

# a lot like Christmas

By Leanne Lally

**Of The Print**  
Shopping centers come alive with piped-in music, lights and toys with sparkles in their eyes and excitement in their voices.

"Look, there's Santa," shouts one child and breaks away from Mom's grip to join the mob that has collected around a small, meek, little fellow.

Looking at this poor soul dressed in out-of-style threads, and hair all over his face, one can only feel pity for him. But to see him with an army of kids around him, the picture changes: now one looks at him with envy.

Oh, but to be loved by so many kids is worth more than

any prestigious position around. To be able to bring smiles to those little faces by just standing near is enough to make anyone drop his whole life and run. Or is it?

The old "Santa in the mall" is a familiar sight. Adults saw it as kids, and now their kids are seeing it. The old tradition of sitting on Santa's knee is as well known as . . . well . . . Christmas trees. Every year at this time, little fat men in red suits station themselves in public gathering places and await the arrival of their admirers. They do not have to wait very long.

The mall Santa's trademark is a little house set somewhere in the mall. It is not hard to find, because there is usually a large crowd of tots around it. Santa sits in that house by the hour and takes the requests of hundreds of children.

Some think the job of part-time Santa would be enjoyable and fun. Some do not.

One Santa, who refused to identify himself, says the job is great for people who "do not

want to do much." His obvious dislike of the job, however, did not hinder his magical affect on the kids who came to see him.

"The whole idea of Christmas is so plastic," said the unhappy Saint Nick. "I'm on strike right now and needed some extra money for the holidays."

"I enjoy the kids, but I hate the walking," said Santa, who then turned to greet a line of beaming followers ranging in ages from 2 to 22.

Santa turns from the group and looks down the crowded sidewalk adorned with twinkling lights and bobbing heads. Following his gaze, one can see what disappoints this otherwise jolly symbol.

Looking to the stars, one thinks about the historic event that happened so many years ago in a tiny town. The birth of a saviour, and the people who went to praise him. One wonders if they saw the same stars people see now. I doubt it, I've been staring at a tree.



## Santa loves winos, too

By Kelly Laughlin

**Of The Print**

Playing Santa in Portland's Old Town is a far cry from the day to day activities of a shopping center or mall-type Santa. For Daniel Ray, the change is welcome.

"I like bizarreness," Ray, a student at Portland State University, said. He certainly gets his share of it in Old Town.

There, in red suit and carefully powdered face, he encounters nearly every walk of life, from the down and outers, to street winos and struggling merchants. Ray admittedly came in with a fair amount of pretension and fear, but that was dissolved immediately.

"These are very real people out here. Fear is one emotion you have to get rid of, if you want to relate to them. When I started, I was scared to death. Now I try to get down to their level, and not be afraid to hug them and show them that Santa cares for them, too," he said.

Just as readily though, Ray finds the not-so-socialable types as well. Once, a tin can was tossed at the jolly old elf. He merely replied, "you had better not do that again, or you won't get anything for Christmas."

"Santa was at the scene of a potential mugging. A 'ho-ho-ho' and 'What would you like for Christmas?' was all it took to send the mugger racing from the scene.

There's a certain amount of pretense and respect that goes along with becoming this kind of celebrity, especially in Old Town.

"As soon as you put on that

suit you are no longer anonymous," rather, the center of attention. As a result, Ray has been cautious of the image he presents. To get ready, "I read Charles Dicken's 'A Christmas Carol,' and 'Miracle On 34th Street.' I also keep a picture of Santa on my mirror when I make-up."

Though Ray realizes the stereotype everyone sees of Santa Claus, he doesn't try to "ho-ho" it up too much. In a sense, this Santa wants to rid children of the notion that Santa is a real individual.

"Parents seem to want me to pervade the 'Ho-ho' image of Santa, but I feel that children have more honesty needs than adults. I try to make them understand that though I am real, Santa is just a concept. One kid summed it up beautifully when he said, 'I know Santa Claus isn't real, but I think you're real nice.'" Ray said.

Apart from his own image of Santa, "a willingness to care, listen, and level with children, are the most important credentials for an aspiring Saint Nicholas," he said. "I try to let them know that I'm genuinely interested in them. In the beginning of the conversation, when they sit on my lap, I ask them questions like 'how was your day?' Most children are most interested in what has happened to them in the last few hours."

Some Santas may grow concerned about children "putting him on the spot" by asking for too many presents, or presents of outlandish quality.

"Once I had a two-year-old ask me for a pony, and another wanted a knife for Christmas," Ray said.

The way Ray handles these children is "the famous side step," he said. For a lengthy list of Christmas gifts, he has them pick one or two from five, 10 or 20 items.

Most importantly, Ray said, "I take a look at the parents first to insure I make certain promises they can keep."

The Old Town Santa was surprised when he found the large number of children that didn't know what they wanted for Christmas.

"The kids aren't as materialistic as I expected," he said. "I'd say, of the 50 kids

I've talked to so far, about two-thirds just wanted to talk. When I asked them what they wanted, I got comments ranging from 'I don't know,' to 'I just think I'll wait and see.'"

With all the diversity, one could guess that this Santa feels the hours he has worked by the end of the day, but he goes home with a twinkle in his eye as bright as when he begins his shift.

"I think we all should celebrate ourselves more, we don't really have to have an excuse for it," he said.

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### ankful

There is no discrimination in the world. The line for the mission is not black, white, or displaced Indians. Despite their differences, these men share a common bond: poverty.

There is no line about not getting a good meal since Christmas. Beneath the laughter is the ironic truth: a joke at all.

The quiet room of the Light Mission is not a restaurant, but these men come here to enjoy the simple pleasures of the dining hall, seat at the table, and eat with hungry men each.

The group sit down and go through a list of generous portions of turkey, dressing, salad and bread. The fare is served up on silverware is polished.

The murmur words of the men as they hungrily chow down. They don't have to be polite, it's just that they are waiting outside the door to take their places at the tables.

As he is heard among the men with bellies full, they become more animated, more lively. Before dinner, Davis, a tight-lipped, even silent man, speaks freely.

Some people seem like they only care if they live or die," said Davis. The holidays are the best time of the year for looking ahead to

As they rise from the table, they walk through the doors of the Harbor Light past the weary men outside in an unorderly fashion, past the steam rising from a manhole, back towards Duane Street.

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