

The Magic of Santa Claus

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By HOWARD ROCK

Christmas Day — the day of homage and observance of the birth of Christ — the day that at once embraces solemnity, happiness, good fellowship, feasting, giving of gifts, and, above all, it is the day when small children awake in the morning and find that there is truly a Santa Claus.

This is the time to witness the beauty and heart-touching wonderment of the children all over the world that there is, indeed, a happy, jolly, rotund little man with a great white beard who, miraculously, covers the whole world in one night on Christmas Eve spreading good cheer by giving gifts of toys and sweets to tood little children, travelling through the night sky with his team of faithful and sturdy reindeer.

Next Sunday evening, the vivid imaginations of the children of the world will come into play. That will be the time when they could, almost, hear the little man shout, "Up Prancer!" — "Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!" Some of them will giggle to themselves as they imagine the laughter of the jolly little man until his "belly shook like a bowlful of jelly."

Christmas and Santa Claus are universal and the beauty of their spiritual influence among the little folks is no less among the Indian, Aleut and Eskimo children.

Deep in the remote Arctic coast a few generations ago, Santa Claus became known to the children. The mysterious little man caught their imagination at once. When they found out that Santa did certain things in a certain manner, they began to have misgivings. They thought that what he could do in other places would be almost impossible, perhaps impossible, to do if and when he came to the village. For instance, Santa came down the chimneys to bring gifts to children. When they realized that there was not a single chimney in the whole village, they were saddened.

"I don't think Santa Claus is going to come to our sod igloo because all we have is a little stovepipe," the children thought. "I don't think he will fit in there. I know he won't fit because I can't even put my head in it. Besides, he might get stuck and get all sooty. I wish we had those big chimneys so he can come down and give us presents."

Santa Claus was, indeed, real to the Arctic children. Many of them wondered whether they might be able to see him for themselves. Some surprised their fathers and mothers by asking to bring wood or a block of snow to melt for drinking water. Christmas Eve — that was the time Santa travelled.

"What's got into you, son? Why are you so suddenly wanting to help around here?" queried the parents.

"I don't know, mother, but can I get some wood for you?"

The boy's mother chuckled and told the little boy to go ahead. When the youngster got outside, the night was dark and cold. It was around 30 below zero and a 25-mile wind was blowing, drifting some snow. The sky was clear and the stars shone brightly.

With a feeling of excited expectancy, the boy scanned the heavens from horizon to horizon hoping to see Santa Claus driving his team of reindeer across the sky. The youngster spent several minutes looking but Santa was nowhere to be seen.

"I think it's too cold for him," thought the boy. "It's too cold. He can freeze his nose and cheeks. Why does it have to be so cold?"

He quickly gathered three or four pieces of chopped wood that were partially covered by drifting snow and hurried inside.

"Is that all you got — those four pittle pieces?" the mother asked teasingly. "I thought you said you'd bring in some wood."

To his surprise, his mother answered softly, "Yes, son, you may light the lamp."

The boy dressed quickly. He groped in the darkness toward a little shelf where the matches were kept. He struck one so he could see the lamp that hung on a hook. He lifted it and set it on the cold oblong-shaped stove his father had made from an oil drum.

He almost stumbled against something on the floor by the stove. He lit the lamp impatiently. When the flame caught, he put up more wick and the yellow light of the kerosene lamp glowed in the igloo.

The boy looked around cautiously — and then!

There, on the floor beside the stove, were several packages in a pile. He wondered. He thought he shouldn't get excited but there was a tingle of excitement within him. Could it be that Santa Claus had come after all? He looked unbelievably up and down the stovepipe.

"Son, perhaps one of those packages has your name on it," the boy's mother said casually while his father, who had awakened also, smiled. "If one has, why don't you open it?"

Indeed there was one with his



"That's all I could find because the drifting snow has covered them," the boy answered.

"You better to go bed now. Come on children, go to bed now. Tomorrow is Christmas Day, you know," the mother said firmly.

The boy slid into his sleeping bag. He had trouble getting to sleep. Every so often, he glanced at the stovepipe that went up and out through the roof.

"He can't come down that little stovepipe," thought the youngster, sadly. "If he did somehow, he would have trouble finding the stove door the way father built it. I wish we had..."

The boy finally went fast asleep.

Then quite early the next morning he awoke with a start, suddenly remembering that it was Christmas Day. The igloo was dark. Apprehensively, he called out in a muffled voice, "Mother, can I light the kerosene lamp?"

The package name boldly written. The package was wrapped in simple brown paper. The youngster opened it, and to his wondrous surprise, there was a little gray shirt, a pair of blue dungerees, a package of hard candy, a pair of caribou mittens and a pair of caribou mukluks.

By this time, the boy's brothers and sisters were awake. They noisily and excitedly dressed and crowded around the packages.

"Wait, you!" the boy interrupted. "You can't read. I can. This one has your name on it. This one is for you, and..."

The parents smiled and watched quietly as the children happily opened their Christmas packages.

When he finished passing out the gifts, the boy picked up his presents. He couldn't take his eyes off of them. Santa Claus had come during the night after all!

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man," thought the youngster. "He must be like a medicine man. Maybe that's why he can come down through that little stovepipe. Santa Claus is a very clever man. He can even make caribou mittens and mukluks."

The youngster fondled the

gifts he had received. He smelled the newness of the little shirt and the dungerees. He tried on his caribou mittens and they fitted just right. He turned momentarily away from his parents.

"You are my very best friend, Santa Claus," he murmured very softly.