

Santa lives

Costume transforms act of kindness into legacy of happiness



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I am Santa Claus. No, really, I am. And I've learned the meaning of Christmas because of it. For what could become a seven-year streak, I've played the prognosticator of prognosticators for a co-worker of my mother's. I know prolonging the myth of Santa ultimately could lead to my future assassination at the hand of someone full of angst because they believed I was indeed jolly old St. Nick. But I truly hope the smiles I bring in the now will make up for the painful truth of the later. Allow me to explain. One foggy Christmas Eve, my mother came to me and dropped a worn box at my feet. She then told me I was going to play Santa for her co-worker Penny's family that night. Turns out, the young'uns became a little suspicious that moments after grandma disappeared, Santa would magically arrive. Hence, I was to play Santa and teach those meddling kids a lesson that Santa is real. Being your typical mad-at-the-world 17-year-old, I refused. She countered with the promise of 10 bucks. Without hesitation, I bent over to the establishment and dropped my pants. A few hours later, I pried myself off the couch and grudgingly slipped into the requisite uniform. The matching velvet pants and jacket, vinyl boots and pillow for the belly made me look like a carbon copy of every department-store Santa in the world and made me all the more irritated at the notion of playing dress-up for some stupid kids I didn't know. But when it came time to top off the ensemble with the billowing beard

and cap, I experienced a rush much akin to an Elvis impersonator strapping on his sideburns - I became Santa Claus.

The plan was quite simple and has been the same ever since. I meet Penny out in the alley, she slips me a 10-spot, hands me the bag of gifts, gives me a quick description of the faces to whom the gifts belong and, like clock-work, Santa makes his appearance. It was originally supposed to be a one-time-only act, but each year, there seems to be a new addition to the family or some faraway relatives coming to town with their kids in tow.

Playing the role of the deity that knows all isn't an easy task, especially for someone with a bad short-term memory. The pressure to get up to six names right, on the first and only try, is incredible. One slip-up, and the myth could be gone prematurely. Every time I've made the walk to the front door - sorry, no chimneys for this Santa - the names are repeated over and over in my head, leaving no time to get into character until I ring the doorbell.

And that's when all hell breaks loose on the holiest of holidays. Ho-ho-ho-ing into an explosion of blinding flashbulbs and screaming children is frightening for a second or two, but the moment I can see again, the smiling kids launch the Santa act into the stratosphere.

Let's see, one year my impression of Santa featured Santa impersonating Elvis. During another Christmas, I got the kids to do the Macarena. Last

year, I pulled the unthinkable and single-handedly delivered a La-Z-Boy in addition to the regular booty. My wry sense of humor and feeble

attempts at getting the sultry niece to sit in my lap and give

Santa a kiss always have the adults rolling in laughter. Above all, I've never lost my beard in the mayhem, blinked in a photo or forgotten a single name.

What really gives me the most gratitude is the realization that, in this family, the materialism of the gifts isn't important. I could hand out lumps of coal and I don't think anyone would care.

A little experiment proved that it isn't just this one family that knows Christmas isn't about receiving gifts of value and prestige.

I had just completed my second run as Santa, and on my way home I decided it was time to make the best use of the costume. I flipped a quick U-turn and headed for Cory's house.

He was the one person I knew who could sneak out on Christmas Eve.

Here we were, two juvenile delinquents - one dressed as Santa, the other like a normal kid. And they were both riding in a 1973 Volkswagen Bus, resplendent in all its bumper-stickered glory.

A chance like this came around only once a year, and we were going to make the most out of it. The best plan our corrupt minds could think of was to buy beer down at the local 7-Eleven.

Logic told us that there'd be no way the clerk would dare ask Santa for identification.

Instead, we wussed out before the barley pops

were even removed from the cooler. After a few games of pinball, the Santa suit began to take control over me. I had an uncontrollable desire to play Santa on a grand scale.

We spent the entirety of my \$10 salary, minus two Slurpees and two rounds of pinball, on fruity Chiclets. Our new plan was to drive about town and give them out to anyone and everyone.

As we walked out into the cold, a family entered the store. A quick glance made it obvious that this wasn't exactly the merriest Christmas for them. "It's Santa Claus!" cried their rosy-cheeked daughter, who could not have been more than 3 or 4. Without hesitation, I reached into my goody bag and handed her the first pack of Chiclets. The girl's exclamation of wide-eyed excitement told us that this was her only gift of the day.

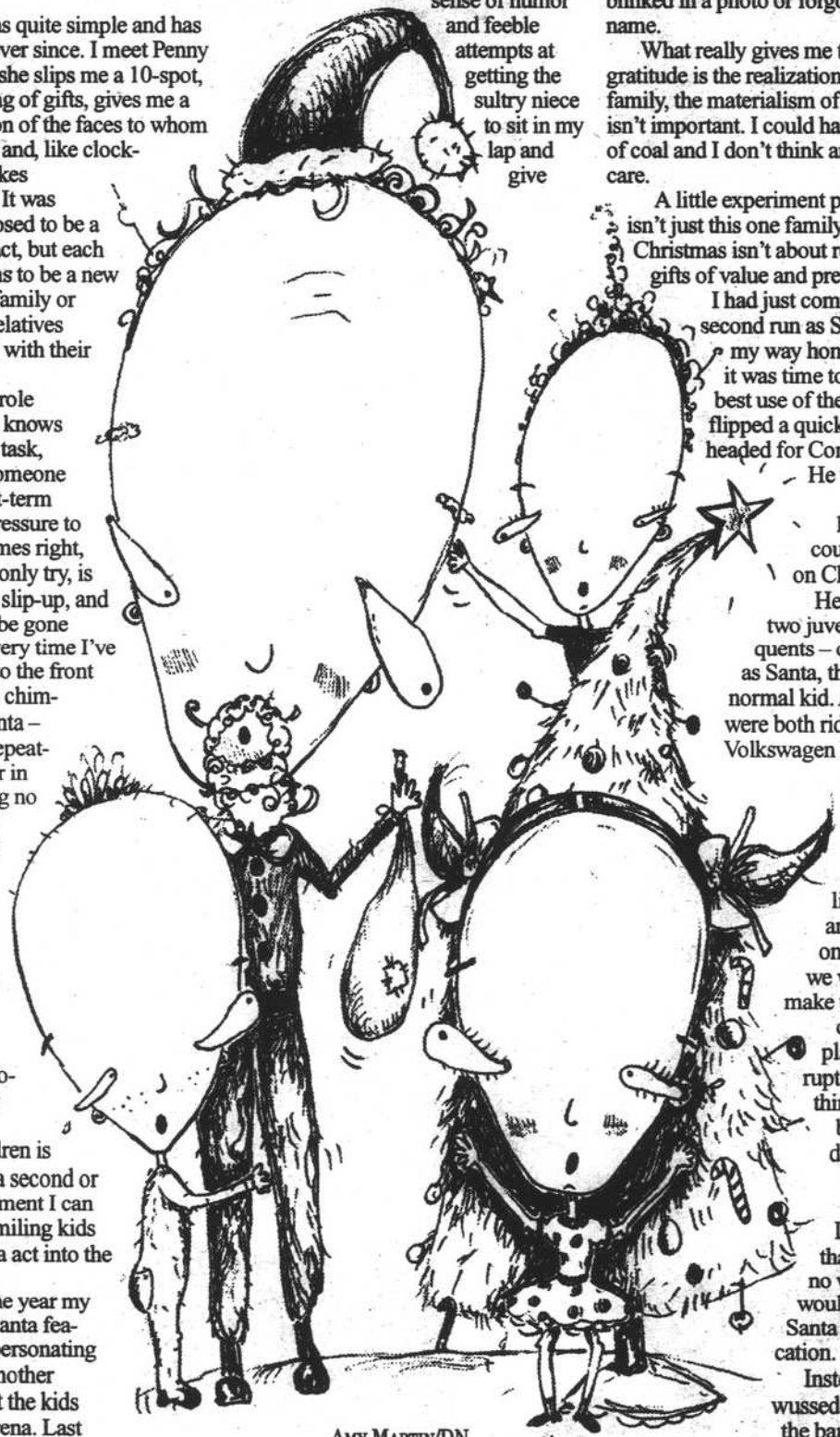
Six years later, I vividly remember that moment. A box of Chiclets, no more than 50 cents, was enough to bring joy into this girl's life and let her experience that same feeling that millions of others take for granted. Santa had finally paid her a visit.

For the next couple hours, Cory and I were an anomaly, pattering about town in a heaterless Volkswagen Bus, screeching to a halt at any sign of life and leaping out to hand the bewildered souls a box of Chiclets and wishes of a merry Christmas.

As the night wore on, we found ourselves resorting to following cars and honking until they stopped. On every occasion, people were shocked and confused but happy for the Chiclets and Christmas cheer. One family we pulled over even had us pose for a photo. On any other night, two high schoolers in a hippie van means nothing but trouble, but give them a Santa suit and some Chiclets and watch out.

This Christmas, try not to let materialism get the best of you. So what if you don't find a Furby or shiny new North Face jacket under the tree? Just think for a second about that little girl who was elated by 10 multicolored pieces of gum. Maybe then, that bah humbug lump of coal will un lodge itself and the spirit of Christmas will make itself clear - it's better to give than to receive.

Happy holidays, everyone.



AMY MARTIN/DN

Male-order pride

Real '90s man should rediscover true masculine spirit



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What is a man? Some men could presume to know, because they exhibit qualities characteristic of the sex. They are men's men, the last of a dying breed, perhaps. They are tough, physical, intelligent - the solid rock standing out above a squeamish, plush civilization. But in this society, in our present situation, can a man remain a man, the way men were in generations previous? The ideal in the overextended society is to create the '90s Man; the idea being to lay aside the primal instincts in men and soften them to

the future, making them captives of their own emotions.

To some extent, men are forgotten.

The emphasis in recent years has been to eliminate the stereotypes surrounding women in the areas of critical and logical thinking and reasoning in math and science.

Since the women's movement became visible in the 1920s, the trend has shifted to admire the strong will of a woman.

Today, men continue to dominate the majority of the world's leadership in business, science and technology. Women still hit the glass ceiling in most jobs, and, for the most part, there aren't a great deal of male homemakers.

Men still enjoy the power in being men, and women are now learning their own powers as females in an opened world.

But after thousands of years of civilization and maleness, the world in our time doesn't know what to do with men.

Men don't know what to do with themselves.

There is a void that needs to be filled - an unexplainable gap between what women are becoming and what men have been in the past.

They have forgotten what it is to be men, to act like men. And all the more scary, nobody is willing to teach them.

Male children born today will be brought up in a world of turmoil and confusion over what their place in life will be. If their mothers and fathers are in the workplace, they are raised by surrogate institutions such as schools or, worse, daycare facilities.

To use a catch phrase of our society: Without a strong male role model, the next generation of men will be less able to deal with their roles as men. They will be detached from society and well behind females.

In schools, male children may be getting less attention as teachers may be more concerned with helping female students develop their math and science skills.

For people such as Thomas Mortenson, the author of a report explaining the downfall of future generations of men, the idea of males falling off the charts in terms of education is becoming a reality.

Studies like the one done by Mortenson, indicating the downward trend of male college graduates, say the graduation rate of men will be hovering around single digits in the

mid-21st century.

While such studies are inflated, unrealistic and exaggerated, there still is a reason for concern underlying the shock value of these reports.

But to go so far as to say that there will be no male college graduates in 100 years is a farce. Men will not cease to earn degrees entirely, though it is possible, as the percentages show, that the number of degrees awarded will decline.

In addition, it is laudable, not lamentable, that women are gaining ground and overtaking men in the race for college degrees.

It has been a great age in the world. More ports have been opened to more people than during any other time in history.

For the most part, it would seem that males aren't the ambitious ones in the modern society. What has come easy for so many years is now being challenged by enthusiastic women.

But men need to act like men. The male children being born today need to look to this generation for support, a crucial framework for their continuance in the spread of world affairs.

Men need to rise to the challenges now posed by the '90s Woman and make new marks, being willing to

join with women in advancing the society.

At this point, a war between the sexes does exist - a war of influence and dominance and, to some extent, it is being won by women.

There is no need for such a struggle but to buffer the egos on either side of the gender line. Males in this generation need to accept the fact that women can maintain the lifestyle of high-powered executives and scholars.

Men also need to discover themselves again - a reinvention of the male spirit, so to speak.

When men can redevelop new ideas about their roles and adapt in the new political and business world environment molded by the advancement of women, the future society will be better fused.

At the same time, men need to hold on to what has been working for many years - the idea of aggressive, austere persistence in dealing with all matters.

Such a balance will prove beneficial for men as well as women - and men can feel comfortable in what could be a new world for males, while still clinging dearly to the precepts that have defined maleness throughout the centuries.