

Being Santa

“There you are. I found you!” exclaimed a young woman as she rushed toward my husband as we browsed in a toy store. “Flowing white hair, a kindly smile,” she continued. “You even have a twinkle in your eye. I’m the President of a costume house and I’ve been on the search for a Santa to model our line of Santa regalia for a new catalogue. I knew the moment I saw you, you were perfect. And to find my Santa in a toy store! Wow.”

Thus, began our journey into all things Santa Claus. What a fantastic adventure it’s been. As my husband took on the persona of the man in red, children flocked to him, no matter where we were or what we were doing. Even in shorts and a T-shirt, they thought he was the real deal.

Often, in a restaurant, we’ve heard “Santa” and a child will make a beeline for him. He puts on his glasses, tilts his head, and with a twinkle in his eye, chuckles a hearty ho-ho-ho.

“You found me,” he says, “but I’m in disguise. I can’t fool you, though!”

“Are you the real Santa?”

“What does the real Santa look like?” he replies. Does he have a white beard?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I have a white beard. Does he wear glasses and laugh ho-ho-ho?”

“Yes,” chorus the children.

“I wear glasses and laugh ho-ho-ho. Let’s see. How can we tell if I’m the real guy? I know. There’s an official test to solve the question. If I’m really him, I would know all the names of the reindeer. Right? Okay, let’s see if I know them. There’s the famous guy with the green nose.”

“No,” the children shout. “He has a red nose.”

By this time, the whole restaurant is tuned into the conversation.

“Right. I can’t fool you. That’s Rudolph. Who are the others? There’s Sleepy, Bashful and Doc.”

The children giggle. “No, Santa, those are the seven dwarfs!”

Santa chuckles. “You’re right again! Let’s see, there’s Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner and Blitzen. I know them all. I guess I must be Santa!”

From there, the conversation goes anywhere from “Where are the reindeer?” to “We’ve moved. Will you be able to find me this year?” Santa always answers them with gentleness and warmth. Often adults stop by our table to say, “You’ve got me believing you’re the real Santa.”

One of my husband’s favourite memories is of the time that our granddaughter asked her grandfather, “Bucka, will you come to my school in your Santa suit for show and tell?”

He was blown away. Never in all his life did he expect to be the subject of show and tell for a kindergarten class.

“I would love to come,” he said. “Let me call your teacher and make arrangements.”

Donning his Santa suit, he walked into her class with a hearty ho-ho-ho. Some of the children squealed and rushed to him for hugs. Some had never seen Santa up close before and were shy and anxious. He shared songs and told stories. He listened, really listened, to each child. Those who were scared soon learned there was nothing to fear. The children and adults all left the school happy and laughing. Once again, his fun and gentle demeanor brought the magic of Christmas to a small corner of the world.

Another time, at a children's Christmas party, Santa was giving out gifts to the children and laughing with them. A small girl had jumped to her feet as soon as he entered the room. She tugged on her mother's hand and pulled her out the door. As she was leaving she looked back and glanced at Santa from under her lowered eyelids. Her face was white and she wore a frown.

I followed them. She was shaking and crying. I approached her mom and asked if I could speak with her. Her mom told me her name was Maddy and that she didn't want to go into the room if Santa was there.

"Are you afraid of Santa?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why you're afraid of him?"

"No."

"Is it because of the big red suit or the loud ho-ho-ho?"

"No."

"Is it his beard?"

"Yes."

"Well, Santa is my very best friend. He's very gentle and won't hurt you, I promise. The beard can make him look a little scary, but it's quite soft. He'll let you touch it if you'd like. Would that help you to not be afraid?"

"No, I don't want to go in there."

"Okay. You can meet him when you're ready."

"Okay."

I left Maddy and her mom and returned to the party. A short while later, I noticed them enter the room. Cautiously, Maddy moved closer to where the children were sitting. Her name

was called to receive her present. Taking her mom's hand, she guardedly approached his chair. She stood so that her mom was between her and Santa. He sensed her fear and gently began to talk to her.

“What would you like to do?”

“I would like to sing ‘Feliz Navidad’.”

“Do you know that song?” asked Santa. “I know that song too! Let's sing it together.”

They began to sing and she started to smile. When they were finished, Maddy's mom said, “Wasn't there something you wanted to ask Santa?”

“Yes,” replied Maddy. “Can I touch your beard?”

“Of course.”

Maddy moved closer to him, reached out her small hand and gently touched his beard. Santa lifted his hand and softly touched her hair.

“See, it's just like your hair, only yours is brown and mine is white,” whispered Santa.

Maddy's eyes widened and she started to giggle. She and Santa smiled at each other for a long time. Then they laughed and she gave him a big hug. Maddy's mom gave him a hug also and whispered, “Thank you so much for helping my girl.”

Being Santa is magical. My husband loves to make the children laugh and smile. To think it all started because a young woman found him in a toy store! He is grateful for that day and the circumstances that brought them together.

Coincidence? He doesn't think so.

“I love keeping the dream alive for the little ones. That’s what being Santa is all about, not just at Christmas but throughout the year. To be able to share hope, laughter and joy with people is awesome. I’m a lucky man.”