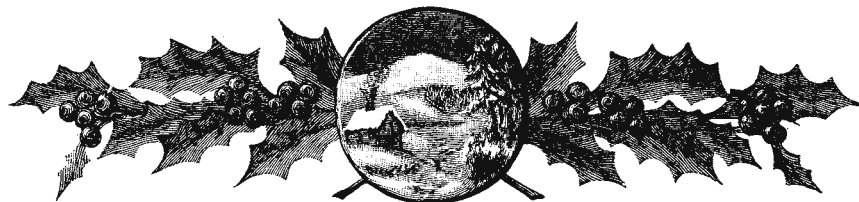
Saturday found us at roundtable discussions inside Castle McCulloch on many things Santa and Christmas. A moderator at each large set of tables, kept the discussions moving, engaging and tried to make sure each participant was involved. A lunch arriving in Christmas stockings was a delight to all.

More discussions and stories followed lunch, as the day flew by in near record time.

The weekend was filled with knowledge shared, stories, roundtable discussions, good food and fellowship, all topped off with a Christmas Feast in a Castle.

The event, sponsored by the Long Leaf Pine Santas, was organized and overseen by Jac Grimes and Cliff Snider, with assistance from Danny Nease.

Long Leaf Pine Santas - <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/longleafpinesantas>





A Chance to Test Santa Claus' Generosity by Thomas Nast

Classified and Posts

Press: For Immediate Release
The Clan Claus Society
“Believe”

Authorized by Santa Claus and established on the 1st of June in the year 2008

The Clan Claus Society embodies the desire to preserve and perpetuate the history, ideals, and traditions, family values and the heritage of the Scottish Santa persona. The Clan is a family element whose primary objectives are to establish a Christmas family.

The Society welcomes professional and amateur individuals who portray Santa Claus, St. Nicholas, Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, Pere Noël, and related persona, regardless of beard status. Both Natural and Designer Beards are welcome. In addition, Mrs. Claus', Elves, Helpers, Reindeer Handlers and any and all other persons connected by marriage or descent from are considered eligible for inclusion in the Clan family. Friends of the Clan are being anyone who has the desire to support the Clan in its Purpose and Missions are eligible for membership.

The Clan Claus Society was developed and organized with the critical emphasis on fellowship, camaraderie and a family atmosphere being the corner stone of the Clans concept. The Clan Claus Society is a family not a business we are not incorporated and have no officers. We do have an Advisory Board that is rich in Scottish history and unlike a business that weights you down with unnecessary rules and regulations we have a very simple common sense Code of Conduct. Show appropriate respect for each other.

We would like to see The Clan Claus Society take an active role in all Santa oriented events. As the Clan grows we would also like to see The Clan Claus Society become active in there state and regional Highland Games. Having the Clan members march in there local parades always portraying Santa, in an appropriate manner at all times.

We are working very hard to debut The Clan Claus Society at Celebrate Santa in March 2009 in Gatlinburg, Tennessee.

The Clan Claus Society is headquartered in North Ridgeville, Ohio USA

Should you have any additional questions please feel free to Contact me at:
440-748-3545 Toy Shoppe ~ 440-725-2107 Sleigh Phone
Or E-mail at: konasstudio@oh.rr.com or irongant@oh.rr.com
Please Visit us at: www.clanclausociety.com

Best regards,
Santa Kona Gant

Santas in Texas

Two new Santa groups have been formed here in Texas. The Santas of Southeast Texas (SoSET@yahoogroups.com) are primarily located in southeast Texas around Orange, Beaumont and Bay areas. The Lone Star Santas (LoneStarSantas@yahoogroups.com) are mostly located in the Houston, to central Texas area. However both groups are open to all of Texas and beyond.

Neither group has a formal, or even an informal “constitution.” There are no officers, no dues and very few restrictions for membership. Just a bunch of people who thoroughly enjoy everything about Christmas. It is all very informal and those who wish to participate do so through e-mail or telephone. When someone comes up a good idea for a get together or an “eat-an-meet”, they simply post an e-mail to their “members” and anyone who is interested is invited to attend. Both groups include bearded well as non-bearded Santas, Mrs Claus, Elves and helpers. Since this past spring, the groups have had several social occasions at restaurants and individual’s homes as well as meeting for some very interesting tours and always have a lot of great fun.

The groups are not affiliated with any other Santa associations (well, except each other by camaraderie), nor do they object to any of their members belonging to any other Santa group. However, politics or gossip being brought to any of their meetings is not welcome. The only rule for both groups is for members to talk and act the way Santa, Mrs. Claus, the Elves and other helpers would.

You and your readers are more than welcome to visit their web sites, but remember, any talk of politics or gossip will not be tolerated.

Gene and Susan Clayton,
Carmine, Texas



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Masthead Artwork by Stephanie Suzanne Sentinella

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