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"Christmas is pretty similar to the U.S. except that Santa Claus gives us presents personally on Christmas Eve instead of putting them in socks," he said.

The Swedes go to church very early on Christmas morning and then have a special Christmas dinner including a "smorgas-board", big ham, "lutfisk", herring and reindeer meat.

"Oh yes, Santa Claus eats oatmeal cereal, too, not cookies," Johnson said. New Year celebrations are about the same.

Christmas Eve day is the main holiday in Finland. Hellevi Kojo-Austin, a sophomore sociology student from Helsinki said the festivities begin at noon when the national radio stations declare Christmas peace, the stores close and the Christmas tree is brought into the house.

They spend the afternoon in the Christmas sauna, which is made very hot for Christmas, she said.

The dinner, held at six o'clock features a whole pig cooked overnight, rutabago and potato casseroles, rice pudding and soup with dried fruits.

"Whoever finds the almond in the rice pudding is supposed to get married that year," she said.

Santa Claus, who supposedly lives on a

Santa Claus . . .

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Why would anyone want to be a Santa Claus? According to Clayton Schnell, a local department store Santa Claus, he became a Santa Claus because he "enjoys kids and enjoys talking to them."

Children must enjoy talking to Santa Claus because Schnell estimated that he talks with 70-75 children a day. Of course not all children are anxious to sit on Santa's lap. Schnell said that some children are afraid of him and won't. But this is no problem for Schnell. "If I can get the children on my lap, I can get them to talk," Schnell said.

He said that there are certain gifts that boys ask for and certain gifts that girls ask

mountain in Finnish lapland, comes to the homes about eight o'clock to give presents to the children.

Kojo-Austin said she misses the family traditions she is used to in Finland and mentioned the commercialization in the U.S. In Finland, most of the gifts are hand-made and inexpensive.

New Year's is a time for a lot of drinking, fireworks, speeches and parties, she said.

A Nigerian Christmas is celebrated mostly outdoors, said Godfrey Edoziem, a graduate student in education administration from Owerri.

Since the weather is sunny and dry, people hold dances and plays in the streets, he said. The Christmas dinner consists mostly of rice, chicken and other good meat that each can afford, Edoziem added.

Santa Claus is called Father Christmas and gives gifts, such as a penny, to children in supermarkets. With those exceptions, Christmas is much the same as in the U.S., he said.

New Year's is a different story. At New Year's, everyone gets rid of their garbage, Edoziem said. It's traditional to throw garbage in the streets at midnight to symbolize the New Year is coming and the old is gone.

for. "The girls usually want one of the new dolls on the market and the boys usually want racing sets or one of the space games," Schnell said.

Schnell said, "one boy got off my lap and went over to the toy department to get a truck he wanted. He then brought the truck to me so I could see exactly what he was talking about."

This year is the first year that he has been Santa Claus in a department store. "Before, I was a Santa for churches and schools," Schnell said.

He commented that he did not attend any classes to become a Santa.

"I learned everything on my own."

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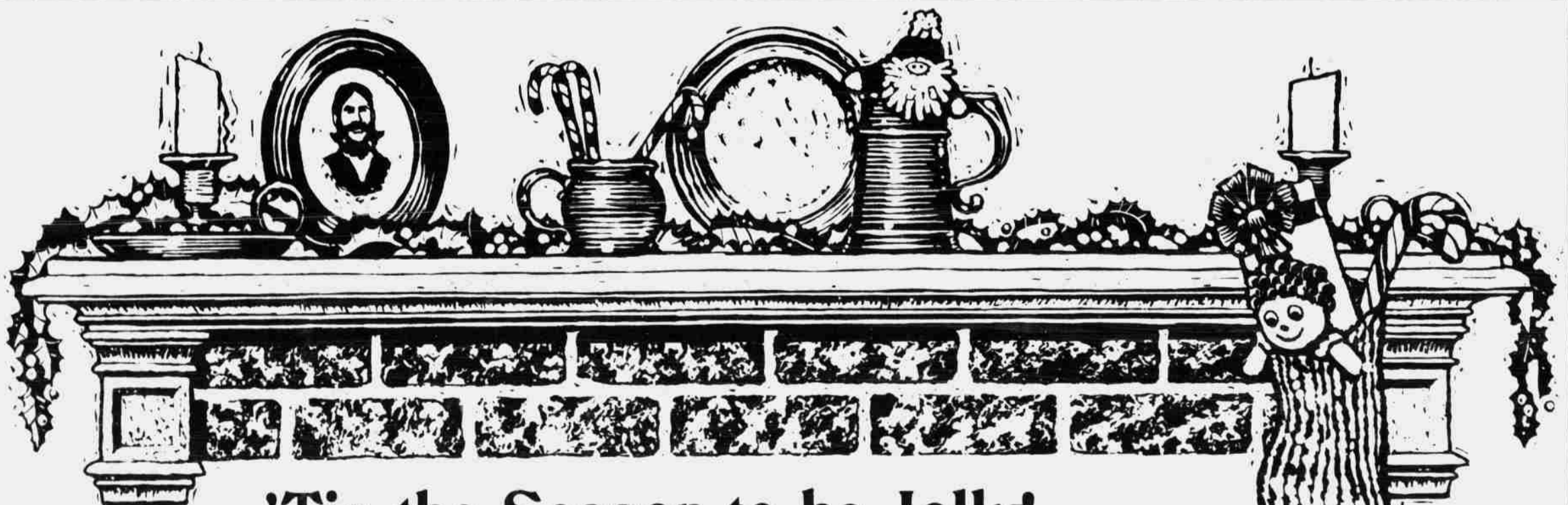
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