



Anyone who knows John Haldane would not miss that twinkle in Santa's eye as that of *Johnnie Sunshine* a caring clown from Mesa Arizona. He shares a Christmas story when *moonlighting* as Santa Claus.

### ***Children Are All Ages from John Haldane***

Santa knows that we're all God's children and that makes everything right. Santa knows that children come in all shapes and sizes and colors and socio-economic backgrounds. Santa also knows, but not everyone else realizes, that children come in all ages.

Among the places Santa has visited in Mesa are nursing homes. These care facilities have places for people whose daily care needs are temporary, moderately long, or permanent. Among those whose needs for care are permanent are those who suffer from loss of mental faculties and memories, such as Alzheimer's patients. This story is about the latter.

Each Christmas Santa would visit a particular care facility. In Ward One were the "lock down" patients; these were the people who had the physical ability to wander away, but not the mental capabilities to care for themselves or avoid danger if they did. The doors had to be locked. Many of these souls had very poor memories or functioned more or less as children, though they may have been in their eighties or nineties in age.

Santa visited Ward One and passed out small, wrapped gifts to the residents there. Often, they were a soft, stuffed animal that brought joy from just the feel and sight to each person.

As I made my rounds, pausing with each person to talk briefly and hand out presents, I received varying responses. Some were just smiles, some were "thank yous," some were kisses or hugs, almost all were blessings to me.

One woman was slumped over in her wheelchair, head down, eyes shut. As I approached her, the staff shook their heads. One said, "That's Elizabeth. She hasn't spoken or responded in about two months. We believe she is on her way out."

I knelt down before her and took her hand. "Elizabeth," I coaxed softly.

There was no response.

I tried again. And again. After no response a third time, the staff member escorting me to rooms, said, "It is no use. She probably doesn't hear you."

My training from Patch Adams and Shobi Dobi, two terrific clowns and teachers, helped me to know that Elizabeth probably did hear me, but she couldn't respond. I decided to give it one more try.

"Ho Ho Ho!" I said, much louder this time. "Merry Christmas, Elizabeth! It's Santa Claus and I brought you a present!"

Slowly, Elizabeth lifted her head a little. Her eyes cracked open, and then got wide. In a loud voice, she declared, "Oh, Santy Claus, you came back!"

As she clutched the gift I handed her, there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

A few months later, Elizabeth passed on. Whether she spoke again or not, I don't know. But I still hear her voice every Christmas season.

"Oh, Santy Claus, you came back!"

Yes. I keep coming back to children of all ages, Elizabeth. And I remember the gift you gave us all that day with those few words. Merry Christmas, Elizabeth.



A wonderful example of empowering a hospitalized child

### ***..... such a sweet moment***

*from Jeannie Lindheim, Brookline MA*

We have been seeing a little boy, Benjamin, for years. He is 10 years old. He can't move his hands, and is either in bed or in a reclining wheelchair. He beams every time he sees our clowns. His one foot and toes act as his hand. He makes magic tricks work, by tapping our tricks with his foot.

Today we visit him. I play a silent clown. My partner, Poppy, says, "Bloopers has lost her voice." And we look in my pockets, behind the nurse's counter, everywhere for my voice.

'Benjamin says, "I will say the magic word." And he does and my voice returns. He takes cards we give him with his toes. Benjamin never wants us to leave when we visit and always says, "One more magic trick?"

We visit all the children on the floors and then talk about our visits in the lobby when we are finished seeing all of the children.

I am about to leave the hospital. I look through my clown bag and realize I have left my magic box up on the floor where Benjamin lives. So I take the elevator to his floor.

Benjamin is eating lunch and beams when he sees me. I pretend I have lost my voice again. He laughs and laughs. He says the magic word; my voice returns. I see my magic box on the counter. I smile at him and wave a huge wave. As I dash down the hall, he yells, "I love you!"

How good does life really get? Not better than this!

..... *on Wednesdays I wear beads*

*By Joseph Redman*

Joseph Redman a.k.a *Fungus A. Mungus* is a caring clown and poet from Satin, Texas and a regular contributor to this newsletter and a regular visitor to nursing homes in his community

*on Wednesday I wear beads  
threaded on one plastic  
string knotted by two gentle  
hands belonging to Vicki.*

*her broken-teeth-from-epileptic-seizures smile  
explodes proudly when she  
notices her beaded  
gift of love hangs  
around my neck.*

*behind mischief filled eyes  
lives a small child trapped  
in a middle-aged shell covered  
with a glitter decorated  
protective bicycle helmet  
that fractures bathroom walls  
when medicine fails and confused  
neurons fight for calm.*

*after the storm bruised arms  
carefully thread  
beads into necklaces for her  
therapy physical and she presents  
love rainbows for me to wear  
when visiting her one room  
nursing home universe.*

*during our weekly  
magic-head-on-shoulder-eyes-closed hugs moment .  
..*

*she always peeks . . .*

*and smiles . . .*

*at my clown nose and big shoes,  
quietly thankful that  
on Wednesday I wear beads.*

