

# Here Comes Sanny Claus

Whenever the North wind begins to blow and snow starts falling enough so that you have to shovel it, my mind harkens back to my childhood and the magic of Christmas.

As we approach the Yuletide season I am always reminded of one Christmas in 1957 in the Ashby district of Sydney. Many of the homes in that area belonged to working class families and there were lots of children around.

My father would play Santa Claus each year and the moms and dads would all chip in some money and buy small gifts for their kids and Santa's visit. It was always done a few days before Christmas as a kind of build up for the "big day" and to remind otherwise naughty children to behave.

My brother and I would pull Santa's toboggan that had Santa's gifts already wrapped. Our secondary job was to protect St Nick from what was commonly called "little anti-christers" who tried to snag a present or pelt Santa on his blind side with snowballs.

My brother and I were pretty good at heading off these assaults as we knew the "naughty list" off by heart. As Santa would work his way through the neighbourhood the kids would be screaming and crying and yelling while Santa rang his bells and cried "Ho, Ho, Ho".

Occasionally a stray snowball would get through our protective shield and Santa would get mutter "O drat, Oh drat" or some other incantation. You have to remember that this was in the days when television was in its infancy and there were no malls as we know them today so a visit to the neighbourhood by Santa caused quite a stir.

The kids would be primed by their parents and of course Santa would already have their names on the gifts. As the procession wound up and down each street thankful parents would present us with glasses of coke or hot chocolate and some Christmas cookies.

Santa was treated like royalty and at each house he would get a generous serving of Coke. It was not until a few years later that I realized that the "coke" also had a drop of the cure, or more specifically Capt. Morgan black rum, apparently the choice of Santa and his many fellow co-workers.

After a dozen or so house visits Santa was getting a little tipsy. He would miss a few steps, drop a few presents and mutter Gaelic curses as he slipped and slid his way into the homes.

Picture if you will, a Norman Rockwell picture, a veritable Winter Wonderland with houses decorated, outdoor lights twinkling, carolers sing and Santa, barely able to stand wandering around the snow-covered streets.

As fate would have it, Santa finally succumbed to the inevitable and took a final header off Corky MacKinnon's front porch. Like Humpty Dumpty, Santa could not be put back together. The only solution was to roll him onto the toboggan and drag him home.

Kids were now in hysterics as they bawled that "Santa was sick" and "Santa fell down. How is he going to get down the chimney?" Add to this the fact that my brother and I could barely pull the toboggan and had no time to protect Santa from the "anti-christers". Santa was being pelted at will with snowballs and it looked like an attack by crazed leprechauns.

When we finally got Santa home we needed help from several of the neighbours to get Santa "rested" and into bed. I never recovered from the shame of it all and Santa "retired" that year as well.