

MALL SANTA

A Book about Mall Santas



Merry Christmas

1

I had a mall Santa try to feel me up once. I wasn't some little kid or anything, though. I was like sixteen and goofing off with some friends and we were all sitting on his lap taking pictures. In retrospect, a bad decision anyway. But that was when mall Santa's and Easter Bunnies became creepy for me.

A Christmas Story didn't help either.

2

My dad's family lives in Canada, so every Christmas we would fly up there to visit everyone. Since my rich uncle with all the money planned everything, we always went the week before Christmas, and flew back Christmas Eve so he could go on his traditional Christmas Cruise with his wife (yeah, I know it sounds douchey, but he's a chill guy. Plus the airports are much more relaxed on Christmas Eve). Anyway, so this time my brother is about 6 and I'm about to turn 8. Perfect age for traveling nightmares, right? Well, god decides to shit out snow all over the Toronto airport, and we spend 8 hours on Christmas Eve trapped inside the airport. My brother and I are being horribly bratty because we're hungry and want to open presents and run around. Finally, after the 8 hour delay, we get on our plane and end up back landing around 1am. Now, it's at this point that my mother realizes she has no food at home for us to eat. She's got two starving, up-too-late brats and NO FOOD. It's 1am. The only place open is Waffle House. So we had our Christmas dinner (because it was about 3am Dec 25 by the time we get home) at a fucking Waffle House. The only other people in there? A bunch of drunk mall Santas who told my brother and I that we were being lied to and this whole Santa thing was a load of bullshit.

3

And here, with my mouth unhinged a nanosecond before I could summon a desperate plea for help, is the moment I stopped believing in God.

You can laugh at the absurdity of that statement, but to a seven year old boy just happy to be at the mall in his brown saddle vamp square toe boots, getting molested by Santa Claus while trying to avoid looking into his dead, cracked out eyes is a little traumatic.

At this point in my life I knew of no evil greater than my friend Jake stealing my favorite Lion King collectible plastic cup, of which I had secured five of the eight advertised. I was a good kid, complacent to be alive and shuffled from home, to soccer practice, to school, to Jake's house. Going to the mall on a Saturday afternoon was not alarming, and the promise of actually meeting Santa for me was like promising a little girl a unicorn. Honestly, though, if someone promised me a unicorn today I would be all over that, as long as it was a bad-ass unicorn that impaled the people who tried to stop us from doing whatever it is that unicorn-human duos...do.

Anyway. The real trouble began when I was close enough to "Santa's Workshop" to notice that every child trudging through the exit line wore the face of someone who had just seen pure evil. Their eyes were bleary; their gaze focused somewhere far-off...a place I hoped never to be. Something was wrong. But, being a seven year old, I had shinier things to worry about.

Without warning it was my turn, and from nowhere Esteban, Santa's flaming gay Elf, had me by the arm en route to Santa's throne of tears. No, no, no... this wasn't Santa at all. This was obviously a ruse. Did they think I wouldn't be able to tell that his beard is fake? And why was that Elf named Esteban? He wasn't even Hispanic. The world began to spin around me as I tried to make sense of it all. The musty smelling, faded backdrop, the neckbearded camera operator. Then, a brilliant flash from all directions. Did he just touch my penis? No seriously, I think he just touched my penis. Someone definitely did. Santa grumbles and Esteban has me again – up, quickly shuffling in some direction. By now I am sobbing for my mother – that wench! How could she abandon me with a man who smelled like Hennessey and regret? I also smelled human feces, but I'm not prepared to blame him entirely for that. Like I said, it was a blur.

4

I knew a Santa impersonator. He would come into my mall bar after he got off work as a mall santa and have a beer after hours. Real cool guy. His wife was a Mrs. Claus impersonator too. Here's the thing with mall santas. They are a part of a santa coalition I suppose you could call it. If you want to be a Mall santa you have to adhere by certain rules within this sorta union. You sign a contract saying you will be santa all year long no matter what. If you are in bermuda enjoying a vacation, As long as you have that beard you must wear christmas themed swimming trunks or you must wear red at all times. YOU ARE SANTA no matter what.

5

I was a mall Santa for several years during the '90s and saw a few old guys endure the job. One year, right after my shift, the guy after me was out on the chair and had a kid on his lap and he started spitting and swearing and pushed the kid off, stood up and then collapsed back in the chair. He'd had a stroke. The following year he came to visit me during my shift and explained that the doctors didn't think he'd last 12 hours. When he did, they said that he wouldn't survive a week ... but he did. And kept going. He'd lost a lot of mobility, but at least he didn't have to be Santa again.

6

When I was a young child, I told the Mall Santa I wanted my dad to stop drinking whiskey until he puked and for my mom to stop throwing shit at him when they fought because I was trying to sleep at 3 AM. He kind of stuttered and said, "I'll... see what I can do, kid. Now, how about a gift?"

Mall Santa must have told my aunt, who I was with at the time, because she bought me the gift I asked Mall Santa for on the spot.

It was glorious. Plus my parents were separated a year later.

Thank you, Mall Santa!

7

My grandfather, tough old boot, WWII veteran, gone to his reward now, was a mall santa in the late 90s. He loved it, and I would often pick him up after working there and we would drink a beer at his place afterwards. One day I drove down to the mall to pick him up, and he wasn't there. I knew he was worried about his heart at the time, and feared the worst when I was told by a security guard he had been taken to hospital.

He had been mall-Santa-ing it up and had just sat down after his lunch break when a little boy of around six had his turn to sit on Santa's knee. This little boy didn't want to. He really didn't want to. He expressed his displeasure in the form of kicks. He kicked my grandfather so hard in the balls that they took him to hospital because they were worried he had ruptured something.

He was actually quite ok, apart from being sore. They were worried mostly because he threw up about five minutes after copping it in the crotch. He ended up living about another 7 years after this. I love breaking out this story around this time of year.

8

So I was at the mall with my mom and brother and I was probably around six or seven years old. I went to sit on santa's lap and I reached up to whisper in his ear, right? So I look up at him, and he turned around and gave me the creepiest smile I had ever seen. I got so scared that I tried to jump back off of his lap and his beard snagged on my jacket zipper. Not only was his beard yanked off, but I tripped and fell down the stairs leading up to Santa's chair. "Santa" tried to run and help me up, but I was so scared I tried to crawl away as I cried, and when he grabbed my arm I swept my legs out behind me and down goes santa. He tried to get back onto his feet, but his pant leg had gone over my boots and it yanked his underpants-less santa sweats down.

9

I worked as an elf at a mall santa years ago. He was a creepy ex-con polygamist from Kentucky who had a new 17 year old wife and something like 24 kids between 8 women. He had prison tattoos and diamond earrings and would get high on his breaks.

Us girls had to walk butts facing away from him (really unnatural when you are trying to position kids around) because he “liked our birthing hips”. He once got bitched out by a husband who spotted santa looking down his wife’s shirt. He liked “new moms” the best because of their breasts and they had to bend down in front of him to place their kids.

He made a thousand dollars *a day* as santa. He was brought up from Kentucky to Ohio and stayed in a nice hotel for a month with all 800 of his family members. By about early December he would turn into a complete nightmare and we wouldn’t even speak to him.

That job was a clusterfuck.

10

When I used to work late holiday shifts at an American Eagle Outfitters, I was fortunate enough to see the poor miserable bastard stumble out to his car in a drunken rage. Santa kinda fell into the driver's seat sideways, shouted something about children being a waste of his time/life, then proceeded to vomit into a nearby pile of snow. That night, I was kinda warmed inside by the fact that Santa self medicated with hard liquor just like me.

11

I did some awful things to my little sister.

I grabbed stationery by the mall Santa intended for parents to write return letters from the big man himself, and wrote my seven year old sister a letter about how bad of a child she was and how the puppy she wanted was killed by the elves when they found out she had stolen my candy from a birthday party gift bag. I left it in the mailbox and she cried and cried.

I also convinced her she was hit by a car when she was little and that's why her back is mishapen.

12

My uncle was a mall Santa, and I got to help out as an elf for about 7 years.

We ran the gamut of funny to touching to screaming-their-heads off. Those always actually pissed my uncle off pretty badly because the parents would yell at the kids for not sitting with what I'd imagine seemed like a creepy stranger (and why are Mommy and Daddy walking away?). One clever trick that most parents were happy with was having the mom or dad sit in Santa's chair and hold the kid, and the elves would distract the kid while Santa sneaked in. Worked like a charm 95% of the time.

We did have the one six year old girl who up and bolted (seriously, poor girl was having a panic attack), and then there was the one year a mom was getting her 3-month-old twins out of the stroller and one projectile-vomited and missed Santa by about 3 inches. There were definitely several older women who asked my very happily married uncle to do slightly naughty things to them for the camera... in a room full of kids. A few actually were visibly dejected after hearing that there was a Mrs. Claus in the picture.

It also amused me that my uncle was the plant engineer (basically handyman) at my elementary school, and the kids knew him well and loved him, but never ever recognized him (even though he would call them by name!) because he hid his beard in his vest at school, and then shaved right after Christmas. He also wore different glasses... that he couldn't see for anything in, but dammit, they made him look like Santa!

13

My grandmother was complaining that she didn't have any current pictures of my dad and my uncle, both of whom were roughly college aged at the time. So they went to visit a local mall Santa. As my dad tells it, Santa was off duty and trying to get an elf's phone number, but once they approached him for a photo, he went into character and kept it up through the whole photo shoot. So my grandparents got their current picture of their two adult sons sitting with Santa.

I also have a friend who worked a mall Santa set one year. His Santa had a degree in child psychology, which was fun. He told me about one time when they had a little girl who was kind of afraid of Santa and no line behind her, so they got a ball and played catch with her and gradually included Santa to help her overcome her fears. He also told me that Santa swears like a sailor in his off hours.

14

Child climbed up into my lap, looked up into my eyes with his huge, soulful eyes, and asked timidly, “Santee, can I have my daddy back for kismis?”

Immediately choked up. I struggled to maintain composure, looked at the little boy right in his eyes, and said, “Buddy.....I can’t do that. You see, he’s in rehab now for flying into that drunken, pill-induced rage after he told you for the millionth-and-one time to clean your fucking room cus you’re sloven and depraved little slob and won’t listen.” Then, right as the little guy realized that Santa **is** real and **does** see everything, I backhanded him right off my lap and gave him a firm bootstomp in the ass to send him on his way.

Oh, and I should mention I’m not a “Mall Santa”, I just dress up in a red suit and a beard and wait around on mall benches.

15

These people used to baby sit me when I was younger. They preferred my brother and used to tell me really fucked up shit, like “You are so wicked and evil, one day the devil is going to open the ground and swallow you up!” They would punish me for fighting with my mom or getting into trouble at home the day before. I’d be sent to a room and told to sit on the bed and stay there. Cathy would take my brother out to the park or out for ice cream while I sat alone in the room.

Bill was a creep. He was from a town called Marion, where when he was a very young boy, was forced to watch the hanging of a couple of black men. He told us about it when we were little kids. There was a night I woke up and saw him standing at the edge of the property line, looking straight into my bedroom window which was only about 10 feet away. I started covering it with blankets, my parents assured me that he was just a senile old man and probably wasn’t creeping. There was another situation where I was laying out in the sun, probably more over on his side of the property line than my own, but our yard was very small and the property owner allowed us to use 5 or so feet of her yard as our own and we had a friendly agreement with her that Cathy and Bill were told to honor. There was to be none of that “kids out of my yard” bullshit. So I’m laying there listening to music in the sun and I get suddenly kicked very hard in my side. I sit up and grab my side because it hurt, Bill yells something about me being a slut and walks away.

Once he died, Cathy became very lonely. She started pulling bullshit to get people to come to her house like asking for help she didn’t really need. One time she called 911 because she was out of bacon and couldn’t drive to the store in winter. Eventually these antics got to be too much for everyone and people were called in to determine her mental health situation. She was taken to a home to be cared for by the state because she had no family who could care for her or even make the decision to put her in a home. When they were cleaning out her room, they found birth certificates and evidence that she did have other children than her son, children with another man a lifetime ago, children who hated their mother and never wanted to see her again apparently. I heard they found five birth certificates in all. Found out from my mom that Cathy’s son had been arrested for child molestation. He was a mall santa and fondled a little girl while she was on his lap. So...that’s why she told everyone he died.

16

Two years ago I was fresh to the city that I currently work/live in, it was Christmas time and being alone I wanted to at least do my part to make others individual holidays improved as best I could. As such, I volunteered to help run the catering for a Children's Hospital's cancer ward Christmas Dinner.

I am tasked with working alone and documenting all the individuals that enter the event, and take orders for family members that cannot leave their children's hospital rooms. Stuck in the corner but I had a full and fantastic view of the entire event.

These adults looked like Kosovo refugees. They are currently living through every parent's worst nightmare. But I assure this tidbit plays into the story, I promise.

So the adults gather up the coloring books, toys, yadda yadda, for their children, the children being patients or siblings/friends of patients. The parents having properly distracted their children begin eating a nice hot meal, generously donated from a local catering firm. And then it happens. Santa from off in the distance lets out the universal Santa call of joy that we as adults find ubiquitously posted on Christmas Cards. HO-HO-HO!

All of 'em, every damn one of them, from the healthy 10 year olds to the 4 year old in the wheelchair, collectively turn their shell-shocked faces. It's like somebody turned off the hospital and warped them all back to childhood. The excitement and joy, that "Oh! Oh my gosh! It's HIM!" faces, I will never forget.

Those that can jump up and run toward the voice have. Meeting our Hero Santa right as he turns the corner. And by god he looked worse than the sick kids. Limping heavily on a cane, older than the actual Saint Nick he negotiates the corner best he can and then bellows out another HO-HO-HO.

The kids lose it.

This ancient old man, made the rounds to every child there, visibly looked pained when kids sat on his lap (damnit it he didn't let a single child know it). Just normal families doing the traditional, normal Santa visit. I still have a hard time wrapping my brain around how quickly morale turned around for these families.

17

When I was preschool, I wanted to be just like my older brothers. They were pretty talented athletes as kids, so they were constantly bringing home trophies and medals. This sparked a deep desire for a trophy of my own in my five year old heart. I wanted one. Badly. As Christmas rolled around, I was doing my best to behave well. After all, Santa checks his list twice. I was so terrified that I would have coal in my stocking that I cried, expressing my fears to my mother - right as I waited in line to sit on the lap of a mall Santa. She reassured me, telling me that "I was the best kid in the whole wide world." So, of course, when my turn to sit on Santa's lap came around, I told him that I was the best kid in the whole wide world, and that I wanted the trophy to prove it. My wonderful mother, bless her heart, searched far and wide until she found a shop to customize a big trophy that said exactly that. Christmas day: I get the absolute best (worst) present any 5 year old could get. The very first day back in school, I show up with my trophy and a shit eating grin. I had Santa-certified proof that I was the better than everyone else in the class. I was the only student who didn't cry that day.

18

“Come on, Jimmy, it’s just one month out of the year. You can do this.”

For James Carlton the mantra was less about steeling himself for the event rather than the faint hope the self fulfilling prophecies were real. Every year he did this to himself and every year he swore it was the last time. The money wasn’t even that good. Why did he become a Mall Santa anyway? He hated the gig so why did he do it?

It wasn’t just the wet laps from the kids with poor bladder control. It wasn’t even the relentless pace. No, he hated the affluenza. Wealthy children who seemed to think the world owed them a larger slice just because of who their parents were. Every day he’d deal with what felt like an endless parade of entitled brats followed by the rare child who wanted nothing more than gloves to keep his hands from freezing this year at the homeless shelter. Or, worse yet, some child expecting a Christmas miracle to heal a cancer stricken parent. Why was it his responsibility to teach some children life’s disappointments at such an early age while sheltering others from cruel reality? It turned his stomach and withered his resolve. He hated being Santa. Not that any of the parents or children seemed to pick up on it. No surprise there. They were all so self absorbed.

“Ho ho ho!” he shouted, “Merry Christmas!”

All the children in the line cheered as they saw him stepping out of the tiny dressing area and approaching the gold painted chair. Stupid chair, Jimmy thought to himself, would it kill them to put a cushion on it? His butt would be sound asleep within an hour.

As he approached the ersatz throne he finally noticed that not all the children were cheering. There, standing in the front of a line of underprivileged and Ritalin saturated brats, stood a small child with black hair and a curious look on his face. His eyes were empty of holiday cheer. He seemed more perplexed than interested.

Great, Jimmy thought, First customer of the day is going to want me to heal his sick mom. May as well get it over with.

19

Sometime back in the '90s, I remember seeing on the news security footage of this mall Santa being horribly racist to a little boy. There was a little black boy sitting on his lap, and here's Santa telling him how he looks like a monkey. It was appalling that this dickbag would essentially ruin Christmas, and maybe even the childhood, of this poor little kid. I felt awful for the little boy, and it's been one of those things that's stuck with me over the years. I just hope any of the kids involved in this incident don't have their Christmas' ruined because of it.

20

My daughter turned 4 on the 20th. Since her first bday I have taken her to the same mall to meet Santa. It's always been the same Santa, he had only 3 fingers on his left hand so he was easy to remember. He wasn't the "warmest" Santa, but he got the job done.

This year they had a different Santa. Now that my daughter is now 4 this was the first year I was actually going to have the "Santa is always watching, so be a good girl and listen to your shes trying her best single mom talk". Simply because me asking my daughter that she needs to be a good girl for Santa or she'll get coal isn't to convincing coming from her push over mom.

Santa started off great, took a wonderful picture and even had everyone there sing happy birthday! Then I took a knee and said "Santa will you please let *name know that in order to receive gifts from you, she has to be a good girl". Santa looked me dead in the eye and stated, "there is no such thing as a naughty list, I call it a troubled list". "Now tell me, what is going on in *name's life that is troubling her and causing her to act out?"

I looked at him with my mouth wide open, I stood up and in the friendliest voice I could muster I said "I don't know, but I'll be sure to ask a psychiatrist one day, until then how about you just be Santa".

I was beyond pissed, all I wanted was him to say was "listen to your mom and be a good girl". That's it, my kid is four of course she gets frustrated sometimes, but she's not fucking troubled. Apparently my complaint about this Santa was not the first of the day.

21

Used to work Loss Prevention for Abercrombie & Fitch. Its holiday time and I was working with a partner of mine in a busy mall. They of course had a mall Santa. We would sit on the second floor above the Santa display, as it allowed us to watch who was coming in and out of our two stores with ease, while being discrete. While we waited we would watch the mall santa. Every half hour he would get up, leave for 10 minutes or so, and come stumbling back. We naturally assumed he was always drunk and was sneaking off for some of Santa's Special Syrup. At least every hour this guy was walking off and coming back. We made fun of him for a week or two about being an alcoholic and how you'd have to be to be a mall santa. Just laughing at his expense.

One day I turned on the local news and see a news piece about a local mall Santa. This mall Santa was an ex Vietnam war vet who traveled 10 hours to work at this mall every year. He was deaf and had inner ear problems from injuries during the war. So he didn't balance well. And he had to change his battery for his hearing device a lot so he could hear the kids. He did this out of the kindness of his heart because he loved kids and christmas. As you have already guessed, this was the Santa at the mall I was at. Fucking feels bad man.

Anyone else ever make judgements only to look like an ass?

22

For the past 3 years I've worked as a mall Santa at a local mall in a reasonably poor area. I won't be working there again, I won't be working as Santa ever again and here's why.

Last year I got roped into working for twelve hours straight as the Santa, the guy who was supposed to relieve me called in sick. So I stayed and tried to remain cheerful, though after 8 hours of ho, ho, hoing one tends to get a bit weary.

Most of the kids are well behaved and a good share are young enough to be in awe of Santa for much of the meeting it's really not that bad. I only had to change my suit twice that day, one little boy got scared and wet himself, an infant decided to give Santa the used contents of lunch. Lovely child she was.

Many of the parents like to speak with Santa first if their kids are old enough to ask for anything outrageous like a puppy. I usually try to talk the kid into something more reasonable, per the parents instructions.

About an hour before we closed there were only a few kids left when one of the mothers came up to me while the elves occupied her daughter with the free candycanes and such. Last year we had an actual midget as an elf but he scared too many kids so this year we had volunteers from a local sorority. Santa was a jolly old soul that Christmas. Ho, ho, motherfucking ho.

The mother explained to me that her husband had passed away that summer and her daughter was just getting old enough to understand dad wasn't coming home. The woman looked absolutely defeated. Her clothes were old or second-hand and her face looked drawn. I couldn't help but feel for her despite being exhausted myself. She gave me specific instructions that if her daughter mentioned her late husband I was to tell her that he's "waiting in Heaven" and will see her again. This flies in the face of my beliefs but it was the mother's request so I had no right to deny it.

When her little girl got to me and I sat her in my lap we started the whole "And what would you like for Christmas Kristi?" "It looks like you've been a very good girl this year!"

23

A few years ago, I was broke and renting a tiny home in a small town in central Wisconsin. So when I spotted an ad in the classifieds section for a mall Santa position - even though I was never a big fan of Christmas - I decided, what the hell. I desperately needed the extra cash.

I was hired the next day.

The first couple days went alright. Boys, girls, fat kids, smelly kids - they all had their lists, and were eager to talk my ear off about it. Some tugged at my fake beard, others jumped on my lap so hard I was afraid the cheaply-constructed plywood Santa throne would crack and collapse - but it was an okay gig.

But then *he* showed up.

He was no more than eight or nine years old with brown, bowl-shaped hair. He wore a red and white striped shirt that made him look like a human candy cane. I peered at him as he stood in line alone, no mother or father in sight. When it was his turn, the boy gently climbed onto my lap and stared with an unnatural focus directly into my eyes.

I asked what he wanted for Christmas, and he just sat in silence, eyes piercing mine. I repeated the question and patted him on the shoulder with my white glove. No response.

He leaned in close. His breath tickled my ear. He placed one hand on my fake beard, and the other behind my hat. He said:

“I have a gift for Santa.”

He hopped down and disappeared through a crowd of people.

When I got home that evening there was a small present wrapped in green wrapping paper and tied with a red bow sitting on my kitchen table. I picked it up and shook it - something rattled inside. I unwrapped the paper, opened the cardboard box, and removed the object within.

It was a garage door opener.