

WEEBLE WORDS

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CHRISTMAS COMES BUT ONCE A YEAR? Santa Ron Kearns

“Christmas comes but once a year, and when it comes it brings good cheer” – or so the old saying goes. But when you are Santa Claus, those old sayings don’t always ring true. Sometimes, waiting for December 25th just won’t do.

I had become a Santa through my position as Chaplain for the Steilacoom, WA Police Department. After several years as being the town Santa Claus, I became aware of the need for Santas to be more than just a lap to sit upon and a round, jolly vehicle for the delivery of toys. There were children who were suffering from serious illnesses, often terminal, for whom a visit from Santa would bring pure joy – and for a brief moment in time, the pain and tubes and worries would disappear because Santa was there. So I signed up with Santa-America to become a Hospice Santa all year long and provide that comfort and joy to children who are sick. I completed all the necessary training and procedures and was ready for my first assignment.

The young woman in charge of Multi-care’s Hospice gave me a call and asked if I’d be willing to be Santa for Giang Tran and her family. Giang Tran (not her real name) was a Vietnamese woman who lived in a very small home with her husband, three children (a mentally challenged daughter in her late teens, a daughter in her early teens, and a 6-year-old son), and her mom. She was dying. Her wish was to celebrate one more Christmas with her family. Not a lot to ask, except this year Christmas wasn’t going to get here soon enough. Christmas was only a month away, but Giang didn’t have that long. “I’d love to!” I responded. How could I deny this woman the desire of her heart? I had also learned long ago that children come in all ages! So off I went to the Tran’s home.

As I walked into their home, I was immediately led into Giang’s bedroom. There were two beds, one for Giang and beside it was a bed for her younger daughter. On the night stands were identical Bibles and Bible Studies; mother and daughter had been studying together. They were both Christians. I entered the room and immediately began greeting them with “Merry Christmas!” and opening my bag of presents to hand out to all there: Giang, her younger daughter, her son, her husband, and her mother. Smiles brightened across faces, and as “Ho Ho Ho’s” echoed

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We need help reaching our children of military families. Please call Santa-America if you can help!

Santa's visit to children come from referrals by the medical community and hospice as well as from special needs educators and social workers.

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photo by Elizabeth
McGonagle Graham

SPIRIT OF SANTA-AMERICA

Santa Ernest



I have just returned from a great meeting of the “Palm Tree Santas.” **Santa Bob Elkin** put together quite an event in Tampa, Florida... 50 Santas and Mrs. Claus attended, and a good time was had by all! We even had Santas from Tennessee and South Carolina who made the trek to Tampa. Lot’s of great fellowship and many great ideas on dress and presentation.

Now is the time for YOU to schedule some local fund-raising events in support of Santa-America before the season starts to impact Santa’s world. I just scheduled a breakfast with Santa, and I’m finalizing our participation in our region’s largest motorcycle charity America bike and sidecar will be making its first official appearance leading 4000+ bikers in a major charity ride for chronically ill children in early November. Your local community is ready to support your visits to special needs children... ..all they need is a call from you to get the ball rolling. Don’t forget, we are also participating in events supporting breast cancer research throughout the month of October. It’s also not too early to contact your local press and develop local articles on your participation in the mission of Santa-America. Most newspapers and local/regional periodicals are already looking for holiday stories with a special twist. I have an interview next week with a Mobile Bay regional magazine. The story will run in the December issue... 2 months from now!

Let’s all spread the word and raise some donations for Santa-America. The Santa Hugs are in production and our first pediatric hospice book “An Angel Comes to Visit “ is at the publishers being proofed for printing. Your local support is critical in making our special gifts for very special children a reality. With Love, Hope and Joy to each of you and the special children we embrace with a big Santa hug...

HELP THE ELF!-ELF NITA

Hello, again, all. We are on the brink of the “Season” again and I’m sure you are all busy with preparations. We’ve been very busy in the Southern North Pole since last Christmas. I’ve worked with many Santa’s who have been busy progressing toward compliancy. I’d say that roughly 20 of those men are brand new to Santa-America. Isn’t that wonderful. They are very conscientious about getting their compliance papers into to me, so that they can appear on our Santa Map and start visiting all those wonderful children and adults we serve. “Santa Hugs” are growing in leaps and bounds!!!! Before we get into the meat of the season, please give some thought (better yet, actions) to getting all your things to me so that I can put my green sticker on your file, which means that it is complete and compliant. I already have begun eliminating some Santa’s from our Map because of no communication from them when I email or call. We must have all the information from you and your hospice to have you remain on our Map. We need to know that you meet the guidelines as outlined in our mission, i.e.: an application on file with me, training completed with a hospice in your community, copies of your back ground check, and TB test results. Unless we get those things, we will have to remove you from our roster. We don’t want to do that. However, we must be what we say we are. So, come on you guys... If for some reason, you don’t get an email from me and you know you haven’t sent things to me, it may be because I have the wrong email address or phone number. Please send me that and I’ll get right back to you. Don’t want to loose anyone because of a clerical error. To end on a positive note, thank you to all of you who have been so diligent in completing your file. Have a great beginning to “fall” and I hope to hear from you soon.



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BEHIND THE RED SUIT

Santa Ron Kearns

Santa, tell us a little bit about yourself?

I'm 64 years old, but relatively new and young at being Santa. I married my grade school/high school sweetheart, both of us at the age of 18. Now, Santa Ron does not recommend marriage at such a young age but it has been 46 years of a tremendous time with Marci, the lady of my life! We have two children and their spouses, Troy and Jenna, and Traci and Scott, and five wonderful grandchildren: Tyler, Fuji, Spencer, Kelsi, and Joshua. We are looking forward to retirement so we can travel and so I can be even more of a full-time Santa. Wouldn't it be great to have an RV painted like Santa's sleigh and just travel all over the US, Canada, and Mexico? Maybe even South America; what a trip! Santa William said it best, "In the eyes of children you see the joy of Christmas; in the hearts of children you see the meaning of Christmas."



Santa Ron Kearns and Mrs. Marci Claus.

What was your first experience as Santa and how did you decide to become Santa?

The answers to both of these questions go hand in hand. I was the police chaplain for the Steilacoom, Washington Police Department and they were in charge of the town's Christmas festivities. I'm not sure how much of the rest of this is true, but this is how it came to me: Officer Whelan, who was in charge of bringing Santa to town, told me that the town's Santa had quit and they needed a new Santa, so at the planning meeting with all the officers which I was strangely absent from, one of them said, "Hey, the Chaplain has the physique for it. Let's get him to do it." So Officer Whelan asked me if I would become Steilacoom's Town Santa. Of course, I couldn't say no; what would happen to all the children at Christmas if Santa wasn't there? I've always been one who, if I was going to do something, I was going to do it right. So not only did I have the physique, but the long white hair and beard began to appear, too – not necessarily a good thing for someone who was supposed to be in a police uniform. But everyone accepted it, the Department, my church, and even the other departments. I was always introduced as Chaplain Kearns and "our Town Santa." Not a bad look in some of the incidents I had to report to, but others? Well, ho, ho, ho! So I'm now retired from the chaplaincy but am still their Santa and Santa for many, many, others. The kids at my church don't know whether to call me Pastor or Santa, so to many of them it's Pastor Santa. Ho, ho, ho!

Anything else you would like to share?

I love being a Santa and the joy it brings to all of the kids and the grown-ups, too. Sometimes the grown-ups are more excited than the kids, as you all already know. But the most outstanding joy and satisfaction that we get, and yet the hardest, is when we go to Mary Bridge Children's Hospital on Christmas morning. The pediatric ward there does an outstanding job of getting every child or teen or baby just what they want for Christmas, and to see their eyes light up when Santa and Mrs. Claus come into the room to bring them a present is worth everything. Giving up Christmas morning with our family to be at the hospital was hard, but bringing joy and laughter to those hurting the most at that time of year makes it a joy to be Santa wherever and whenever he is needed. We know that for some, it is their last Christmas here on this earth, but we also know they will have Christmas every day of their life when they leave this earth. Yes, I truly believe as Santa told me, "In the eyes of children you see the joy of Christmas; in the hearts of children you see the real meaning of Christmas." Ho, ho, ho! I believe!

Giving up Christmas morning with our family to be at the hospital was hard, but bringing joy and laughter to those hurting makes it a joy to be Santa...

—Pastor Santa
(aka Ron Kearns)

Please send in your stories and pictures of your special visits. We need to refresh our photos to better represent the diversity of our Santas and our coverage throughout the country.

Santa-America is member of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO).

Weeble Words

CELEBRATE SANTA UPDATE

We are now less than two hundred days away from Celebrate Santa with over 300 registered attendees! As we begin to enter our busy and happy Christmas Season, all of our chairs are beginning to put the finishing touches to our now *Monster Convention of March* so that we can let it rest and simmer until January. We will need to close registration at 1,000 attendees on the Santa side and hold the number going to the Black Bear/Comedy Barn and Ober Gatlinburg to 750 people total. Make sure we have your payments and registrations to all the things you wish to attend.



Have you seen our new promo videos?! Our latest promotion video for Halloween is on YouTube and can be found at this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ec3y_ZoMyr8. If you haven't visited the new Holly & Shamrock website stop by and say hello. We have already received several emails from the public (and a few Santas) saying they are planning to attend our Santa gathering! Our website address is www.hollyandshamrock.com.

We are having a little difficulty in one area and need your help. **Part of the success of Celebrate Santa depends upon being able to effectively move people around as we need to. In order to do this we need buses... lots and lots of buses.** Now we are able to offer nearly everyone some very inexpensive [read cheap] fares from surrounding markets. But we need to fill those buses and pay rather significant deposits to secure those 55 passenger wonders. We also hope to see a very large gathering from the new Clan Claus, our All Santa Band, and others. We have also decided to allow Santa groups to walk together in the parade. However your group **MUST** send the parade application (NO FEE charged) so that we may assign a number for your group. You may download the parade application from www.celebratesanta.com and fax or mail the form to us. As always, Santa Tim Mack is continuously updating the blog and will have more information on our seminars and entertainment so keep checking our website and our blog at <http://celebratesanta.blogspot.com>.

through the house, spirits were lifted and everyone was thrilled to see what Santa had brought for each one. The social worker asked if I had another gift, and she took me to another room, where the older daughter was sitting with her head down, rocking and unresponsive. When Santa came into the room, she looked up and lit up. I gave her a big teddy bear and she hugged it to herself and then wrapped her arms around both me and the teddy bear. She followed me back to Giang's room where the rest of the family was still enjoying the fun. We visited and then I read to them the story of the very first Christmas. It was a special time – for all of us. Before it was time for me to go, Giang whispered to me: “Now it is all right. I can go home. I've had Christmas with my kids. I truly believe in miracles, and this is mine.” Giang went home to be with Jesus 8 days before Christmas. And although December 25th of 2007 was still filled with tears and grieving, Christmas for the Trans that year was a happy memory of a day in November when Santa came to visit – one the family will cherish for a lifetime.

Being a Hospice Santa is one of the most difficult and rewarding things I do. It breaks my heart to see little children and families who are facing the awful news of a family member who is suffering and may die. Yet, the ability to bring laughter and joy amid the personal crisis is truly a gift from God. I am so honored to be able to be used in this way and my heart is uplifted to know I have played a part in allowing a child – no matter what age – to forget the pain, if only for a few moments. Another Santa I have met told me this: “In the eyes of children is the joy of Christmas, but in the hearts of children is the reason for Christmas.” I believe in Christmas. I believe in the One who came to earth on that first Christmas day. And I believe my Santa friend is right.

CHRISTMAS IS 365! BY ALISON HILL

Perhaps you're tired and a bit exasperated that retailers are in "Christmas Mode" as early as August. Here on the Gulf Coast we are not even through Hurricane season yet! But Christmas has no ending or beginning for one Fairhope, AL child. Her visits from Santa have little to do with the calendar. Three year old Rachael McCully was visited by her very own personal Santa on August 6th receiving the first official "HUG" of the season through Santa-America. Executive Director Cathy Barnette explains "The "HUG" is a polar fleece scarf with mittens attached on the ends designed to remind children that Santa's love and warmth is always with them. It is a symbolic gift to represent Love, Hope and Joy."



Rachael was diagnosed shortly after birth with severe health issues. Within days she required open heart surgery to close a hole in her heart and open a life-threatening blockage in the pulmonary artery. The road to recovery would come slowly with many doctor and hospital visits. It was one of those very visits that brought about the relationships with Santa America. Dr. Nikki Alexander, one of Rachel's treating physicians, knew of the McCully's struggles and recommended her to Santa America.

While Rachel was home to the first official Hug of the season it was the 5th actual visit for Rachel and Santa. Santa Ernest Berger visited her for the first time on November 28, 2006 a year after her first heart surgery, and has continued to meet with her twice a year ever since. So on these last days of summer Christmas may be the furthest thing from your mind, but for Little Rachel McCully she has Santa on the brain and more importantly in her heart 365 days a year.

HEAR YE! HEAR YE!

Greetings Kris Kringle! It is officially Fall and the holiday season will be here before we know it. Most people are not thinking about Santa Claus this time of year, so we encourage you to help them focus on events which happen in October through December. What should you do???

Build a relationship with your area medical society and medical alliances. Let them know about your affiliation with Santa-America and your ability to support medical charities. For example, in October, we recommend you support breast cancer awareness events. Several Santas are even investing in pink santa suits.

It is also a great time to be placed on the agenda for an October, November or December civic or service group presentation. Many of these groups will give a donation to Santa-America that will help support your HUGS for the season. As you set up the presentation, the SA North Pole will help you develop the proper presentation as well as in individualized SA photo sheet.

How about a Breakfast with Santa? Partner with an area restaurant for Santa-America to receive a portion of the breakfast sales for the day. One last idea... contact your area Sam's Club and Wal-Mart and ask them to provide a grant to Santa-America to support your area children. Please contact Elf Nita or Elf Cathy for more information on these ideas or support to make them a reality. We need your help!

SANTA TO DO'S

Elf Nita still needs your paperwork!

Submit your pictures and stories! We'll upload to the website.

Send the name and contact information of a local paper and reporter. We'll send them a note about your involvement with Santa-America.

Contact Santa-America for your e-copy of the Santa-America Volunteer Sleigh Kit.

Identify a venue for a Santa-America fundraiser. Contact Elf Cathy or Elf Nita for details.

Share with elected officials your special visits and the work of Santa-America. Elf Cathy and Elf Nita are ready to support you as needed.

Contact Elf Cathy to learn how you can team up with an area school to build an Elf Program.



Sept. '08

photo by Elizabeth
McGonagle Graham

NEW GUIDE FOR HOSPICE COORDINATORS

Santas, some of you are frustrated that your hospice is not putting you to use as Santa! As Elf Nita continues to talk with volunteer coordinators throughout the country, it became clear that a Santa-America guide for hospice coordinators needed to be created. So many folks do not understand that Santa-America is 365 days a year! Not only does the guide, explain our mission and purpose, it provides direction for the coordinators and has a section of frequently asked questions. The guide can be downloaded via the web or by contacting Elf Nita at ElfNita@santa-america.org.

www.Santa-America.org/visit/

Earlier this year we highlighted the importance of Santa-America capturing your special visits through our visit report form. We know that it has been a number of steps to download from the web, complete and mail. So, as promised, we are thrilled to announce the visit report form has been converted to an interactive form on the Santa-America website. Now all you have to do is complete the form and email photos along with your photo release form. Please call Elf Nita or Elf Cathy if you need more direction or explanation.



Don't forget about print and visual media. We would like to see every Santa have a press release in area newspapers about their involvement and support of Santa-America. Email your contacts to Elf Cathy at CathyBarnette@Santa-America.org or call with questions.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 2009- Celebrate Santa Convention. Visit www.CelebrateSanta.com for details.

Summer 2009 Santa-America Training Conference...details to follow in upcoming issue.

Gathering not listed! Contact us so we can add it to the list!

Love, Hope &
Joy
Wrapped in a
Warm Santa
Hug
for Special
Children &
their Families
365 Days A
Year!



Santa
America

Santa-America
has grown to
almost 300
dedicated
Santas, Mrs.
Claus and Elves
in 44 states and
6 foreign
countries.

WE&BLE WORDS