

# Red Suit Gazette

*Unlock the World of Santa*



The Brotherhood of the Direct Descendents of Santa

Special Christmas Edition  
December 2008

## Teeba Meets Santa Claus

by Lou Knezevich

She sat on the edge of her restaurant booth.

As I walked by her dark eyes danced and flashed quickly at me.



The hostess seated my family in the booth right next to hers. I was visiting them in Cleveland, Ohio, after traveling from my home in Atlanta, Georgia.

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## From the Heart of Santa Claus

### The Bell On Christmas Eve

By Bill McKee  
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It would be a Christmas to remember, that was without doubt.

The newspaper article ran following my fateful encounter on that bright December day. After all the years as an employee, a conflict had arisen between the employer and Santa. In the final analysis, my only choice was for children, the ones I had never met, and the ones the Santa I might never meet.

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## TEEBA'S STORY cont.

As I settled into my seat, I saw I was looking directly at this child's face, staring deeply into those large, dark, oval eyes, so brightly lit from within.

She was about 6-years-old with long brown hair. She was a lively young girl and her excitement was uncontainable.

When I looked more closely at her face I could see it was badly disfigured, showing the scarring of severe burns. In another time in my life I would have turned my face away, but the beauty from within this child reached out to me, transcending her disfigurement.

Our eyes met and her smile told me she had recognized Santa Claus immediately. I was drawn to her, her magnetic personality pulling me forward.

We quickly became fast friends without a word being spoken. I had with me some stickers that said "I Met Santa Claus." I got up and went to her booth and gave her one. She was very excited and proud to put it on and wear it.

One of the ladies seated with her at the table said to her; "I told you he was Santa."

That little girl smiled up at me, and with that smile, I never saw her disfigurement again.

My family, seated at the booth included two sons along with some of our grown grandchildren. They had never before seen me interact with anyone as Santa.

They saw, felt and marveled at the magic of this powerful connection between children (of all ages) and Santa Claus.

After I sat back down, one of my sons handed me a note written on a napkin which had been passed to him. It read "Her name is Teeba.

She is from Iraq. She was burned in a car bomb explosion and she is here for surgery."

Upon reading the note my heart just opened completely to this young child. This child who has suffered and endured so much in her short, scarred life.

I was to learn later, just how greatly she had suffered, and would continue to suffer with the surgeries needed and upcoming.

It did not take very long for her to come see me at our table. She was accompanied by another young girl. I looked at Teeba and told her how proud I was of her, and how brave she was.

She had the usual questions most all children have, such as; "Where's your reindeer," etc. We had a wonderful conversation, filled with lots of excited giggling and glimmering dancing eyes. When she returned to her seat we continued to exchange glances and smiles.

When it was time for Teeba to leave, she came over to me and we talked until it was time to say goodbye. Then she gave me a big hug and said; "I love you." I told her "Santa loves you too." I meant it with all my Heart. From deep within Santa's Heart, I had fallen in love with the essence, the very Spirit of this child.

I spoke with one of the ladies in Teeba's party. She told me Teeba had been severely burned by a roadside bomb. A



bomb which killed her 3-year-old brother, injured her parents and severely burned her neck and face.

The car bomb explosion happened when Teeba was 19-months old. Ever since it happened she has gone through constant ridicule and harassment because of her disfigurement.

She went on to tell me how fascinated Teeba was by Santa Claus and how interested she was in him.

The lady I was speaking with is named Barbara Marlowe and she had read about Teeba in a newspaper article.

Barbara read the story and was so moved by it that she began a quest through various International agencies to bring Teeba to the United States for surgery. Working tirelessly for over a year, Barbara was finally successful and brought Teeba to Ohio. At Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital, part of University Hospitals Case Western Reserve medical system in downtown Cleveland, Teeba would undergo reconstructive surgery.

After I returned to Atlanta, I found a number of newspaper articles which had been written about her after a quick search on the

**See TEEBA'S STORY next page**

## TEEBA'S STORY cont.

internet. One story which describes Teeba's ordeal was featured in People Magazine, February, 2008 issue. The story is titled "Loving Teeba."



Since our meeting Teeba and I have spoken on the phone and exchanged emails. Her English is perfect and she has that typical inquisitive nature as all 6-year-olds have.

Yes, Teeba has won my heart!

Barbara told me her next operation will be around September 8th so Santa's getting a special gift ready to be with her and to remind her how much Santa loves her.

Santa has been working, and hoping to make a special Christmas visit to Teeba and her guardian angels in Ohio. So far, the sleigh ride has not come into being due to available resources.

Think about Teeba, or a child you have touched as Santa Claus. They are the reason we became Santa. And the reason we look forward to putting on the "Red Suit."

Santa  
Lou Knezevich

**Postscript:** Teeba had some complications with the procedure

done in early September. The surgeon had to basically remove and repair the spacers placed under her skin and restart the procedure again. I have spoken to her by phone and she is as inquisitive as ever. Her favorite costume is a Santa suit and she told me how hot it gets which gave me the chance to tell her how hot my coat also gets. This must be a common problem among Santas and Santa's little helpers.

I have contacted a number of charitable and business organizations seeking someone to sponsor me for a trip to pay Teeba a Santa Visit at Christmas. I have not been successful so far, so Santa's

visit may not be realized this year. I am about to create a video for her and hope to have my webcam working so we can video our conversations.

Her freshness and excitement gives me great joy but I fear as she grows older her mirror will not hide what her innocence is not seeing today. As I write this my mind flashed back some 20 years ago when I received the dreaded phone call that all parents fear, that "Your child has been in an automobile accident." My youngest son had been thrown through the front



windshield when the young driver he was riding with lost control and hit a house at over 50 mph. It required over 225 stitches to close the cuts on his face and the trauma of the accident did not seem to affect him until we brought him home and he looked into the mirror. What he saw changed his immediate life, and ours, in so many drastic ways. I realized my writing about Teeba is a parallel to what I have experienced in my personal life, and I'm sure it's another reason this man in the "Red Suit" feels the spirit of Santa in or out of costume.

A Very Merry Christmas to you, your family and may the magic of Santa be in your heart every day of your life.

by Lou Knezevich

"Zivili" Celebrate Life"

Santa Lou

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<http://www.Santa-Lou.com>

Photos of Teeba

courtesy Barbara Marlowe



The People Magazine article, "Loving Teeba," can be found here: <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20179769,00.html>



“Faith - Waiting for Santa Claus,” by M. Woolf. From *Harper's Weekly*, Dec. 26, 1874.

# ChriskwanChanumas Notes



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“Santa” is Spanish for “Saint.” But guess what? The same letters also spell “Satan.” Whoa, that’s heavy. Must our typical mall Santa bravely tiptoe through a mine field each December? Let’s peek at the diary of a member of the Union of Real Bearded Santas.



Nov 30 - Santa College was a killer! Flunked reindeer names. I felt so sure about Dopey. Couldn’t sing “Away in a Manager” or “Chipmunks roasting on an open fire....” And coal for naughty kids? That is so 1953. Now Santa scolds by giving big, ugly sweaters.

Dec 1 – Arrive at the motel for my out-of-town gig, with Santa suit, hat, and white gloves from the temp agency. Rules to remember: No swearing! Be PC, and sensitive to other cultures! Hey, no problema. Decades ago, I got C+ in high school Spanish.

Dec 3 - Off to a great start. Children shrieking all day in terror at a jolly, fat Stranger-Danger with a hairy face. Hearing aids ain’t workin’. How can I lean in to hear kids without looking like Mr. Creepy? Just breathe, stay cool, keep the white gloves in sight.

Dec 7 - Eyeballed my suit in the daylight. Jeez Louise, it’s disgusting! Bought a case of antibacterial spray. Considered Evergreen and Fresh Blizzard scents but hit a sale on Reindeer Musk. Each night I turn the suit inside out and spray the hel- holly out of it.

Dec 11 - A little flirting with two curvy nymphs hauling Victoria’s Secrets bags. So much giggling. Did they really say they wanted handcuffs for Christmas?? Damn hearing aids.

Dec 13 - Pet Day. Who the fuchsite\* dreamed this up? After 17 dogs and 29 cats, I’m covered in hair, and my throne looks like a wicker porcupine in a grand mal seizure. Lords a’leapin’, why am I so itchy??



Dec 14 - Chat with a Latina clerk at the pet store. Has she been good? She shrugs, and whispers, “Mejor.” Gulp. Was that English or Spanish? May- ?? May-hor?? I pay for the flea collar. I’ll be long gone by May (sigh) so don’t be teasin’ Santa, hear?

Dec 18 – Suit is a sauna due to reindeer musk buildup. Computer games remain wicked cool, but Santa knows zip. I ask kids if they prefer Mario or Pac Man. Oddly, they seem to dislike the question. One of them even yanked out a hunk of beard, the little shi- shepherd boy.

Dec 20 – Pungent Rogaine® ointment on my chin hides the smell of the flea collar. A blonde in a Bratz parka demands some American Girl item called Chucka-nucka. What? “Chucka-nucka!” yells the mom. Ooooooh, I say, you probably mean

Chanukah!! The eye rolls from Bratz and mom suggest missing frontal lobes. These two jinglebells need serious help, but I can only bring them ugly sweaters.

Dec 22 - Victoria’s Secrets duo waltzes by again — helloooo, Prancer and Vixen! The lithe maidens blow kisses until violently repelled by Santa’s ripening reindeer aura.

Dec 23 - Over a thousand kids today. Subtract my breaks and we have a solid 41.52 seconds per kid. My suit is slough-

ing dried reindeer musk like a full-body psoriasis. An Hispanic family stares at the mound of flakes. Mortified, I stammer, “Santa, uh, embarasada.” An hour later they’re still guffawing over in the food court.

Dec 24 - A little redhead begs me for Butterscotch. So I hand her one from the candy bowl. “No! Butterscotch!” she screams. Sometimes crappy hearing aids are a blessing. Turns out, Butterscotch is a robot pony worth more than my car. And “embarasada” doesn’t mean embarrassed. It means pregnant. Huh.

Dec 25 – Planning for a new Santa suit next year. My granddaughter sews her own skating costumes and will enlarge a pattern that would be oh, so coolio for Santa – red satin, backless, with snap-in flea collar. Till then, Merry ChrisKwan-Chanumas to all!

\*Yes, Sugar Plums, ’tis a real word.

Mary Tompsett

Mary Tompsett writes *Posing As Normal*, a monthly humor column that appears in several publications. You can read more of her work at: <http://www.marytompsett.com>

Editor’s Note: We would like to thank John Lauder, a friend of Mary Tompsett, and Santa, who suggested that Mary send this in for publication in the Red Suit Gazette.





## **BELL cont.**

It all began a few days before Christmas 2006.

Monday morning I awoke early.

In only 6 days it would be Christmas Eve. Mrs. Claus had departed the day before on a trip to Disney World with children and grandchildren. She would not return until just before Christmas.

Today would be my busiest day leading into Christmas Eve, with more than 20 stops before returning home late in the evening. This annual trek has become a day of fun visiting friends, associates and offices known well to Santa. It is a yearly ritual, which I always anticipate with great joy. I look forward to sharing Christmas goodies, stories, laughs and smiles with some I only get to see once each year.

I loaded the sleigh and headed out early, my first stop in the foothills of Whitetop Mountain (the second-highest mountain in Virginia). I was there to visit the office of my dentist, Dr. Tebbenkamp, and his staff who all work diligently caring for their patients.

I entered the waiting room saying Merry Christmas, greeting all inside. Walking down the open office hallway, I greeted everyone, offering candy and treats, a kind word or two and a photo or whatever they desired.

I stopped to speak with Dr. Tebbenkamp, busy at work, and I found myself drawn towards the tightly squeezed, clamped closed eyes of his patient. Eyes perhaps holding some mystery yet to be revealed.

Making my way on through the office, I spoke with all I met and wished all a very Merry Christmas.

Time to move on, off to my next stop, so I headed out the door.

As I prepared to depart, strapped in the sleigh, a slender young man came down the steps from the office, giving a nod and a wave as he entered his white pickup. I waved and nodded hello in return. He departed before me, turning left back towards the mountain. I turned right, going down toward the town of Damascus, Va., and my next visits.

Soon after departing, a couple of miles down the road, I entered the switch-back curves along the route. As I entered the first curve, suddenly appearing behind me a white pickup truck approached, catching up with me very quickly. It struck me as odd, but I brushed it aside. Little did I know, I had only begun to witness oddness.

Almost immediately I noticed the driver, the sole occupant of the vehicle, digging around the cab area. Soon, this bag of trash came flying out his window, landing on the road, glass and paper and all manner of trash scattering everywhere. Someone throwing out a bag of trash in this area is not unusual, by any means.

However, the driver continued digging all around the cab of the truck and throwing everything he found, out the window. This behavior continued as we wound through curve, after hairpin curve, switching back and forth, he swerved, dug and threw out anything and everything without slowing. After a short while, I could not imagine where he could possibly find anything else in that truck to toss out. The amount of trash, books, papers, bottles, odds and ends (including the glove compartment door, I think), etc., that he had already thrown out was enormous.

As we topped the ridge and the road straightened out, heading downward, I observed him removing his shirt and

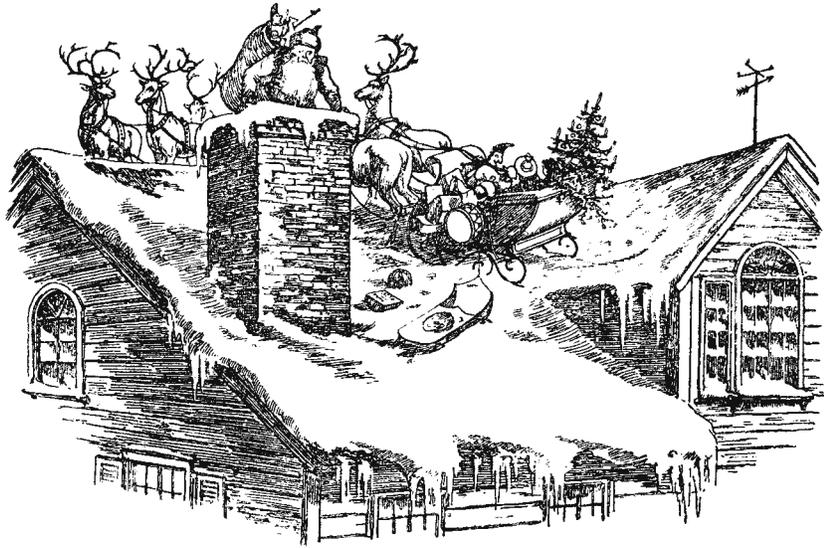
tossing it out the window. Down this entire straight stretch of mountain road, with no cell phone service available, he continued to weave and remove article after article of clothing. He tossed each in turn out the window.

He seemed almost oblivious to my presence on the road in front of him, sometimes not far behind, other times he was pretty far back.

By this time I had several very serious concerns. Whatever he was up to, one thing seemed perfectly clear by now. He was apparently capable of most anything. I did not fear for my personal safety, but his current and potential future actions were of immediate concern. My only option, considering I had no chance of reaching authorities by cell phone, was to continue down the road toward Damascus. This being a week day, near noon, the town police should be around the office. I could stop and alert them of what I had witnessed and they could take what actions they deemed necessary. Whatever the driver of this white pickup was up to, for public safety alone, he probably should not be driving.

Down the mountain we continued, occasionally passing a car or truck going the other direction. I feared, as he kept weaving's across the road, he might strike another vehicle, perhaps one filled with children. As I entered town, the white pickup still behind me, traffic was moderate, and the sidewalks were busy with Christmas shoppers. Traveling down main street, I neared the police station. Out front, a cruiser was parked. I knew someone was there.

Looking carefully, I found a parking space directly across the road from the police station, with nowhere to park behind me, forcing



## BELL cont.

the pickup to continue on by. This he did, for about 50 feet and came to a screeching stop, sliding on the pavement and into the grass ahead. Jumping out, he ran toward the rear of his vehicle, passed behind his truck, and into a used car lot directly ahead of him, stark naked. He bounded into a car, the door having been left open, and was immediately spotted by the car lot owner, who was standing outside his office.

I remained in the sleigh.

By now two of the town policemen had heard the squeal of tires and the commotion on the street. They came rushing out of the office to see what was the matter. "Stephen, across the street," I hollered out my window to one I knew. I pointed in the direction where the streaker was now just standing, naked in the car lot, having abandoned the car which had no keys.

Very quickly a cruiser was brought in, he was handcuffed, covered and secured into the back seat of the cruiser, bound for the local jail and

whatever fate lay ahead for him.

Being witness to the entire affair, I waited in the sleigh until one of the officers came up and asked me for a statement. I got out of the sleigh to stand on the sidewalk. People passed by, some waving. A school bus filled with children passed by. I waived and smiled to all the smiling faces plastered to the windows. I heard someone tell them that Santa had helped the cops capture a bad guy. No problem for the children. They didn't see the streaker anyway. After detailing what I witnessed for the officers report, I continued (somewhat shaken) on my way.

I still had about 19 more stops to make this day.

I reached home that evening, exhausted but energized from the events and encounters of the day, as I made my way around the region following the incident. I had the next two days scheduled off to rest, refresh the suit and prepare for the final countdown and the few, but extremely busy days ahead.

The next day, a reporter, and fellow employee called. With this call things

headed, and continued downhill. Throughout the afternoon there were conversations with the reporter and long conversations with my boss. I had one powerful and primary concern with the story, and that was "trying to somehow protect the man's children,"

The story ran the following morning, front page, above the fold, complete with a mug shot and of course the man's name.

I had learned the day before the man had basically overmedicated himself before his visit to the dentist. I had also learned he had three young children at home. And Santa had been the one who witnessed their father's very public mistake.

The day the story ran was a very long day for Santa Claus.

In a couple of days I would have to do one of the most difficult things I have ever done in my life. I would have to get up, put on the red suit, and walk into Damascus again following the publication of the story and Santa's quotes. I had no idea what the citizens of the town might think. I had been their Santa for 8 years. Perhaps they might prefer 'Santa' not return. I did not know.

My first stop that morning was at the building that housed the police department and the fire department. There I always stocked up on candy for the days' visits throughout town. Going in, I found one of the town's police officers (Sgt. Rouse) and told him of my concerns and my questions concerning my continued role in Damascus during the Holidays. He looked me straight in the eye and said, as far as he knew, "everyone" wanted me out there, making my rounds leading up to Christmas Eve.

See BELL next page

## **BELL cont.**

So I loaded up goodies and made my way up the street. Damascus seemed deserted. I walked into the first shop (open for just over a year) to visit with the proprietor and any customers inside. After being admonished by the owner for missing her on my previous year's visits (which I humbly apologized for), a customer began to tell me of an experience they had recently.

I found myself listening to this wonderful experience about grandparents who had passed some years before. It had been such a blessing and changed their life in many ways, I was told. This started a reconnection with real life.

By this time, three or four more customers had entered the store, beaming and happy to encounter Santa on their morning rounds. Talking and listening and passing out candy canes, I became enveloped within the Spirit of Christmas. It was not me. But it was all around me. Leaving the store for my next stop, my eyes almost betrayed my senses. There were cars and people everywhere. As if they had magically appeared quite suddenly, manifest from elsewhere and when.

I continued the wondrous sleigh ride through town, visiting shops, homes and children everywhere I went. The Spirit of Christmas was filling the air, permeating everything I witnessed before me. And I knew it was not me. But I was blessed to be witness and enveloped within.

It was December 23. Tomorrow would be Christmas Eve.

A few weeks earlier I had found this wonderful brass acorn bell. I ordered a few and ended up wearing 9 of the bells on my suit. Three on each boot, embedded within the

white fur, and three attached to the snowball on the hood of my jacket. I wear one for each of the reindeer. When I walk they sound like sleigh bells on reindeer flying above rooftops, and Christmas in the snow.

The next morning, Christmas Eve, I awoke early. Excitement filled the air.

It had been a bad news week in Damascus leading into Christmas this year. First came the stalker, witnessed by none other than Santa, which made the front page of the local newspaper. Later the same day that the stalker appeared, a methamphetamine lab (spewing foul and toxic fumes) caused the evacuation of a three-story apartment complex at Woods Landing.

All the residents, many elderly, had nowhere else to go. They were taken in by concerned citizens, friends, family and some put up in local motels. Places were found for everyone. The resulting damage and cleanup of the building, meant they would be out of their homes for days, maybe weeks. And Christmas was almost here.

Over the years, I always looked forward to visiting the residents there, handing out candy canes and wishing all a Merry Christmas. And I had found out last night, December 23rd, the residents would be moving back into their apartments today! For them, it must be pure joy to be home for Christmas. For me, I looked forward to seeing some old friends and wishing them a special Merry Christmas this year.

After making my stops, visiting the downtown area of town, I made my way to Woods Landing. As I arrived there were several people in the parking lot. They were unloading and carrying their belongings back into their homes, talking, laughing and hugging each other, glad to be home.

I talked, I laughed, and almost cried

as I made my way through the first floor, apartment by apartment, handing out candy canes and hugs. The air crackled with excitement, as the emotions of the residents soared up and down, high and low, sadness and joy all wrapped together, remembering the events of the week. They were returning home on Christmas Eve. From the first floor to the second, then I moved on to the third. Stepping off the elevator on the third floor, the hallway was empty except for one frail, small lady off to my left, just getting ready to enter her apartment.

A smile beamed across her face as she exclaimed, "Santa!"

I walked over to where she was standing, wishing her a very hearty Merry Christmas, and welcome home. She was so excited, but also had a sadness. I could feel her emotions as we talked about the events of the week and being back home for Christmas. She was joyous and depressed and happy and sad. At one point I thought she was going to break down to tears.

I heard a bell drop onto the floor, beside my left boot. When I glanced down, I recognized the bell as one of the brass acorn bells like on my suit.

As I bent over, reaching down to retrieve it, several thoughts went through my mind in a flash. I knew I would need to replace a bell when I returned home that evening, as it must have fallen off of my boot, one of the three. But in the same flash I also thought (foremost in my mind and without doubt); "this must be for you!" as I reached out my palm to her, bell in hand. This was Christmas magic to her and for me.

You would have thought I had given her a bar of gold.

**See BELL next page**



“Another Stocking to Fill,” by Thomas Nast. From Harper’s Weekly, Jan 3, 1880.

### **BELL cont.**

A simple brass bell (seemingly fallen from my suit) was a precious gift to her.

We talked a short while longer, but not long, as she seemed very content and very excited to be home. And it was Christmas Eve. Santa was here and he had given her a gift. A gift that she must have needed.

I said good-by, headed back to the sleigh, and on to my next stop this Christmas Eve.

There were only a few left, as it was already late afternoon and dusk was not far behind. It would soon be time to climb in the sleigh behind the reindeer and make my annual journey.

Before leaving town I had a walk through of the local Food City. The store was packed with last minute Christmas dinner shoppers and children all filled with excitement. It was candy canes for all, and warm wishes everywhere. As I turned up one aisle in the store, I stopped in my tracks. I backed slowly and quietly away (Just far enough not to intrude) but simply observe. In front of me was Christmas manifest into reality. Two old friends; friends who had not seen each other for many, many years, had stumbled into each other in the aisle of the grocery store on Christmas Eve. The joy in front of me was yet another very powerful and magic element of the Christmas Spirit.

I made my way back to the sleigh to restock candy canes before visiting the Family Dollar store across the lot.

Opening the door of the Family Dollar as dusk arrived in town, I began to laugh a boisterous laugh. I saw before me, all the cashiers standing at their registers, staring straight at me, and they all were wearing antlers! Laughing and joining in the moment, I heartily bellowed out, “there you are, I have been tracking you all afternoon. We have to go. It is almost dark and we have lots and lots to do.” Everybody in the store was laughing and the Spirit of Christmas was in the air. It was a moment in time (timeless and boundless) another element of Christmas cheer.

As I traveled homeward that Christmas Eve I reflected on the events of the very powerful and magical Holiday. I had been

**See BELL next page**

## BELL cont.



honored and blessed to be witness to people coming together in the true Spirit of Christmas, opening their hearts and lending a helping hand to neighbors and strangers alike.

I arrived at home and began to remove the suit. My mind was reeling with the love and magic manifest from this day, and this Christmas. I started with the boots. At that point I saw there were still 3 bells firmly attached to my left boot, and also on my right. The bell must of fallen from my hood. Removing my belt and jacket, I discovered all three bells, firmly attached. All 9 were here and accounted for.

Yet one had remained behind.

I sat and I was truly humbled, so grateful for my opportunity to wear the red suit. I understood one thing very clearly, and very profoundly. The bell, the one which dropped onto the floor by my left boot, wherever it manifest from, the bell was a gift for her.

In this year, through these events, actions and consequences, I had begun to find Santa manifest within myself. I had watched the Spirit of Christmas grow and manifest into real magic and wonder right in front of me.

I found myself transformed. I found the Heart of Santa Claus.

Bill McKee

<http://www.theSantaClaus.com>





"The Old Homestead - Going Home for the Holidays," by Granville Perkins.  
From Harper's Weekly, Dec. 25, 1875



# 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](http://www.Santa-America.org) or contact our Executive Director Cathy Barnette at 251.379.0462 or [info@santaamerica.org](mailto:info@santaamerica.org)

Photos courtesy of Elizabeth McGonagle Graham, Lasting Memories Photography.

# *Yes, Virginia*

## *There IS A Santa Claus*

Eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon wrote a letter to the editor of New York's Sun, and the quick response was printed as an unsigned editorial Sept. 21, 1897. The work of veteran newsman Francis Pharcellus Church has since become history's most reprinted newspaper editorial.

"DEAR EDITOR: I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.' Please tell me the truth; is there a Santa Claus?"

-VIRGINIA O'HANLON,  
115 West Ninety-Fifth Street

"VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except [what] they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, VIRGINIA, there is a Santa Claus.

He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus. It would be as dreary as if there were no VIRGINIAS. There would be no childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence.

We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished. Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies!

You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas Eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if they did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there.

Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world. You may tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond.

Is it all real?

Ah, VIRGINIA, in all this world there is nothing else real and abiding. No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood."

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### **Masthead Artwork by Stephanie Suzanne Sentinella**

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