

From the *Stockton Record*:

# Real-life St. Nick lives in San Jose, not North Pole

**By Howard Lachtman**

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Bruce McGuy is a man who keeps Christmas in his heart all year.

No wonder he loves December.

That's when the San Jose contractor and father of five puts on his red costume and turns on his lights - all 34,000 colored bulbs.

"My neighbors tease me that their houses dim when I turn my lights on," McGuy said.

The lights are the lure, along with a 7-foot tree, a toy train and an 8-foot sleigh with illuminated reindeer. But the chief attraction is McGuy himself. Welcoming the thousands of children who visit him this month, he also accepts Christmas wish letters to Santa.

McGuy, 38, personally answers each letter. He does it the old-fashioned way - with a quill pen, a sense of compassion, and a robust sense of humor.

"Dear Santa," one teen wrote, "Last year you brought me a telephone. I want to thank you. For Christmas this year, enclosed you will find my phone bill from last year. Since you brought me the phone, Dad said you should get the bills."

McGuy's reply: "Please leave the phone next to the fireplace Christmas Eve."

A material girl wrote: "All I want is money and I want it now. P.S. SASE enclosed, no checks, please."

And one child told Santa the awful truth about her broken doll: "I didn't mean to pull her head off. Her legs were another accident. Well, her arms, that is another story. Her hair got caught in the scissors. It was a bad hair day!"

There are also many touching letters from kids coping with disease, divorce and death. One wrote Santa to say she cried a lot and asked that all her toys be sent to heaven, where her baby brother had gone. "Even Santa cries sometimes," McGuy consoled her.

## Spirit of Giving

Letters to - and from - Santa form the basis of two books - "Even Santa Laughs Sometimes" and "Even Santa Cries Sometimes". McGuy will bring his Christmas magic to Stockton in a personal appearance from 11:00 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at the Longs store at 4713 Quail Lakes Drive.

\$5.00 from each book sale goes towards the Toys for Tots Program.

"Bruce has devoted everything he does to kids," said Longs corporate ad manager Max Timms.

"You can't get him to stop talking about Christmas."

"I'm not a professional Santa," McGuy said. "I do it just for the love of the kids and the excitement they feel. Also, I like in some way to be a mentor, spreading good will. We have enough tragedy in our day-to-day lives."

McGuy has contributed thousands of dollars from his own pocket to make the holiday a little brighter for needy children.

As Santa, he avoids posing as an authority figure on a throne. Instead, he makes eye contact and small talk, creating a bond of trust.

"I've come to a greater understanding of children and their needs," McGuy said. "Things aren't always happy for children during the holidays. This has given me an opportunity to talk to them and maybe make them feel good about themselves."

**No crazy man** When he first took on the role of Santa, McGuy said, it was a lonely job.

"I felt like the Maytag man standing out in my front yard in my Santa suit," McGuy recalled.

"Everyone was driving by, but not many honked or waved. They thought I was just a crazy man." After several weeks, though, McGuy wasn't alone anymore. Word got out that there was a nice Santa who like children and didn't charge.

Some people were simply looking to save five bucks," McGuy said.

Others were looking for a caring, warm-hearted man with a knack for talking to kids, and making them feel welcome. Someone like the real Santa Claus.

"We all have this personality about us that children feel," McGuy said. "Whatever it is that I have, they seem to like it."

Today, the parents and children throng his San Jose home. The crowds - and letters - grow every year. And McGuy is more than a neighborhood Santa.

His actions and contributions to children's causes have earned him a widespread reputation of a real-life Kris Kringle. His two Santa books have brought him fan mail from the likes of George and Barbara Bush, Jimmy Carter, Reba McEntire, Joan Rivers, Rush Limbaugh and Tipper Gore.

### **'Love, Santa'**

"From day one, when I started doing Santa, I started receiving letters from children," McGuy said. "The first night, I had four letters brought to me from kids who had seen me. They needed to get their letters to Santa, and they felt that instead of addressing them to the North Pole, they could just give them to me."

Adults going through tough times also remember Santa, McGuy said. Recently, he received a letter from a woman who'd just lost her mom and dad.

"Dear Santa," the woman wrote, "I need your help. I'm 45, maybe a little too old to be writing, but I need to believe, and since I believe in you, I'm asking you for your help to believe in me," so I can go on with my life."

McGuy replied: "I just want you to know that I do believe in you. I know how hard it is to lose a parent, but I believe that we can carry on for our parents. Remember, as your parents loved you, to share your love with those that are around you, and they will be there for you, to shelp you through your troubled times. Love, Santa."

### **Sharing the love**

"One of the nicest things I get back is the love people share with me - whether it's cookies or a knock on the door to thanks us for what we do," said McGuy, who turns down "at least \$2,000" each year to help pay his PG&E bill.

"We don't accept money for that or for anything else," he said. "This is what we do for the community."

For McGuy, the meaning of Christmas has nothing to do with expensive gifts. It's about the spirit of caring and helping others.

"I get more pleasure from that than any gift I've ever received," he said. "I do what I can. I can't do it all, but I can at least try. I believe we are all mentors - and from that, our children are going to learn."

And from children, McGuy added, he's learned the real secret of Christmas.

"We love everyone as children, but when we grow older, we are taught not to trust," he said. "We have to learn all over again to trust. That's the meaning of Christmas. These children have taught us a great deal, just by their openness in these letters."