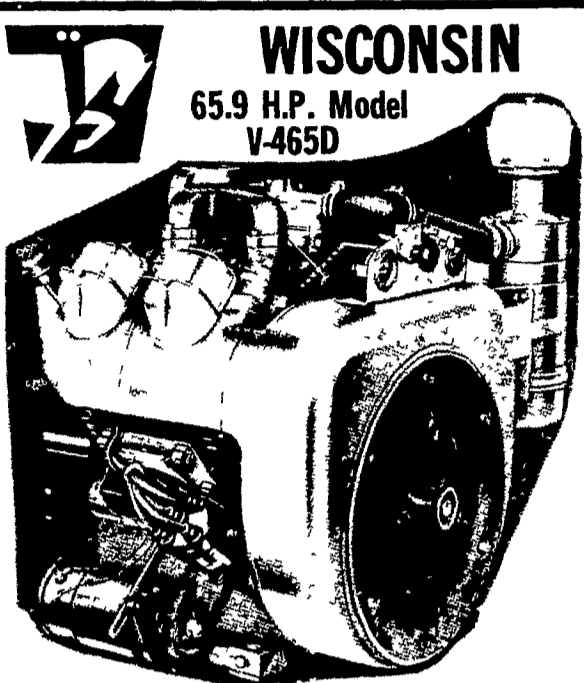


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Ladies Have
You Heard?

By Doris Thomas

Lancaster Home Economist

ABOUT THE SANTA
CLAUS MYTH

"Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus." Remember those words? They have been repeated many thousands of times over the years since a newspaper editor responded to a little girl who asked the question, "Is there a Santa Claus?"

Every year, parents of younger school-age and preschool children wonder, and a few worry, about this inevitable question. In most families, the older children have given up their belief in the jolly red-suited man while the younger children still hold tightly to the belief that he somehow comes down the chimney after having parked his sled on the roof.

Parents of children who still believe in Santa do question whether it is harmful for their child to believe in someone who really doesn't exist. They question whether this myth will undermine the child's faith in other things the parents tell the child. It is comforting to realize that millions of people in this country have believed, have then found out that Santa does not really exist, but now as adults, still

have a warm spot in their hearts for that mythical figure of Christmas.

Most children are not harmed by believing and they only gradually come to realize that Santa is a myth. If a young child hears an older brother or sister say that Santa isn't a real man, he just doesn't hear. The factual information doesn't make sense to him and doesn't mean anything to him - so why hear it?

If the child, upon hearing such information, is ready to give up the belief, then he may strongly defend the existence of Santa. He may even shed tears and be unhappy. But these tears usually signal that the child is ready to accept the factual information. Even when the child of seven or eight does accept the factual information, he will still believe or accept only what he is ready to believe and accept.

Children of preschool age have well-developed imaginations. Some children have imaginary but "real" friends. They can manufacture a story literally a mile long, and believe every word of it. And so it is with Santa. He exists. He is very real in the mind of the four or five-year-old. The child will protect himself from hearing information that he is not ready to believe. This is comforting since the child not only protects himself from hearing the factual information about Santa, but he also protects himself in other areas of life as well.

As the child grows older, he gradually develops a full appreciation of what Christmas is. The very young child, under 12 months of age, will probably not be at all impressed with the idea of Christmas. At great expense, parents and-or grandparents will buy the child a fancy stuffed animal or doll, only to find that when the animal is unwrapped, the child breaks into tears and is petrified by the sight of the gift. He will be far more interested in the wrapping paper. First-time parents and-or grandparents frequently expect too much from the child - and

sometimes are very disappointed when a nine-month-old does not fulfill their expectations.

The child of toddler age up to around three will probably be greedy. This age child will want and insist on opening every package and when a package is given to another person, he sits teary-eyed saying "Anything more for me?" If we, as parents, can expect this kind of behavior then we won't be disappointed when the child doesn't act like an angel that adorns the top of the tree. Again, one important aspect of parenting is understanding what to expect from a child at different ages. If we expect only what the child is capable of doing at a particular age, we will not experience the disappointment and conflict that can occur if we expect too much of the child.

The child, in his fourth year, will have an interest in Santa and will be excited and pleased with the presents he receives. From toddlerhood on, the decorations will probably attract his attention. He may sit staring at the light for long periods of time. He will be curious about the ornaments. And, of course, he will want to rearrange some of them. Santa becomes very real to the four-year-old child and when the child reaches five and six, Santa takes up residence in a house, has a

wife, and drives a sled. Every detail becomes important; even the snack for the tired old gentleman must be left in a prominent place on Christmas eve.

In the later preschool years, the child can be included in many of the activities that precede Christmas. Parents have a good opportunity to allow the child to express his creativity by allowing and encouraging him to help decorate the house, make cookies, or trim the tree.

Regardless of the end result of decorating on the child's part, praise him for his efforts. Remember also that contrary to the instructions printed on Christmas tree light boxes, there is really no one way to trim a tree. A child sees the tree from a different angle. Let his ideas count, too.

At first glance, we may not see all the opportunities that are available to us as parents when we think of children and the activities of the holidays. But there are many, many opportunities for the child to learn to do things and to practice making decisions. These first few years of the child's life are the foundation years of all that will follow. The skills he learns, such as making decisions, will be the foundation for the major decisions he will make all through life.

Women's Calendar

Saturday, December 4
Lancaster County Society 12 meeting at 6 p.m. Family party at Shady Maple.
Society 1 meeting at 1:30 p.m.
Society 6 meeting at 6 p.m. Family Christmas program.

Tuesday, December 7
Lancaster County Society 27 meeting to visit Teen Challenge at 6:30 p.m.
Lancaster County Society 23 meeting. Christmas program.

Wednesday, December 8
Lancaster County Society 14 meeting at 7:30 p.m. Gift exchange at Groff home.

Thursday, December 9
Lancaster County Society 28 meeting at 7:30 p.m. Christmas sharing.

Lancaster County Society 21 meeting at 7 p.m. Christmas party.

Saturday, December 11
Lancaster County Society 13 meeting at 6 p.m. Family Christmas party at Witmer Fire Hall.

Berks County Society 5 meeting at 7 p.m. Christmas party.

Lancaster County Society 25 meeting at 6:30 p.m. Family Christmas party. Vera Nauman, hostess. Bring one hot or cold covered dish.

Lancaster County Society 29 meeting at 7 p.m. Christmas banquet at Willow Valley.

Lancaster County Society 8 meeting at 2 p.m.

Lancaster County Society 7 meeting at 2 p.m. "Christ across the Sea" is program.

Lancaster County Society 2 meeting at 6 p.m. Christmas meeting at the Mastersonville Fire Hall.



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