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...belief in Santa (cont.)

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who had originally misinformed them. One such is Rebecca Corrigan, age 11, who said of her parents' turnabout, "I guess they just played it as a game to make Christmas more fun for me."

Many people give up on Santa's reality when they see their parents sneaking around the house on Christmas Eve, according to our study. Terry Hubbard, 15, told us she "just figured it out."

Many adults answered our query with a "yeah," "sure!" or "of course." Linda Ryman, 27, told us she believes because "it's a nice thing to believe in. A little magic in everyday life doesn't hurt." George Anne Weber, 18, said philosophically, "Sure.

He's real because kids believe in him." Many people took the attitude of Charles Drace, 42. When asked if Santa exists, he replied, "Yes, and I know who he is. I am Santa Claus in my family."

Debbie Weaver, 20, was one of the two people we spoke with who had never believed in Santa Claus as a sleigh-riding, chimney-climbing elf. However, she does believe in Santa Claus. "You have to believe in Santa Claus," she said, "because Santa Claus is God and love and sharing."

Charley Engle said he didn't believe in Santa, but "he's a nice idea for promoting things."

Another man told us that Santa was alive when he was a boy but "died."

The history of Santa

Santa really lived, in the Middle

Ages—a town in Indiana

exists, too

Santa Claus may be just a fairy tale now, but he was once a real person.

Santa Claus lived in the Middle Ages. He was the youngest bishop in the history of the Roman Catholic Church, and was sainted after his death. He is still occasionally referred to as "Old Saint Nick" (although it would be more proper to call him "Young Saint Nick"). St. Nicholas is the patron saint of schoolboys.

In Medieval times school boys would elect a boy bishop each December 6th, dress him in finery, and march with him through the streets. This was a solemn occasion.

Santa was brought to this country by early Dutch settlers. The Dutch celebrated his feast day with the traditional parade through the streets; St. Nick's representative, dressed as a bishop, would ride on a white donkey. English settlers picked up the idea and moved December 6th up to coincide with Christmas. The name "Santa Claus" is a corruption of the Dutch "San Nicholas."

Santa Claus is an American phenomenon: The British child's "Father Christmas" wears a swallow-tail coat and a beaver hat. Europeans generally, including Russians, speak of Father Christmas (Pere Noel in France). Germans call him Kris Kringle.

Our own Santa took his present form gradually. In a Washington Irving story

of 1809, he drives a wagon over the trees instead of a sleigh, and wears a broad-brim hat. Clement Moore's poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (the one that begins, "Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house," etc.) of 1822 was the first depiction of Santa as a round little man with a white beard and fur coat. Moore also gave him his sleigh and reindeer, including Rudolf.

Santa's image was polished up by Thomas Nast, the famous cartoonist who gave us the Democratic donkey and the Republican elephant. He drew an illustration for *Harper's Weekly* in 1866 which was called "Santa Claus and his Works." It showed all the things we associate with Santa today: the toyshop, the list of good and bad children, the elves, the reindeer, the pack of toys, and the stockings hung by the chimney. Since Nast, Santa has been going downhill.

The fact that many children do believe in Santa is proven by the problems encountered each December by the post offices of two towns: Santa Claus, Indiana, and North Pole, Alaska. These places are deluged with otherwise undeliverable mail. Incidentally, Santa Claus has a statue of its namesake, the elf Santa Claus, in the town park. The statue is dedicated to all the children of the world.



Brian Brooks, center, believes in Santa. Why? "I saw him on the roof the other day." Mary Kline, left, doubts but wrote Santa a letter asking for a stereo and a carton of cigarettes. Her friend Kathy Thompson, right, likes her friend's idea, and will ask for a van with mags.



Rebecca Corrigan, left, thought Santa was real until 3 years ago. Natalie Raudabaugh, right, says about Santa, "I don't know. I think anything's possible."

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