



- Yvonne Vissing
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[Column: Getting back to the basics of Santa](#)

Yvonne Vissing [The Salem News](#)

Among the many casualties associated with the economic crises of the early 2000s is belief in Santa Claus. Santa has been defined, and redefined, many times over the last several centuries, and has been transformed into a super marketing tool by corporations in recent years. The latter is increasingly a real problem for families who are struggling to get by. When Santa Claus becomes associated with money to buy “things,” and when there isn’t enough money to go around for necessities, he has gotten put on the list of things to cut in many households. Santa Claus has become another victim of the economic downturn—and he had nothing to do with it.

Most people like Santa, whether they see him as part of a religious tradition or not, and they frankly don’t want to see him and his reindeer pushed over the fiscal cliff. The problem is they aren’t sure how to deal with him in a way that makes sense today. They aren’t sure whether they can afford to have him in their lives, but they aren’t sure they can afford not to. So here are some thoughts to consider about how to keep Santa alive, but in an appropriate place, in our hearts and minds this season and next.

Think back through your childhood. What do you remember most dearly about the December holidays? Was it a particular material gift — or is it recollections about family, singing, cooking, decorating, having fun together, figuring out how to let others feel loved, and hoping that dreams

could come true? We outgrew that special outfit; over time the toys broke or disappeared and presents we liked simply wore out and were replaced with different ones. We now know that things come and go. But memories? They last forever. They keep our hearts warm and they bring us joy today, just as they did way back when.

Let's get back to the basics of Santa. He isn't perfect, nor does he expect children to be. He's overweight, loves cookies, smokes a pipe, doesn't keep a normal schedule, and sometimes stays up all night doing things he likes. Even though he has a normally jolly nature, he also gets tired and annoyed, especially when others are naughty. He likes for children to think about what they would like, prioritize a list and then compose a letter, using good writing skills, in which they ask him for a small number of things that he could consider.

It doesn't mean that if you ask for something you're going to get it. Santa can't possibly bring all the requested items. He may have ideas of what he thinks would be better gifts for us. Realistically, he can only fit a few items for every child on his sleigh, as it is quite small. Historically, he delivered his gifts into children's stockings, which were never very big. He took a lead from his associate, St. Nick, who delivered a bit of gold, sweets, toys, and desirable trinkets into stockings.

Santa is not supposed to give many or big expensive items. What he brings is home-made by him or by elves who spend long hours crafting presents that they hope each child will appreciate. While he and the elves work, they think carefully about those who will receive the gifts. Santa delivers his presents when no one sees, reminding us that giving without expectation is honorable. He expects children to be good for goodness sake, since giving to others is an act of joy and selflessness is something that no one else ever needs to know about. He gives to others to make them happy, not because he anticipates getting something in return.

As we approach another holiday season, remember that Santa is a symbol of moderation, not greed or excess. The mystery of Santa delightfully reminds us that sometimes the impossible IS possible. Our biggest joys often come from the smallest and least expensive gifts — people spending time with us, laughing with us and sharing love that they make a special effort to show during this time of year. Teach children by role modeling the important lesson that it's not things that matter, but people. Share yourself generously with others. This season, give the Santa spirit.

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