

Christmas Is Love...

A Story For The Season

By Dr. Richard Betts

While taking a shower recently, a long past memory of a bygone holiday season popped into my head. Maybe this remembrance was pulled from the depths of my mind because of the early installation of Christmas decorations throughout the city. People are already scurrying from store to store trying to find that perfect gift for everyone on their list. However, holiday cheer seems to be missing this holiday season.

Prior to my current career, I was in the entertainment business. The holiday season was a time to provide carolers and Santa Claus appearances to Christmas parties. As you can imagine, from Thanksgiving to Christmas Day, my company was very busy.

I played Santa Claus. Yes, with my 6 foot, 5 inch height, late twenty something age and my slim build, physically I resembled no Santa Claus depicted in any story or television show. With a warm velvet high end Santa costume, beautiful silky beard and wig perfectly quaffed, two bed pillows to give a more portly vision and my natural soothing bass voice I became a very convincing Santa Claus but not so elfin like. I truly enjoyed the holiday season for no other reason than to spread Christmas cheer.

For one event, I arrived outside a large windowed gathering room where the party festivities had already begun as I viewed children of all ages enjoying the glowing warm atmosphere. A beautiful Christmas tree sparkling decked in reds, greens, silver and gold anchored the decorations and ornate stockings hung on the mantle bulging at the seams waiting to be unpacked by its intended child. Dancing orange and red flames of the fire added to the warm glow that emanated from the room.

Part of the appearance was to be a reading of "T'was the Night Before Christmas" to the entire group. As I prepared to make my grand entrance I anticipated the surprised and excited faces as in times past but little did I know I would

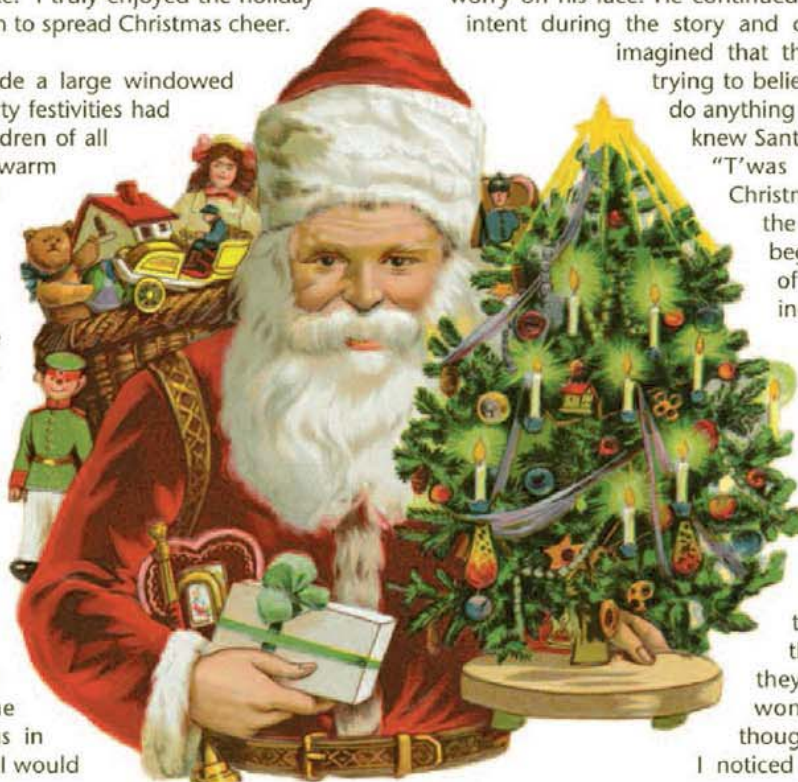
also have my own Christmas surprise.

Upon opening the door and entering with sleigh bells jangling around my wrists and "Ho Ho Hos," the pleasure of each child was evident through their excited screams of joy as adults tried to corral the children into one area so that I could begin my story. Once settled on the lavishly decorated loveseat that would be my home for the next hour I felt comfortable and at peace portraying the character of Santa Claus. As I settled, I took a quick scan of the room, as I always did, to see if there were any little ones that seemed to be frightened of me. Everyone looked back at me with that young eye sparkling anticipation. "What is he waiting for?...We're quiet why isn't he starting?...Oh my gosh what is his problem?...If he doesn't start I just don't know what I'll do" was the attitude.

I began with a "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" sing-a-long. Most of the anticipatory faces melted into complete bliss; however, there was one young fellow I noticed with a look of worry on his face. He continued to look at me with great intent during the story and carols. From experience I imagined that this was a child who was trying to believe that Santa Claus could do anything but because of his past he knew Santa couldn't help him.

"T'was the Night Before Christmas" was read and all of the songs were sung. I had begun the fascinating ritual of listening to each individual's list of what they wanted Santa Claus to bring them. Barbies, bikes, puppies, a horse, power rangers, and skateboards were the general wants and a few said, "Whatever you think I deserve Santa." These children I would always ask what they would like me to bring their parents. Of course, they would always have wonderful, loving and thoughtful ideas for them.

I noticed that the line had finally



dwindled down to four children. At the very end of the line was the young boy that caught my eye earlier. His stare was intense and hopeful still trying to decide whether Santa could help him. I finished with the three children before him and now it was his turn.

As he stood there and looked into my eyes and I into his, I said, "Hello young fellow, would you like to tell Santa what you want for Christmas?"

With an intense look of concentration still on his face he softly said, "Yes."

Being closer to me I could see that he was no more than seven years old. I invited him on my lap but he declined letting me know that he didn't want to hurt me. I just smiled and patted the seat cushion next to me. He hesitated for a moment and then sat beside me.

I knew this was going to be an interesting conversation but he needed some Christmas cheer desperately so I began with, "Are you having a good time?...This is a very nice party."

"It's fine... I just have other things on my mind," said the boy, as he looked around the room.

"Yes I've noticed that you might... Would you like to tell me what you want me to bring you for Christmas?" I asked.

Those intense dark eyes became sad as he turned toward me and looked into my eyes and said, "Santa, I don't want anything for Christmas..."

After a long gazing pause he said, "All I want is my daddy back."

I had to hesitate as this is the first time I had this request. I continued, "Is your daddy in the army helping our country? Is that why he isn't with you?"

He thought about this as his eyes became more sad and glossy, and then responded with a slow soft, "No." He then took a moment, he looked up and my eyes met his, "He's...in heaven with God."

I felt every fiber of my being well up with sadness and loss. He and I were connected experiencing the same hurt feelings. What was I to do? What was I to say? This young fellow was looking for answers to questions he didn't understand and comfort from me I wanted to give but wasn't sure how.

"I see, and you miss him very much?" I said.

"Yes... I do," he replied. As he looked up at me with those longing eyes he said, "I know you probably can't do this... but I have to ask... can you bring my daddy home for Christmas?"

I felt my mind move a million miles a second trying to find something to say to this child that would help with all of the pain and hurt. That night someone must have been watching over me because something popped into my head and so I asked, "What is it about your daddy that you miss the most?"

Without hesitation, "His hugs...I felt safe and loved when he hugged me," as tears began to stream down his face and a slight smile emerged obviously remembering those cherished times of what his fathers arms felt like around his small frame.

I was glad to be hidden by the beard and wig for underneath it was all I could do to keep from crying. With tears welling up in my eyes, I barely kept my composure, looking sincerely into his gaze with a slight crackle in my voice, "Would you like a hug from Santa?"

His watery eyes looked up at me with a barely audible polite, "Yes, please."

We hugged for what seemed to be an eternity as the young boy wept softly in my arms. Both of us experiencing memories of our fathers loving embrace. I waited for him to release his arms in hopes to make him feel safe and give him a Christmas memory of those embraces that he so cherished from his daddy.

We broke our embrace and as he wiped his tears I asked, "Does your mommy give you hugs?"

"Of course, Santa," he responded, as if to say that was a crazy question.

"I have an idea."

"What is it Santa?" he said asked, as a big smile blossomed with anticipation.

"Why don't you pretend that some of those hugs that your mommy gives you are hugs from your daddy... in heaven."

He looked deep into my eyes with a questioning expression and finally, "That's a great idea...I can do that Santa...Yes, I can do that." He gave me a big hug and thanked me. With a huge smile he joined the festivities and I never saw this young boy again.

Lessons are learned from the oddest of places. It surprised me that from such a small boy I could learn the real meaning of Christmas. It isn't about the giving of presents, it's about the simple giving of love. Hugs are free and they don't need to be gift wrapped. Most gifts are forgotten after a couple of weeks, but a never ending supply of hugs is more valuable than any gift. No matter how old you are children really only want their parents attention, time and especially hugs to feel safe and loved.

Don't worry about not having enough money to buy gifts. Remember it's not about the gifts for gifts are only a cold uncaring object. A warm embrace, your time and love are what children of all ages really yearn for. Give hugs freely for you never know when your time will come when you'll be..."in heaven with God."

Dr. Richard Betts is a Baldwin Park resident who practices Acupuncture, Chiropractic and Nutrition and is currently accepting new patients. Go to www.drrichardbetts.com for more health information.

