

My Christmas Memories as told by Santa Claus

Christmas 2012

Of all my appearances as Santa, those done for charity have always been my favorite. When asked to be the Santa for the Akron Children's Hospital annual Christmas party I said "Yes" with no hesitation. This party would be something special. All the children in attendance were patients from the oncology ward. Some were in remission, some were being actively treated and, unfortunately, some were terminal.

Several children spotted me in the lobby area and instantly became my guides. Each one, in turn, held my hand and lead me to the door that would be my entrance. When I entered the large banquet room where the party was being held, I was amazed at how many children were there. The hospital staff indicated I would be visiting with 320 children this night. With my self-appointed guides, I made my way around the room, visiting with many, many tables along the way. I couldn't help but notice the look of sheer wonderment from children and parents alike. I finally reached the stage and took my seat, continuing to wave to all of the families. The hospital staff had arranged a large basket of candy canes and an even larger basket of stuffed animals next to my seat. Finally, their time had come. The staff visited each table and brought them forward to visit with Santa. Each and every child enjoyed their visit albeit there were a few communication problems that were easily overcome.

Some children needed a wheelchair to get around. Rather than try to maneuver their wheelchair onto the stage, I would leave my chair and visit with them in front of the stage. The parents were ever so grateful and many, many photographs were taken by them of this special night.

The requests for gifts were funny, serious, thoughtful and in many cases, unselfish. They ran the gamut. Kindles, books, clothes, games, iPads and iPods, cell phones and the latest version of Xbox. But, there were some that gave me cause to think and to reflect on my own life. More than one child asked to have the cancers removed from friends they had made while in the hospital. They had come to accept the fact they were terminal but asked that their friends be spared that fate.

One little angel sat upon my knee with her eyes all aglow and with one of the largest smiles I had ever seen. I asked her what she would like Santa to bring her for Christmas. She thought about it for a moment and very politely asked if the elves would make her new kidneys so she could live. My heart just melted. Her Mother, who was standing nearby, told her that Santa and his elves did not have that kind of magic. I gave her a big hug, told her that Santa loved her and that the elves and I would pray for her to get better.

One young lad sat down on my knee and asked how I was doing. I responded "Great!" and asked how he was doing. He told me he was okay but was getting really tired of being in the hospital and eating their "lousy" food. He was looking forward to going home for a while at Christmas. We chatted a little longer before I asked what he would like Santa to bring him for Christmas. Without hesitation, he asked for a double Whopper with the white cheese and told me to "hold the tomatoes". I laughed so hard I nearly fell off of my chair. His parents were standing nearby and he asked if they would take him and Santa to get some Whoppers after the Christmas party. We all enjoyed a good laugh together.

Upon hearing requests from many of the children concerning cures, good health for all and concern for their fellow patients, I explained that Santa's magic can only do much. I promised each and every one of them the gift of prayer and that I did before my night was over. After everyone had left, I finally went to my car. It took a while before I was ready to drive home. As I sat there reflecting on this night, I thought of how could I or would I handle something like this if it were one of my children. You never realize what you have until an experience like this causes you to think.