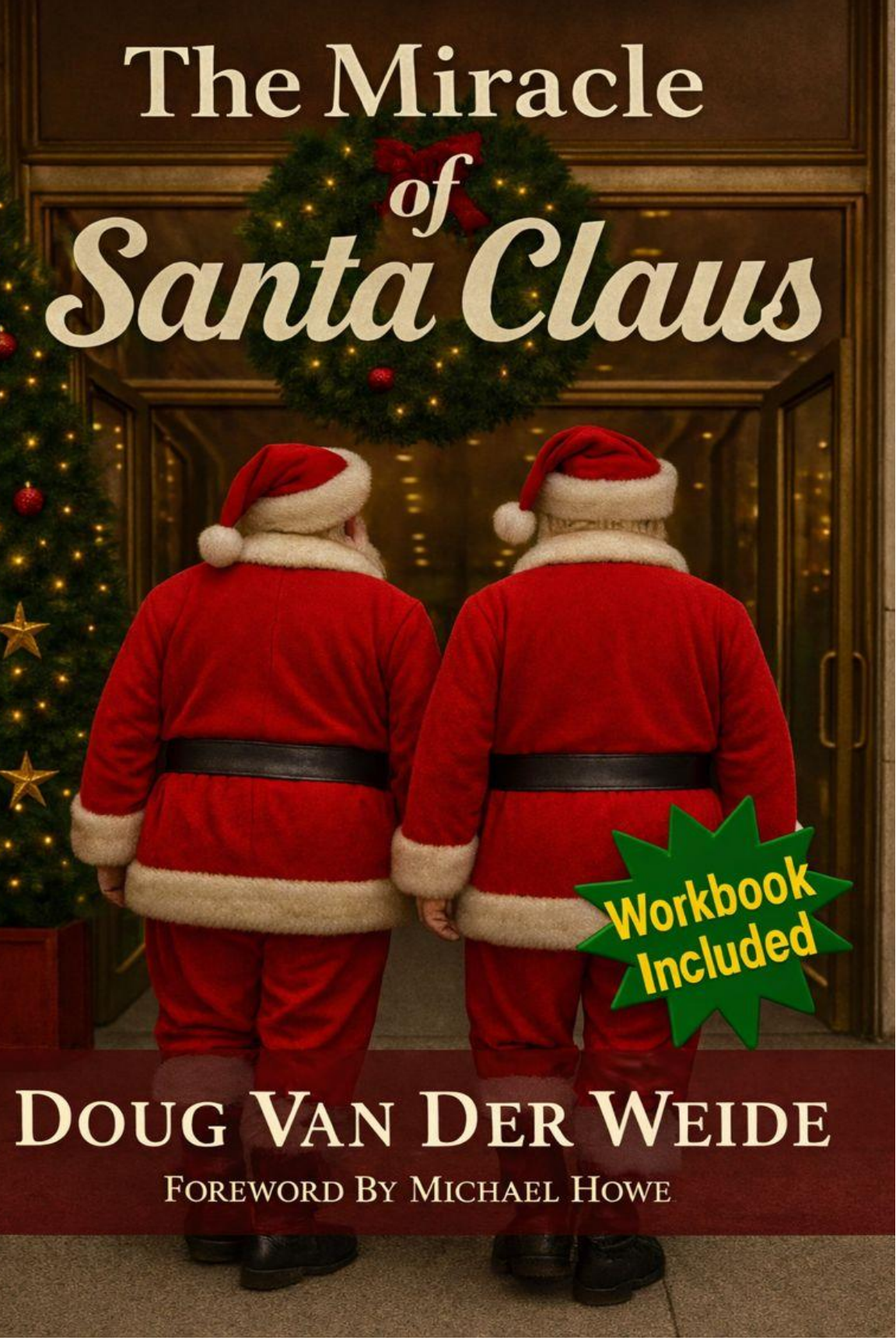
The Miracle of Santa Claus



DOUG VAN DER WEIDE

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL HOWE

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STORY SLEIGH PRESS

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Oh, Christmas isn't just a day, it's a frame of mind... and that's what's been changing. That's why I'm glad I'm here, maybe I can do something about it.

-*Edmund Gwenn* (as Kris Kringle)

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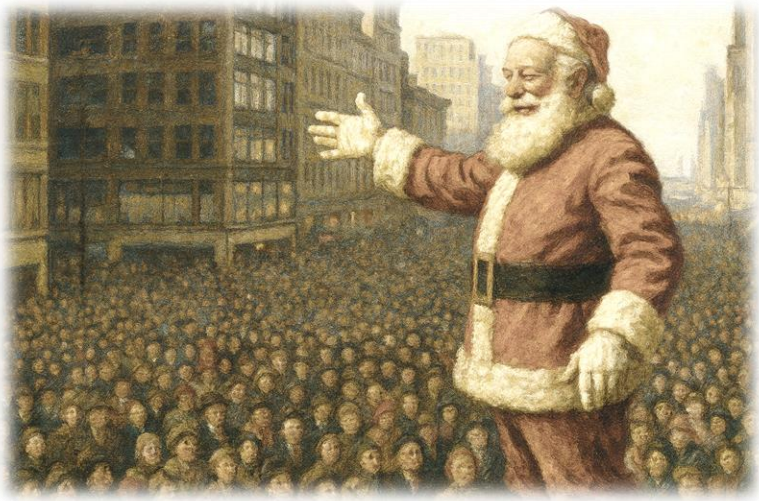

Foreword

There are some stories that entertain us for a moment… and then there are stories that quietly change the way we see the world.

The Miracle of Santa Claus is a story that does just that.

This is not simply a book about movies, traditions, or the man in the red suit. It is about something far deeper, the unseen moments, the quiet exchanges, and the gentle acts of kindness that shape belief long before a child ever speaks the word "Santa."

For many of us, the image of Santa was born in a department store line, in a living room glowing with Christmas lights, or on a television screen as Edmund Gwenn or Richard Attenborough stepped into the role of Kris Kringle. Yet the true magic of those portrayals never came from special effects or clever scripts. It came from presence. From stillness. From a man who chose to listen before he spoke. From a character who valued people more than proof.

In these pages, you will discover that Santa is not defined by a beard, a belly, or even a sleigh. He is defined by the way he makes others feel, seen, safe, valued, and understood. You will read about actors who did not merely play Santa, but became him. You will step behind the scenes of the world's most beloved Christmas traditions. And you will encounter lessons that speak not only to professional Santas, but to parents, grandparents, teachers, volunteers, and anyone who has ever longed to bring light into another person's life.

This book is an invitation.

An invitation to slow down in a hurried world.
An invitation to listen more deeply.
An invitation to choose kindness when it would be easier to perform.
An invitation to protect belief, not as fantasy, but as a living expression of goodness.

Whether you wear the red suit or simply carry the spirit in your heart, may the chapters ahead remind you that Santa does not enter through chimneys… he enters through people. Through small gestures. Through gentle words. Through moments

no one else may ever notice, but that someone will remember forever.

As you turn the page, I encourage you to read not with your eyes alone, but with your heart. Let these stories rekindle your sense of wonder, renew your compassion, and restore your faith in the power of simple goodness.

Each chapter ahead is a gentle nudge back to wonder, a reminder that when we choose compassion over hurry and presence over performance, Christmas doesn't just visit us once a year… it lives in us every day. Keep reading with an open heart, the miracle is only just beginning.

Michael Howe
The Mitten State Santa

Preface

For as long as I can remember, the two portrayals of Santa Claus discussed in this book have stood as the gold standard, performances that shaped not only how the world sees Santa, but how many of us choose to become him. Both versions of *Miracle on 34th Street*, the 1947 original starring Edmund Gwenn and the 1994 remake featuring Richard Attenborough, remain among the most viewed and beloved Christmas films in history. And for good reasons.

These actors did not just wear the red suit. They stepped into the very spirit of Santa Claus. Though there are five filmed versions of this iconic story, these two have always stood above the rest.

Long before I ever put on the red suit myself, I grew up watching the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade each year, and I still watch it to this day. Like so many children, I waited with excitement for that final moment when Santa appeared at the end of the parade. To me, that Santa was not just a character. He was the real Santa, the one who made the season feel magical and alive.

Years later, when I became a professional Santa, people often asked me, “What’s your favorite Christmas movie featuring Santa?” Within the Christmas performer community, the most common answer you will hear is one of the *Miracle on 34th Street* films. And I agree. Edmund Gwenn’s performance in the original film captivated me. He did not simply play Santa, he embodied him.

That sparked a question: *Could I learn something from these portrayals that might enrich my own calling as Santa?*

As I began searching for deeper insight into these films, I found articles here and there, but surprisingly few substantial publications. That gap, combined with my own curiosity, became the beginning of my journey to writing this book.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive historical or biographical study of *Miracle on 34th Street*. Instead, it is a focused exploration of performance, specifically how Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough each brought Kris Kringle to life in distinct and unforgettable ways.

If you are seeking a detailed historical account of the film’s creation, I highly recommend *Miracle on 34th Street: The Making of a Christmas Classic* by Jeffrey Paul Thompson.

As a modern-day Santa performer, my admiration for Gwenn and Attenborough runs deep. Their work led me to ask a more personal question: *What does it really take to embody Santa?* What happens to a person, actor or performer, when they dedicate themselves to portraying the world's most cherished symbol of kindness, hope, and belief?

While researching this book, I discovered that stepping into the boots of Kris Kringle transformed both of these men in meaningful ways. Their off-camera gestures, their warmth with children, and their gentle philosophies revealed something profound: portraying Santa Claus shapes you from the inside out.

That realization led me to reflect on my own journey.

My wife, Jenny Kringle, and I portray Santa and Mrs. Claus throughout the year. What began as putting on costumes for a party grew into a calling, one that changed us far more deeply than we ever expected. The more we embraced the spirit of the Clauses, the more it softened our hearts and guided our interactions with the world around us. Performing as the Clauses didn't just change our calendar, it transformed our lives.

This book is my attempt to share those discoveries. To explore what we can learn from two of

the most iconic Kris Kringles ever captured on film. To reveal the stories behind the scenes that shaped them, and the stories in my own life that continue to shape me.

In these pages, I invite you to journey with me through the magic of performance, the power of belief, and the unexpected ways Santa Claus can change anyone willing to wear the suit… or hold his hand.

That transformation, inside and out, is what I believe to be The Miracle of Santa Claus.

Doug Van Der Weide

Acknowledgments

This book would not exist without the support, encouragement, and inspiration of the many people who have walked beside me on this remarkable journey.

First and foremost, to my wife, Jennifer (Farmer) Van Der Weide, known to so many as Jenny Kringle, my partner in all things merry and magical. Your heart, your laughter, and your unwavering belief in the spirit of Christmas inspire me every single day. Thank you for sharing the red suit, the stage, and the story with me. Being your Santa and doing this together is one of the greatest gifts of my life.

To my mother, Joyce Haak, whose guidance, and love shaped the man I am today. Your kindness, strength, and faith are woven into every chapter of this book. Thank you for taking me to see Santa and for creating magical Christmas memories year after year. Those moments remain some of my most treasured childhood memories.

To my children—Zackary Van Der Weide, Sarah Grace (Van Der Weide) DeYoung, and Allison (Van Der Weide) Toler, thank you for teaching me love, joy, wonder and what it truly means to have faith. To my

grandchildren—Declan Van Der Weide, Elea Van Der Weide, Gwendolyn DeYoung, August DeYoung, and Ernest DeYoung, your wonder-filled eyes remind me why the magic of Christmas must always be protected, celebrated, and shared. You are the spark that keeps my sleigh moving forward.

I also extend my deepest gratitude to my extended Claus family: Joseph Cunningham, Jeff McMullen, Michael Howe, Michael Beurer, Chris Terry, Kim Terry, Bob McMasters, Matt Spaulding, Randyl "Santa Checker" Lee, Spangle, Sherri Heath, Myke Hutchings, Bruce Norred, Kathy Norred, Ken Matuszak, Jeff Wertz, Melissa Rickard, Shawn White, Betsy Garner Modrzejewski, Joe Murphy, Neil Bower, Keryn Bower, Issanis Kassissieh, Phil Wenz, Tom Valent, Holly Valent, Joe Valent, Bruce Kotowich, Derek Dugan, Cliff Snider, Thomas Sheerin, and Steve Gillham. Each of you have influenced my Claus' journey in meaningful ways.

There are countless other Santas, Mrs. Clauses, elves, seamstresses, and Christmas performers, too many to name, who have shaped this community and my own path within it. Your insight, creativity, and willingness to share your experiences strengthen this craft and keep the spirit of Christmas alive.

It is my hope that this book inspires others, whether seasoned performers or those just beginning their journey, to step into the red suit or red dress with purpose, heart, and humility. May you pull this book from the shelf before each season begins and allow it to rekindle the Claus fire within you.

Finally, to all the Christmas enthusiasts, the families, friends, and lifelong believers, this book is for you as well. May these pages encourage you to create lasting Christmas memories and to keep believing, not only in Santa Claus, but in kindness, generosity, wonder, and the enduring spirit of Christmas.

For all of us, may we never forget the true reason for the season: the birth of Jesus Christ, whom God sent into the world to redeem us. Born of a virgin, He lived a sinless life and willingly gave Himself on the cross, taking upon Himself the penalty for our sins so that we might know grace, hope, and eternal life. Which is the miracle, and best gift of Christmas!

With gratitude and joy,
Santa Doug

Chapter One

– The Christmas Movie Hollywood Never Believed In

The sun beat down on Los Angeles on June 4, 1947, the day *Miracle on 34th Street* premiered. It was warm, bright, and unseasonably cheerful for a movie about Christmas. Movie goers passed posters filled with smiling faces, romantic poses, and vague promises.

Not one poster featured Santa Claus prominently. Not one trailer leaned into the holiday or Christmas magic.

Chapter One

This was not a mistake. It was fear.

Not one poster showed Santa Claus prominently. Not one trailer leaned into holiday magic that this movie would provide.

At 20th Century Fox, executives dismissed the film as too sentimental, too gentle, and too seasonal. They refused to market it as a Christmas movie, believing audiences would not show up for something so "small." Instead, they released it in the summer, a time when holiday films were considered box-office poison.

Studio head Darryl F. Zanuck insisted the film be treated like any other drama. No Christmas music. No holiday advertising. Nothing that hinted at the warmth hidden inside the story. To Hollywood, Miracle on 34th Street was a gamble.

"It'll never work."

That was the general attitude inside 20th Century Fox when the idea first circulated. Hollywood had no faith in a Christmas movie about an old man claiming to be Santa Claus.

Chapter One

Here's what the studio executives thought:

1. They believed a Christmas movie wouldn't sell.

Darryl F. Zanuck, the studio head, was convinced that the only way the film could make money was to release it in the summer. Not because he thought it was genius…but because he feared nobody would go see a Christmas movie in December. So, *Miracle on 34th Street* premiered in June 1947, in the heat of summer, with almost zero Christmas advertising.

2. The marketing department hid the fact that it was even about Christmas.

Fox marketing was so nervous that they created posters and trailers focusing on romance and comedy, barely mentioning Santa at all. One poster featured Maureen O'Hara and John Payne with taglines like: *"It's Delightfully Different!"*

They did not mention Santa. They did not mention the holiday theme. They believed, *"A Christmas film will not sell if it is marketed as*

a Christmas film." Their fear was simple: *"Seasonal"* movies die quickly.

The Budget Was Modest

This was not a big-budget Hollywood spectacle.

- No elaborate sets
- No huge special effects
- Minimal studio costuming
- Many scenes shot on location to save money
- And the Macy's parade scenes were shot during the real 1946 parade rather than staging their own, because staging it themselves would have been too expensive

The production was efficient, quick, and financially conservative.

In Hollywood terms: a middle-to-low budget project that nobody expected to become a classic.

Chapter One

The First Actor Offered the Role Turned It Down

This part of Hollywood lore is true: Edmund Gwenn was *not* the first choice for Kris Kringle. The role was first offered to: Cecil Kellaway — Edmund Gwenn's cousin.

Kellaway declined the part. He did not like the script and did not see the character of Santa Claus as a career move worth taking. Only then did the role go to Edmund Gwenn.

This rejection adds a wonderful irony: The man who passed on the role was related to the man who would become one of the greatest Santas in film history.

So taken was Gwenn by the script that he immediately phoned director George Seaton and eagerly exclaimed, *"When do we start?*

Hollywood Thought It Would Be a Flop

Several reasons:

1. No "commercial appeal."

Executives thought the story was too soft, too sentimental, too niche, a sweet little picture, but it will not make money.

2. The Santa theme was considered childish.

Studios in the 1940s preferred war dramas, crime thrillers, romance, or musicals.
A movie about Santa Claus was not seen as serious filmmaking.

3. Releasing it in summer should have killed it.

And yet…

Audiences loved it. Critics raved.
Gwenn's performance made grown men cry.

The courtroom scene became iconic.
And the film went on to win:

- 3 Academy Awards (including Gwenn for Best Supporting Actor)
- A lasting place in American culture
- A permanent spotlight on Santa Claus in film history

Chapter One

The little movie nobody believed in became the one Christmas film almost *everyone* believes in.

Maureen O'Hara's Thoughts About the Studio's Doubt:

Maureen O'Hara later said that she always knew the film was special, and she was *shocked* that the studio did not seem to understand what they had. She commented in interviews that:

"The script made me cry. If it could do that on paper, imagine what it could do on film."

She believed Gwenn's performance elevated the entire movie, and that Hollywood had simply misjudged the emotional power of a well-told Christmas story.

Yet beneath the marketing confusion, beneath the studio anxiety, lived a miracle waiting to unfold a story about belief, kindness, and the quiet magic of a man who claimed to be Santa Claus. At the heart of it was one actor: Edmund Gwenn.

Chapter One

His performance would not just give the film life; it would define Santa Claus for generations. Hollywood did not know it yet. But Christmas was about to change.

"Christmas is not just a day.
It's a frame of mind."
~ Kris Kringle

Chapter Two

– Edmund Gwenn, the Santa Who Stepped Off the Screen

On Thanksgiving morning in 1946, New York City was wrapped in a hard winter chill. Crowds packed the sidewalks along the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade route, waiting for the moment when Santa Claus would appear and officially usher in the Christmas season. But Santa waving from the sleigh that day was not Macy's employee.

He was a seventy-year-old British actor named Edmund Gwenn, already in character for a little Christmas movie being shot on the streets of New York.

Chapter Two

He rode the real parade sleigh. He waved to real children. He froze under real November winds. For a few magical blocks, movie fiction and a New York tradition became one. When the parade reached Macy's on 34th Street, Gwenn descended from the float and assisted by fellow actor Philip Tonge, climbed atop the Macy's canopy to reveal the store's *Nutcracker*-themed holiday windows.

Life Before the Beard

Born in London in 1877, Gwenn was a respected stage actor long before Hollywood found him. He served in World War I, acted in the works of George Bernard Shaw and J.M. Barrie, and built a reputation for warmth and sincerity. No one expected him to become the world's most beloved Santa Claus.

Chapter Two

The Parade That Changed Everything

The film needed parade footage.

Rather than stage their own, the studio made a bold decision: they would shoot scenes during the actual 1946 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, with only one chance to capture every shot.

So, on a freezing November morning, Edmund Gwenn climbed aboard the real Santa Claus float in full costume. The crowds had no idea they were watching a movie being filmed. To them, he was Santa, just as he appeared every year. But this time was different. This time Santa was immortalized.

He waved, he smiled, he embodied the spirit of the season so completely that even newspaper reporters noted the twinkle in his eye. One writer called him *"a somewhat frostbitten Santa Claus… in the person of Edmund Gwenn."*

For those few hours, New York City did not meet an actor. They met Santa Claus.

Chapter Two

Maureen O'Hara later wrote: *"Edmund did not play Santa Claus, he was Santa Claus."*

Edmund Gwenn brought such genuine joy to the set that many around him could not help but wonder if he might be Santa Claus. His presence was constantly cheerful, always lighthearted, always fully immersed in the spirit of the role. That joy was not something he turned on for the camera; it followed him everywhere, spilling into even the quiet, offscreen moments of the production.

Former child actor Robert Hyatt later recalled one such moment, remembering how Gwenn would stop by the on-set schoolroom where the young actors studied between scenes. *"He would come by the schoolroom,"* Hyatt said, *"and he would do this little dance…and I just cracked up."* The interruption was delightfully unforgettable. As Hyatt put it, *"Of course, I couldn't study history with Santa Claus dancing in the front of the door!"*

Moments like these reveals how deeply Gwenn embodied the character, not just in performance, but in spirit.

Chapter Two

To the children on set, he was not merely an actor playing Santa Claus; he *was* Santa Claus, spreading joy wherever he went, reminding everyone around him that belief often begins with the simple choice of being joyful.

Even Natalie Wood believed he was the real Santa until the movie shoot ended.

The Real Macy's Store

The authenticity did not stop at the parade route. Macy's opened the Herald Square, flagship store, to the filmmakers, allowing them to shoot during real business hours.

Assistant director Arthur Jacobson recalled sneaking Gwenn and young Natalie Wood into the real employee cafeteria line, surrounded by unsuspecting shoppers.

To anyone watching, those two were simply another Santa and a quiet girl enjoying a meal. To film history, it became proof that magic often happens most naturally among real people.

Chapter Two

This moment, Gwenn in costume in the real Macy's, surrounded by real holiday bustle, later fueled rumors that he worked full time as Macy's official in-store Santa. And although that is more myth than fact, the truth is even more charming: For a while, he genuinely did.

As part of his preparation for the role, Edmund Gwenn insisted on spending several hours each day portraying Santa Claus, approaching the task with complete sincerity. While seated on the throne, he would carefully ask each child what they wished for, dutifully writing down their names and addresses with the genuine intention of sending along the requested gift.

On one occasion, director George Seaton stepped into the office Gwenn was using as his dressing room and found him reviewing the list. Coming upon the request of one child who had asked for twelve presents, Gwenn looked up and remarked with a grin, *"Greedy little bugger, isn't he?"*

Chapter Two

The Studio's Worst Fears Come True… Then Melt Away

When the film premiered in June, the least festive month of the year, the studio braced for failure. They had released a Christmas movie in the summer. Disguised its poster art. Gave it a modest budget and carried no expectation that it would last beyond its first, awkward week. Then something unexpected happened:

Audiences loved it.

Word spread quickly. Reviews glowed. Tears flowed. Families told families. Gwenn's gentle, believable Santa touched people in a way no Hollywood executive had predicted.

The praise even reached the pages of The New York Times, which joked that, *"if ever the real Santa Claus ever decided to step down, Mr. Edmund Gwenn would be the perfect man for the job."*

By year's end, *Miracle on 34th Street* was everywhere, and the film won three Academy Awards, including one for Gwenn himself.

When Gwenn accepted the Oscar, he quipped: *"Now I know there is a Santa Claus. Oh, you may laugh, ladies and gentlemen. It's not so easy to be certain. He's a most elusive fellow."*

A line written as a joke, yet truer than anyone realized.

Miracle Hollywood Did not Expect

What Hollywood saw as a low-budget, seasonal gamble became a timeless masterpiece. What executives dismissed as sentimentality became a seasonal tradition.

What one actor's cousin turned down became an iconic performance immortalized for generations. In the center of it all stood a gentle British actor who believed in the magic of kindness. In a world distracted by spectacle, guns, crime, and glamour, Edmund Gwenn reminded audiences of something simple and eternal:

Santa Claus matters — because belief matters.

It was the perfect theme for a Christmas movie that was not meant to be watched, was not meant to

succeed, and certainly was not meant to make history. Yet it did, proving that belief matters and that Christmas magic has a way of finding its moment.

True Christmas magic, whether found along a parade route or inside a bustling department store, never waits for an invitation. It does not ask permission, follow a schedule, or arrive on cue. It simply appears in quiet moments and unexpected places, touching hearts when we least expect it. It shows up in a child's wide-eyed wonder, in a shared smile between strangers, and in the simple act of choosing kindness. That is the magic of Christmas: it does not need to be planned or explained, it just happens, and when it does, it reminds us why we believe.

“Edmund did not play Santa Claus –

he was Santa Claus.”

~ Maureen O’Hara

Chapter Three

– The Real History of the Macy's Santa Tradition

Long before *Miracle on 34th Street*, long before televised parades, long before modern malls existed, Macy's had already created the most influential Santa tradition in America.

Long before millions watched Santa Claus appear at the end of the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade each year… long before the first parade balloons, Broadway-style performances, or network broadcasts… even long before *Miracle on 34th Street* brought Santa to the big screen…There was Macy's Department store. Macy's had Santa Claus. A real Santa.

Chapter Three

A tradition older than the parade itself.

A tradition that shaped the American image of Santa Claus, and ultimately shaped Hollywood's version of Santa Claus.

The Beginning: A Store Ahead of Its Time (1860s–1870s)

Macy's Santa tradition began over 160 years ago, around the 1860s, when department stores were new giants of city life. At the time, stores used window displays and live performances to attract holiday shoppers.

Macy's founder, Rowland H. Macy, understood something essential:

People do not just want to shop for Christmas. They want to *experience* Christmas. So, Macy's (New York) introduced in 1862, what no major retailer had attempted on this scale before: An in-store Santa Claus.

Not just a clerk in a red suit. Not just a figure in a corner. But a full character, a performer tasked with embodying the magic of Christmas.

This was decades before shopping malls existed, before the Santa marketing campaigns, and before any modern depiction of Santa crystallized in the public imagination. In many ways, Macy's did not just hire Santa. They helped *define* Santa.

James Edgar is also credited with having a department store Santa in his Brockton, Massachusetts store in 1890. He did this tradition for years to delight children and boost sales. Both Macy's and James Edgar are key figures to solidify the department store Santa's role in holiday retail.

The Early Santa Experience: More Theatre Than Retail

By the late 1800s, Macy's Santa had become an attraction of its own. Parents brought their children to the Herald Square flagship store not just for gifts but for a moment with Santa that felt personal, even theatrical. Santa was placed on a decorated throne. He spoke with children individually. He asked questions, listened, and offered warmth.

Sound familiar?

This was the prototype of the modern Santa visit, the same style professional Santas use today. As demand grew, so did the spectacle. Macy's added elves, scenery, and eventually entire mini-"North Pole" sets to elevate the experience.

1924: The Year Everything Changed — The First Macy's Parade

The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade did not begin as the balloon-filled spectacle we know today. Its original purpose was simple: To bring Santa Claus to the store.

The parade's last float, from the very first year onward, has always carried Santa Claus, ushering in the Christmas season.

When Santa descended from his float and climbed the ladder to Macy's balcony, he *"opened the Christmas windows"* and declared the holiday shopping season officially begun.

This moment, more than any other, defined Macy's Santa as a figure of national importance.

Chapter Three

Enter a Legend: Charles W. Howard

While Edmund Gwenn portrayed Santa Claus in the 1946 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade during the filming of *Miracle on 34th Street* and again served as the parade's Santa in 1947 following the film's re-release during the Holiday Season. Then, Macy's appointed Charles W. Howard as its official Santa in 1948, who was a farm boy from Albion, New York, who had grown from a dream-filled child into one of America's first professional Santa Clauses and who, according to the American Film Institute Catalog, served as a technical advisor on the 1947 film starring Gwenn.

Howard was not only a performer he was a philosopher of Santa Claus. He believed in authenticity, in heart, in presence, and in taking the role seriously.

In 1937, Charles W. Howard, a farmer, founded what would become the world's first Santa Claus school. His motivation was simple but firm: he was disheartened by the number of Santas he saw wearing worn costumes, poorly made beards, and

possessing little understanding of the character they portrayed, even down to basic knowledge of the reindeer. Believing Santa deserved better, Howard set out to teach others how to embody the role with authenticity and care.

The school's first class was modest, just three men, including a welder from New Jersey, a friend, and a neighbor, but it marked the beginning of something enduring. Over time, Howard expanded his vision into a Christmas-themed park featuring barns, a train, and even reindeer. Families traveled from miles around to visit, including children like Tom Valent, who made the trip from Salamanca, about an hour away.

"As a little girl, I sat on Charles Howard's lap too," recalled Holly Valent. *"We were from a small town, and every child wanted to go to Christmas Park."*

The C.W. Howard Santa Claus School stands as the oldest continuously operating Santa school in the world. What began as Charles W. Howard's commitment to protecting the heart, dignity, and authenticity of Santa Claus continues today under the

leadership of Tom and Holly Valent. Now located in Midland, Michigan, the Valent's faithfully uphold Howard's original standards and philosophy, guiding each new generation to understand that being Santa is about more than appearance, it is about character, presence, and purpose. Additional information about the school and its continuing mission can be found at santaclausschool.com

At Macy's, Charles W. Howard established the modern Santa standard: authentic in appearance, professional in conduct, gentle in spirit, and centered on emotional connection and wonder.

Howard appeared in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade as Santa from 1948 through 1965, but he became the head Macy's Santa, shaping the training and expectations of everyone who donned the suit.

Though his name is related to Macy's parade role, he apparently never really worked as Santa in Macy's New York City flagship store. Charles W. Howard legacy lies in training Santas, setting standards of appearance and behavior, and being the parade figurehead that many families would recognize each year. If Edmund Gwenn was the face

of Santa on film… Charles W. Howard was the heart of Santa in real life.

The Postwar Boom: Santa Becomes a National Icon (1940s–1950s)

After World War II, families flocked to Macy's in record numbers. The Santa experience was not a novelty anymore; it was a pilgrimage. Lines wound through the store. Children rehearsed what to say. Parents hoped for a moment of magic.

Macy's Santa came to define the national standard: warm and welcoming, calm, and composed, quietly wise, rooted in tradition, and instantly believable.

This portrayal heavily influenced department stores nationwide, and even the earliest holiday television broadcasts. Santa was not merely a character anymore. He was a cultural institution.

Miracle Meets Reality: The Gwenn Connection

What makes the Macy's Santa tradition so remarkable is that it blurred the line between fiction and reality long before *Miracle on 34th Street* dramatized the idea.

Chapter Three

Store Santa? **Real.**
Parade Santa? **Real.**
Children believe he was the true Santa? **Very real.**

So, when Edmund Gwenn stepped into the role for the 1946 parade, he was not just acting. He was fulfilling the real job millions of children already believed in. This moment did not invent the Macy's Santa tradition. It crowned it!

The Evolution: From One Santa to an Army of Elves (1960s–2000s)

As Christmas crowds expanded, Macy's refined its Santa operation: To keep waiting times reasonable, Macy's began using multiple Santas in hidden, identical rooms. Children were never aware; each believed they met "*the real*" Santa…hence…

Santaland

Santaland grew into a fully immersive holiday experience, far more than a place to meet Santa. Elaborate decorations, towering trees, animated figures, skating penguins, and glowing North Pole villages worked together to create a living world of wonder. Dozens of carefully trained elves guided

families through space, not just performing roles but actively protecting the illusion. In places like Macy's Santaland, every detail was intentional, setting a standard for how environment, performance, and belief could unite to preserve the magic of Christmas.

It is not just a visit anymore. It is a full theatrical experience. That is Santaland.

Macy's Today: The Keeper of the Tradition

In the present day, Macy's Santa remains a national figure. Santaland opens every year. Santa still arrives on the last float of the parade. The tradition continues as strong as ever. Macy's Santa tradition, from the 1860s to today, represents something bigger than retail:

1) A national sense of continuity.

2) A shared cultural memory.

3) A belief in magic that refuses to fade.

Chapter Three

It is the longest-running, most influential Santa tradition in American history. Without it, *Miracle on 34th Street* might never have existed.

Why Macy's Matters to Every Santa Today

Whether you are a mall Santa, a home-visit Santa, a parade Santa, or a Santa performing at a tree lighting… the Macy's tradition affects your work more than you may realize.

Here is how:

1. The "Macy's Look" became the modern Santa standard.

The red suit, the fur trim, the boots, all shaped by early Macy's performers.

2. The "Macy's Manner" defined the gentle, wise persona.

When Macy's Santa has warmth over comedy, wisdom over loudness, and quiet magic over spectacle, belief naturally follows.

3. Macy's created Santa expectations for children and parents alike.

A Santa who truly understands without rushing.

A Santa who is patient, deeply compassionate, and ensures every child feels seen and special.

4. Macy's proved Santa is not seasonal — he is timeless.

A belief system, not a costume. This is why Macy's Santa tradition matters for performers today, because it established not just a role, but a standard of excellence.

A Tradition That Lives On

From the first 19th-century department store Santa… to Charles W. Howard's refinements… to Edmund Gwenn waving in the 1946 parade… to millions of children walking through Santaland today… Macy's did not just hire Santa.

They helped *define* him.

Macy's created a sacred stage for belief, one that continues to inspire professional Santas, filmmakers, and performers everywhere.

Including you.

Authentic Rules for Macy's Santa Tradition

These combine documented Macy's policies, Charles W. Howard's Santa principles, and long-standing professional Santa standards used specifically at Macy's Herald Square.

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I. The Classic Rules (1920s–1940s)

These rules went into effect as Macy's Santa became highly popular:

1. Santa must be gentle and soft-spoken.

No shouting "Ho! Ho! Ho!"
Instead: warm, quiet joy.

2. Santa must know how to talk *to* children not "*at*" them.

Howard taught: *"Look into the child's eyes. Meet them where they are."*

3. Santa cannot promise anything specific.

No: *"You'll definitely get that pony!"* But instead: *"We'll see what we can do."*

4. Santa must always stay in character.

Even backstage, out of public view, Santas kept the spirit alive when transitioning between rooms.

II. Macy's Secret Santas (1950s Onward)

When multiple Santas began operating simultaneously:

5. Santas must never reveal or acknowledge that there is more than one Santa.

This is one of the most important Macy's rules in history.

6. All Santas must match in costume, beard, glasses, and demeanor.

Everything, voice, posture, laugh, mannerisms, had to be identical. This was called: *"The Santa Continuity Standard."*

7. Santas never move through public hallways.

They are escorted through secret back corridors called the *"Santa Tunnels"* so no child sees more than one Santa.

III. Appearance & Costume Rules

8. The suit must always be immaculate.

No wrinkles. No stains. No crooked belt. Macy's established the first *"Santa Wardrobe Team."*

9. Santa's beard must be clean and snowy white.

No visible straps, adhesives, or edges.

10. Santa must look older, wise, and comforting — never silly, cheap, or clown-like.

This rule came directly from Charles W. Howard.

IV. Behavior Rules

11. Santa never eats or drinks in public.

Not even a Cola, unless it is part of a private photo shoot.

12. Santa cannot smoke, chew gum, or swear — anywhere.

Even off-hours. Macy's insisted on *"role integrity."*

13. Santa may not remove any part of the suit in public.

Not even his hat.

14. Santa listens more than he speaks. This is one of Macy's strictest rules: *"Santa should make every child feel heard."*

V. Interaction Rules

15. Santa must keep conversations positive and reassuring.

If a child is distressed, the rule is to help them feel safe, not pressured.

16. Santa must never comment on a child's weight, height, or appearance.

Only compliments about kindness, bravery, and helpfulness.

17. Santa must be inclusive of all backgrounds and beliefs.

Macy's Santa celebrates love and generosity, not doctrine.

18. No child may be forced onto Santa's lap.

If a child hesitates, Santa offers alternatives: Sitting next to Santa, standing beside him, Santa standing behind the chair, or High-fives.

VI. The "North Pole Code" (Macy's Signature Rules)

Passed down through decades, these are the most famous:

19. Santa must never say "I'm tired."

He may say: *"Even Santa gets a little slow this time of year."*

20. Santa must always end a visit with a blessing or positive wish.

Not religious — but warm: *"Merry Christmas, my friend." - "I'm proud of you." "Be good to your family."*

21. Santa must uphold the spirit of Christmas both in and out of the suit.

Macy's called this *"the Santa Oath."*

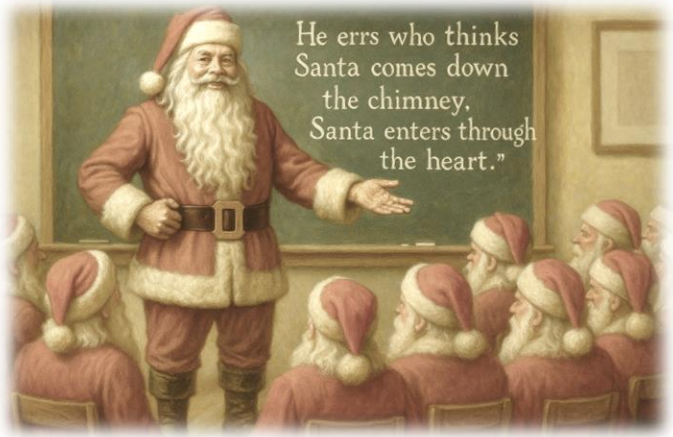
Bonus Rule: The Charles W. Howard Principle

This rule influenced *every* Macy's Santa after 1948:

22. Santa must stand for goodness — even when no one is watching.

Howard's most famous quote: *"He errs who thinks Santa comes down the chimney. Santa enters through the heart."*

This became an unofficial Macy's motto.



"*He errs who thinks Santa comes down the chimney. Santa enters through the heart.*"

~ Charles W. Howard

Chapter Four

– A New Miracle for a New Generation
The 1994 Remake of Miracle on 34th Street

Nearly half a century after Edmund Gwenn first stepped onto 34th Street as Kris Kringle, Hollywood dared to revisit one of the most beloved Christmas stories ever filmed. The year was 1994, a different era, filled with different faces, different expectations, and a new generation of families who had never seen a Christmas classic in a movie theater.

When 20th Century Fox announced the *Miracle on 34th Street* remake, audiences were skeptical.

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The original was sacred. Untouchable. A cornerstone of holiday cinema.

And the biggest question was: "Who could possibly fill Edmund Gwenn's boots?"

The answer: Richard Attenborough.

Richard Attenborough — A Santa of Dignity and Heart

Sir Richard Attenborough was no ordinary actor. He was already a legend, known for roles in *The Great Escape*, for directing *Gandhi*, and for bringing John Hammond to life in *Jurassic Park* just one year earlier.

But none of that compared to the gentleness he brought to Kris Kringle. Attenborough's Santa was: Soft-spoken, Wise, Grandfatherly, deeply empathetic, and filled with the same quiet magic Gwenn had perfected.

Where Gwenn felt like a timeless English storyteller, Attenborough felt like a universal grandfather, the kind every child in the world wished they had.

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His eyes twinkled naturally. His smile carried wisdom. His posture radiated comfort.

He embodied the role not as a copy of Edmund Gwenn, but as a love letter to him.

Attenborough later said he took the part because: *"The world needs to believe in kindness."*

It is shown in every frame of the film.

The Cast That Brought the Miracle into the Modern Era

Mara Wilson — The Heart of the Film

Like little Susan Walker, Mara Wilson gave one of the sweetest child performances of the 1990s. Fresh off *Mrs. Doubtfire*, she was already known for her sincerity and intelligence on screen.

Her Susan, was not cynical, she was simply unsure. Her belief did not need to be "fixed." It needed to be awakened. Her scenes with Attenborough are among the most moving in the film, especially the whispered: *"I believe you."*

Wilson's portrayal helped the story reach an entire generation of children who had never experienced the magic of meeting Santa in a department store line.

Elizabeth Perkins — The Modern Doris Walker

Elizabeth Perkins updated the role of the career-focused, skeptical mother for a 1990s audience.

Where Maureen O'Hara's Doris was steely and self-protective, Perkins' version was warmer, more emotionally conflicted, and deeply relatable to single mothers of the decade. Her arc, from guarded to hopeful, mirrors the film's theme beautifully: It's not just children who need something to believe in. Adults do, too.

Dylan McDermott — A Romantic Leading Man of the 90s

Dylan McDermott brought quiet strength and charm to the role of Bryan Bedford. He was a man who believes in Susan and Kris before anyone else does.

His presence grounded the movie's warmth and provided the emotional comfort that the new story structure required.

Major Story Differences — And Why They Matter

The 1994 remake is not a shot-for-shot recreation. It makes intentional changes to better reflect modern times.

1. Macy's refused to participate.

This is one of the most important behind-the-scenes details.

Macy's executives believed the remake would never live up to the original and chose not to allow the store's name to be used. Kind of a BIG mistake if you ask me. Both films are timeless and speak for themselves.

So, to address Macy's not being a part of the movie the filmmakers created:

- **Cole's Department Store** (a fictional stand-in)
- **Shoppers Express** (the rival)

This change gave the filmmakers freedom but also protected Macy's from unfavorable comparison. Ironically, the movie ended up being beloved anyway.

2. The court case was modernized.

Instead of proving Santa's identity using the U.S. Postal Service (which felt dated in 1994), the remake uses a legal argument about belief, symbolized by: "In God We Trust."

The judge rules that if the state acknowledges the existence of God as a matter of faith, it may also acknowledge the existence of Santa Claus as a matter of faith.

This moment is powerful, bold, and perfectly suited to the era.

3. The tone is less comedic, more heartfelt.

The 1994 version leans into more warmth, and emotional connections. It is shown through the bond between Susan and Kris, and the movie is also about the restoration of hope.

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The movies tagline captured this beautifully: "If you believe, anything can happen."

Cultural Impact — Why the 1994 Film Still Matters

Although the original remains more "classic," the 1994 remake has had a tremendous influence on: A New Generation of Believers.

For millions of children born in the 80s and 90s, the Attenborough version is *their* Miracle.
It was shown on: Family Channel, ABC, Fox, Holiday VHS marathons, later including, DVD and streaming. It introduced Santa's warmth to an era moving into digital age distractions.

A Modern Interpretation of Santa

Attenborough's Santa is often studied by today's Santa performers because he brought an emotional realism, with gentleness, a deep sense of dignity, and an incredible stillness with wisdom.

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Many professional Santas today cite Attenborough as a model for connecting with children on a deeper emotional level.

A Belief in Kindness

While the 1947 version is whimsical and charming, the 1994 film leans into something universal: Kindness is proof enough of magic.

Parents and children around the world cite the film as a reminder that: Santa represents hope, that goodness matters and of course, belief is a gift!

This message became even more important in the 1990s, as society modernized rapidly.

Attenborough's Legacy — A Santa for Today!

If Edmund Gwenn was the Santa of tradition… Richard Attenborough was the Santa of the heart. His performance carries a quiet peace; the kind families crave during the holidays. He represents comfort, wisdom, gentleness, and reassurance.

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Many performers model their Santa behaviors on him. His calm voice, slow gestures, soft eye contact, being reflective, and having thoughtful responses. Perhaps most importantly: *"He never talks down to children. He meets them where they are."*

Attenborough's Kris Kringle does not feel like a character. He feels like a friend.

The Miracle Continues

Between 1947 and 1994, two very different Santa Clauses stepped into the red suit. Yet each created a miracle of his own:

- Gwenn defined the magical Santa.
- Attenborough defined the emotional Santa.

Together, they shaped 70+ years of Christmas storytelling.

And both films continue to influence professional Santas, parents, children, Holiday traditions, and Christmas movies of every kind.

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Where the original brought wonder, the remake brought warmth. Where the 1947 version established belief, the 1994 version restored it. And where the original introduced the world to the Macy's Santa… the remake reminded us why Santa, in any era, still matters.

"I'm here to tell you
that I'm Santa Claus."
~ Kris Kringle

Chapter Five

– What the Miracle on 34th Street Films Teach Today's Professional Santas

The story of *Miracle on 34th Street* is more than a Christmas classic; it is a blueprint for what it means to *be* Santa Claus. For nearly eight decades, the two films (1947 and 1994) have shaped how the world sees Santa, how children experience him, and how performers bring him to life.

Whether a Santa stands on a parade float, greets children at a mall, visits families in their homes, or performs at a lighting ceremony, these films teach lessons that go far beyond costumes and scripts.

They teach the ethics, heart, and responsibility of wearing the red suit.

This chapter distills the wisdom of both Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough, the two most influential cinematic Santas, into practical guidance for every modern Santa performer.

1. Authenticity is Everything

In both films, Santa succeeds not because of flash or comedy, but because of authentic presence.

When we look closely at Edmund Gwenn's portrayal of Santa Claus, a clear philosophy emerges. Magic is never pushed or performed for effect; it is allowed to unfold naturally. He listens first, giving space and value to every voice before responding. Even when faced with skepticism or disbelief, he remains calm, centered, and unshaken. Rather than arguing his truth, he simply lives it, radiating authenticity through a quiet, gentle confidence that invites belief rather than demands it.

When observing Richard Attenborough's portrayal of Santa Claus, a different but equally powerful approach reveals itself. His presence is marked by stillness rather than motion, quiet confidence that naturally draws attention without effort. The warmth he conveys feels genuine and earned, never exaggerated. His eyes carry both kindness and depth, suggesting a lifetime of understanding and compassion. Every interaction, no matter how brief, is treated as significant, as if each moment holds meaning and deserves to be honored.

Lesson for Santas today:

You do not "play" Santa, you *become* Santa. Children (and adults) sense authenticity instantly.

Your energy/spirit matters more than your beard.
Your presence matters more than your suit.
Your heart matters more than any script.

2. Santa Is a Listener First, a Speaker Second

Both films, and both portrayals of Santa Claus, demonstrate this truth with remarkable clarity. Each Santa allows children the time and space to speak, listening not just to their words but to the feelings behind them. Their fears, hopes, and stories are never dismissed or hurried. Responses are given with thought and intention rather than habit or routine. Most importantly, neither Santa ever rushes a moment of wonder, understanding that belief is fragile, and that the quiet pause is often where real magic lives.

In the 1947 film

In the 1947 film, Edmund Gwenn's Santa meets belief at the child's level. When a young Dutch girl begins to sing softly before him, he responds immediately, not by redirecting her, correcting her, or rushing the moment, but by joining her where she is. Santa answers her in her own language, singing with her rather than speaking over her.

It is a small exchange, quiet and deeply personal, yet profoundly powerful. In that moment, belief is not

created through explanation or spectacle, but through connection. Santa sees the child, honors her world, and communicates in a way she understands. The scene reminds us that belief begins when Santa meets a child exactly where they are, heart, language, and imagination aligned. Intimate, gentle, and unforgettable.

In the 1994 film

Richard Attenborough's Santa is defined by intentional presence. He kneels to meet children at eye level, removing any sense of distance or authority and replacing it with trust. In these moments, he does not tower over belief, he meets it where it lives. He listens carefully, connects sincerely, and creates an atmosphere where each child feels safe, valued, and truly seen.

This approach is especially powerful in the scene with the deaf child. Rather than relying solely on spoken words, Attenborough's Santa communicates using American Sign Language, taking the time to speak in a way the child can fully understand. It is not played for effect, nor treated as

extraordinary, it is simply kindness in action. By choosing connection over convenience, Santa affirms that every child deserves to be heard in their own language. The result is a moment of profound inclusion, quiet dignity, and genuine magic, one that lingers long after the scene ends.

More Lesson for Santas today:

Children rarely remember the exact words Santa speaks. What stays with them is how he made them feel at that moment. The tone of his voice, the patience in his pause, the safety in his presence, these are the things that linger long after the visit ends.

Listening is where the real magic begins. It is through listening that trust is formed, and through trust that belief takes root. When Santa listens without rushing, without interrupting, and without judgment, he creates space for something sacred to happen.

Children often reveal more than they realize, hopes tucked between wishes, worries hidden behind

smiles, fears disguised as questions. Santa's role is not to correct or dismiss those moments, but to receive them gently. In doing so, he affirms that the child has been heard, valued, and understood. In that quiet exchange, belief is not taught or demanded, it is earned.

3. Never Promise a Gift — Promise Hope

Both films follow this golden rule:

Santa never guarantees ANY specific toy.

Instead, he gently shifts the conversation toward kindness, faith, and the spirit of giving.

Lesson for Santas today:

Redirect gift requests with warmth:

- *"That is a wonderful wish. I will talk to the elves."*
- *"We'll see what we can do."*
- *"What a thoughtful idea!"*

The promise is not the toy, the promise is hope.

4. Santa Must Represent Kindness — Even in Conflict

In both movie versions, Kris Kringle is confronted by: doubters, corporate interests, judges, skeptics, legal challenges, and by people who misunderstand him.

How does Santa respond?

With patience, dignity, and kindness.

He never raises his voice. Never mocks. Never belittles. Never loses his composure. Even when the world pushes him, Santa remains Santa.

Lesson for modern Santas:

A crying child. A frustrated parent. A rushed photographer. A disorganized event staff. A line that seems to stretch forever. Chaos has many faces, and Santa often meets them all at once. Yet none of these moments should ever pull Santa away from his gentle center.

A professional Santa serves as an anchor of calm in environments where stress and disorder are

common. His presence steadies the room. His patience slows the pace. Even when everything around him feels hurried or unsettled, Santa remains unshaken, offering reassurance through tone, posture, and presence.

In those moments, Santa is more than a performer; he becomes a symbol of peace. It is that quiet, unwavering calm that allows magic to survive, even amid chaos.

5. Santa Is Not Just for Children — He is for Adults Too

One of the most powerful themes in *Miracle on 34th Street* is that adults often need Santa *more than children do*.

In both films:

Doris Walker needs to believe it again. The judge needs courage. The city needs hope. Parents need reassurance that wonder still exists.

Gwenn and Attenborough both play Santa as someone who ministers to the *entire family*, not just the children.

Lesson for today's Santas:

A thoughtful word offered to a weary parent can quietly reshape an entire season. A gentle, well-timed bit of humor may ease the weight carried by a stressed mother, even if only for a moment. A simple acknowledgment, a nod, a smile, a few sincere words, can help a struggling father feel noticed and understood in ways he may not have felt in a long time. Sometimes, a blessing or a warm wish spoken without expectation becomes exactly what someone needed to hear.

Santa is often remembered for the joy he brings to children. But just as often, and just as powerfully, Santa brings peace, and even healing, to the adults who stand nearby. In those brief exchanges, Santa becomes a reminder that kindness still exists, that burdens are seen, and that hope can be carried quietly from one heart to another.

6. Santa Represents Belief — Even When Others Do not

Both films center on a world questioning Santa's identity. The magic is not that Kris proves himself.

The magic is that he never stops believing, no matter who doubts him. This teaches one of the deepest lessons for performers. Santa models unwavering belief. Not belief in himself- but belief in goodness, kindness, generosity, and hope in others.

So, for modern Santas this is a lesson that in a world full of noise, negativity, stress, and doubt, Santa becomes a cultural antidote.

It is not your job to "prove" Santa is real.
It IS your job to embody the joy of believing.

7. Santa's Demeanor Matters More Than His Suit

In both films, Santa's emotional presence far outweighs the suit.

It is Santas soft voice gentle movements, thoughtful reactions, warm eye contact, patient timing, silent moments, light humor, and unforced joy that children and adults pick up on.

Lesson for modern Santa:

Anyone can put on a red suit. The fabric is easy. What is rare is the ability to wear gentleness, to carry patience, kindness, and calm as naturally as the suit itself. That quality cannot be bought, rented, or rehearsed.

This is what separates a good Santa from a transformative one. A good Santa creates a pleasant moment. A transformative Santa creates a lasting memory. Through gentleness, Santa becomes more than a character, he becomes a presence that lingers, a feeling that remains long after the suit is put away.

8. Santa Is a Safe Harbor for Every Child

Both films make something very clear: Santa's role is not simply to entertain; it is to provide

emotional support. Through their performances, Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough reveal a deeper calling behind the red suit. Each creates an environment where safety, trust, comfort, and acceptance naturally exist.

In their portrayals, Santa offers a space where children, and adults, can simply *be*. There is no judgment passed, no agenda to fulfill, no expectations placed upon those who come before him. Santa does not demand belief, correct behavior, or rush emotions. He meets people exactly where they are, offering reassurance through presence rather than performance.

In doing so, Santa becomes more than a character in a story or a figure at an event. He becomes a quiet refuge, someone who listens without condition and responds with kindness. It is within that space of unconditional acceptance that true Christmas magic is allowed to take root.

Santa meets children exactly where they are. He is there for children who have lost a loved one, are experiencing hardship, are living through family

changes, are nervous or anxious, and are shy or overwhelmed. Santa becomes a soft place to land for these children. This is the sacred responsibility modern Santas inherit.

9. Santa Stands for Kindness When No One Is Watching

In the 1947 film, Kris helps strangers, workers, and children when no one is around.

In the 1994 film, Kris comforts an exhausted mother after her daughter has a breakdown, again, away from crowds.

Lesson for Santas today:

The mission does not end when the gig is almost over or the suit comes off. It does not end when you run into someone you know, so you can let your guard down for the moment. The spirit of Santa must carry beyond the spotlight, into hallways and dressing rooms, parking lots and sidewalks, car rides home, and moments no one believes are being noticed. It must live backstage just as fully as it does onstage.

Children are always watching. They notice tone, posture, patience, and kindness long before they understand words. Adults notice too, sometimes even more quietly, carrying their own burdens and hopes. You never know when a glance, a gesture, or a single overheard moment will shape someone's belief.

There are times when Santa is seen, and times when Santa is simply *felt*. There are moments when someone, whether it is a child or adult, is not looking for entertainment at all, but for reassurance, dignity, or a small miracle. In those moments, the true work of Santa continues, not because anyone is watching, but because someone may need it.

10. Santa Is Not a Performer — He Is a Symbol of the Spirit of Christmas

The greatest lesson shared by both films is this: Santa is bigger than any one man. He is not confined to a single performance, generation, or face. Santa is a symbol of the very best within us, kindness, generosity, patience, and hope made visible.

Both Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough understood this truth deeply. They did not attempt to *own* Santa; they honored him. They recognized that Santa does not belong to an actor, a studio, a Christmas performer, or even a single story. He belongs to the world—and to every heart willing to carry him forward.

When a modern Santa steps into the suit, he joins a living lineage. It is a caretaker's role once carried by Charles W. Howard, and thousands of dedicated professional Santas who have upheld the spirit with integrity and humility. To wear the suit is to accept more than a role, it is to accept responsibility.

That responsibility carries weight. It asks for gentleness, consistency, and emotional awareness. It asks for presence when it would be easier to rush, and kindness when it would be easier to perform. But it also carries profound joy, the joy of being trusted with belief, of creating moments that last a lifetime, and of serving as a reminder that goodness still exists in the world.

With that responsibility comes an important discipline: the setting aside of ego. Santa was never meant to be a stage for pride, competition, or personal acclaim. The moment the role becomes about being better than another performer, collecting praise, or chasing recognition, the spirit begins to fracture.

This work asks for humility. It asks Santa to release comparison, to quiet the desire to be seen, and to resist the temptation of fame, because Santa himself is not seeking attention. He is offering presence. The red suit does not elevate the wearer above others; it lowers him into service.

To carry Santa well is to set pride aside willingly, to understand that the magic is not about *us*, but about what passes through us. When ego steps back, gentleness steps forward. When pride is laid down, trust is lifted up. In that humility, Santa remains what he was always meant to be: a shared symbol, carefully protected, lovingly carried, and bigger than any one man.

Chapter Five

Santa is not something we play. He is something we protect. He is carried in the trust of children, the traditions of families, and the moments that become lifelong memories. Santa lives in kindness freely given and in the quiet assurance that goodness still matters.

To wear a red suit, or to welcome a Claus into our lives is to accept a responsibility: to lead with gentleness, listen with care, and place compassion before performance. Sustained by sincerity rather than spectacle, Santa & Mrs. Claus remains a shared language of hope and generosity, belonging to everyone when carried with integrity.

"It is not your job to prove Santa is real.
It IS your job to embody the joy of believing."

~ Doug Van Der Weide

Chapter Six

– The Santas on Set: Behind the Beards

Behind the Beard: **Edmund Gwenn**

The magic of *Miracle on 34th Street* did not begin when the cameras rolled. It began the very moment Edmund Gwenn buttoned his red coat, adjusted his whiskers, and stepped into the quiet streets of New York City as Kris Kringle. To his fellow actors, the crew, and especially to the children who wandered onto the set, Gwenn did not "portray" Santa Claus, he simply *was* Santa Claus.

What unfolded behind the scenes is a collection of heartwarming moments, quiet humor, and small miracles that remain as beloved as the film itself.

A Santa Who Never Broke Character

From the earliest days of rehearsal, Gwenn's transformation into Kris Kringle seemed effortless. He carried the warmth, twinkle, and gentle humor of Santa with him wherever he went. In moments between takes, he could be found chatting with children as though they were long-lost friends. He laughed easily, always had a kind word ready, and carried himself with the soft patience that parents often wished Santa truly had.

Natalie Wood, who played young Susan Walker, became the most enchanted of all. At eight years old, she believed absolutely that Edmund Gwenn was the real Santa Claus. The illusion did not break for her until near the end of filming, when she saw him without a beard at a wrap up party. The spell, finally, gently dissolved. Gwenn would typically arrive early to apply his beard and stay in character, making it

seem incredibly authentic, even when Wood pulled on it and got a good handful. Natalie Wood's realization that Edmund Gwenn was an actor, and not Santa, happened only after the filming wrapped up.

Riding the Macy's Parade — for Real

The Thanksgiving Day Parade sequence remains one of the great triumphs of the film, but what most viewers do not realize is that nearly all of it was filmed live during the *actual* 1946 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. There was no closed set, no staged crowd, no retakes.

There was only Edmund Gwenn, in full Kris Kringle regalia, perched atop the real parade float, waving to thousands who had no idea they were watching Santa Claus make movie history.

The director later recalled laughing at Gwenn's reaction after the long chilly ride.

When someone exclaimed, *"Now you know how Santa feels!"* Gwenn, rubbing his cold hands, replied, *"Now I know what Santa goes through every year."*

The line, equal parts humor and humility, summed up his entire approach to the role.

A Beard Tug Heard 'Round the World

One of the most memorable moments in the film is the scene in which Susan tugs on Santa's beard to test whether it is real. That moment of childlike truth had to be filmed several times—and each time, Gwenn encouraged Natalie Wood to pull harder.

> *"Go on, my dear,"* he told her with a twinkle. *"Let everyone see it's real."*

His gentle encouragement turned a simple gag into one of the most iconic moments in Christmas movie history. Maureen O'Hara later said that the scene worked because *"Edmund put his whole heart into letting her believe."*

Oscar Surprises and Santa's Humility

In 1948, Edmund Gwenn stood on the stage at the Academy Awards, holding an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor.

His portrayal of Kris Kringle had charmed the world, yet Gwenn seemed almost startled when his name was called.

He lifted the statue slightly, smiled, and whispered to a friend nearby: *"Now that is a surprise."* It was the kind of modest, quietly humorous reaction that made him a favorite on and off the set.

Santa for Sick Children

Because Edmund Gwenn embodied Santa so naturally, 20th Century Fox often sent him, still in full costume, to charity events, children's hospitals, and holiday parties. Those who witnessed these visits said the joy he brought was effortless and unmistakably genuine.

To many children he met, Edmund Gwenn was not a movie star. He was Santa Claus, come to life. One publicist recalled, *"He never rushed a child, not once. He listened as though every whispered wish was the most important thing in the world."*

Chapter Six

A Moment of Cold Truth

During one outdoor filming day, the weather turned bitterly chilly. Gwenn, his breath forming tiny clouds beneath his mustache, wrapped his arms around himself between takes. *"It's cold out here,"* he muttered. John Payne, who played Fred Gailey, chuckled and replied, *"But Edmund—you're Santa Claus!"* Gwenn smiled back with that familiar, knowing twinkle and said, *"Yes, my boy—but I'm an actor, not a saint."* Even in discomfort, he delivered a line worthy of the script itself.

Studying Santas in the Wild

To prepare for the role, Gwenn spent time quietly observing department store Santas around New York. He watched how they spoke, how they cradled children on their knees, how they used their hands when telling stories, and how they softened their eyes when listening to wishes both silly and heartfelt.

He blended those real-world observations with his own warmhearted instincts, creating a Kris

Kringle who felt less like a mythical figure and more like a kindly old man one might truly hope to meet.

It is that human connection, gentle, familiar, and believable, that gives *Miracle on 34th Street* its timeless heart.

Reflections from the Cast and Crew

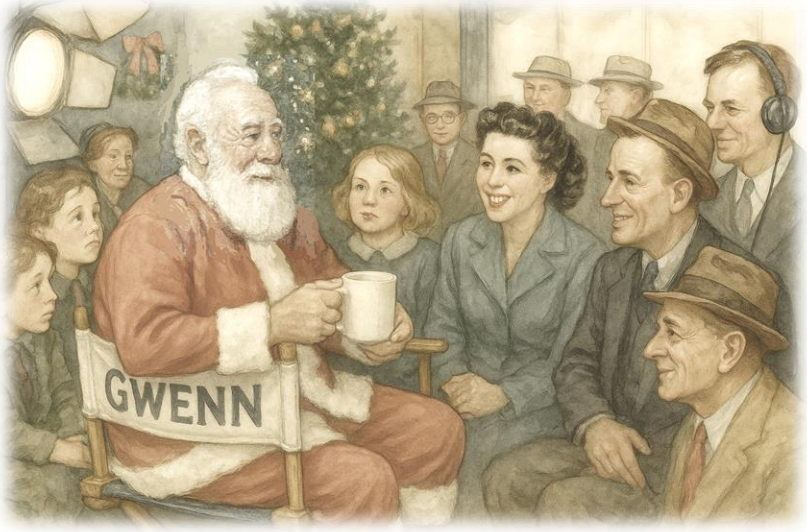
Maureen O'Hara later wrote, *"Edmund Gwenn was Santa Claus. No one could have played him more perfectly."* Many in the cast shared the sentiment. They spoke of his calm presence, his professionalism, and his ability to lift everyone's spirits. Crew members said he could brighten a room simply by stepping into it. For them, he wasn't just portraying Santa. He *became* Santa, for the duration of filming and long after.

The Legacy Behind the Beard

Nearly eight decades later, *Miracle on 34th Street* continues to charm new generations each Christmas season. What audiences feel, year after year, is not just nostalgia, it is the sincere goodness that Edmund Gwenn carried with him into every frame.

He approached the role with dignity, affection, and a remarkable sense of authenticity. In doing so, he gifted the world a Kris Kringle who feels real not because of the suit, but because of the soul behind it.

Perhaps that is why, to so many people who worked with him, Edmund Gwenn will always be the Santa who stepped off the sleigh and onto the silver screen, not as a character, but as a living embodiment of Christmas spirit.



Chapter Six

Behind the Beard: Richard Attenborough

Nearly half a century after Edmund Gwenn charmed the world as Kris Kringle, another actor, stepped into the red suit with gentleness and depth that echoed the legacy of the original. In 1994, Sir Richard Attenborough brought his own warmth, wisdom, and quiet magic to the role.

Though the film was a contemporary retelling, Attenborough approached Kris Kringle not as a reinvention, but as a living spirit, one he felt honored to carry forward.

Those who worked with him often said he did not simply play Santa Claus. He believed in the message of Santa Claus, deeply and sincerely. That belief shaped everything that happened behind the scenes.

Heart First: The Actor Who Wept for Christmas

Richard Attenborough was famously empathetic. While filming *Miracle on 34th Street*, he

cried more than once, not from exhaustion or stress, but from the emotional weight of the story.

Scenes with children moved him profoundly, and he often wiped away tears before the cameras began rolling.

Mara Wilson, who played the young Susan Walker, once remarked: *"He cried more than anyone. He felt Santa in his heart."*

It was this emotional sincerity that made his version of Kris Kringle feel timeless, gentle, grounded, and full of hope.

A Voice of Comfort, Not Character

Unlike many actors who adopt a booming, theatrical "Ho Ho Ho!" Attenborough used his natural speaking voice for Kris Kringle. He believed Santa should sound like someone you trusted immediately.

Director Les Mayfield later said: *"His own voice was the magic. When he spoke, the room softened."* The result was Santa who felt wise, kind, and utterly human.

The Santa Children Gravitate Toward

From the first day on set, the children in the cast, and sometimes children visiting from nearby families, were drawn to Attenborough as if by instinct. Between takes, he placed them on his knee, listened intently to their stories, and gave them his full attention.

To the young actors, he was not Sir Richard Attenborough, acclaimed filmmaker, and world figure, he was simply *Santa*. Mara Wilson later recalled: *"He spoke to every child like they were the only person who mattered."* Those moments were not acted. They were genuine.

A Production Without Macy's — And a Joke from Santa

One of the film's biggest challenges came early: Macy's refused to participate in the remake. Unlike the 1947 original, the filmmakers could not use the name, branding, or New York storefront.

The entire department store had to be reimagined as Cole's, signage, parade materials, uniforms, even bags and advertising. Attenborough found humor in the situation. On one break, cane in hand, he quipped: *"Well, I suppose even Santa must shop around."*

His lightheartedness helped keep the cast and crew in good spirits during the massive rebranding effort.

Guiding a Child Star with Gentle Hands

Several scenes were emotionally challenging for young Mara Wilson, especially moments involving heartbreak, belief, and hope. Before difficult tasks, Attenborough often knelt beside her, held her hands, and spoke softly: *"We are two friends telling a story together. Let's make it a good one."* He was not just a scene partner, he was a mentor, offering comfort and reassurance in the most Santa-like way imaginable.

A Santa Who Felt His Own Mistakes

The film's emotional low point comes when Kris loses his temper in the park and strikes the man

hired to antagonize him. Attenborough insisted that the moment be played not for comedy, but for sorrow.

He told the director: *"If Santa believes in goodness above all, then failing his own standard must wound him deeply."* It was one of the rare portrayals in cinema where Santa's humanity and vulnerability were allowed to show, and Attenborough ensured it was done with dignity.

Honoring Edmund Gwenn

Attenborough often spoke of Edmund Gwenn with enormous admiration, calling his performance *"a coat of warmth"* that he did not wish to replace, but rather to honor.

He frequently referred to Gwenn by name during filming and encouraged the cast to revisit the 1947 film. *"Gwenn carried dignity like a warm coat,"* he said.

"I only hope to wear it respectfully." His performance reflects that reverence, familiar, but uniquely his own.

Chapter Six

The Walking Stick He Never Gave Back

Attenborough grew particularly fond of the elegant cane Kris Kringle carries throughout the film. When production wrapped, he asked if he might keep it as a memento. The studio agreed.

He later displayed the cane in his study, next to his BAFTA awards. Sometimes guests would ask about it, and he would smile and answer simply:

"It reminds me I once had the privilege of being Santa Claus."

A Final Scene That Moved the Crew to Tears

On the last day of filming, during the sleigh ride scene where Kris waves to the little girl whose deepest Christmas wish has been granted, Attenborough gave a performance of such warmth that even seasoned crew members were seen quietly brushing tears from their eyes. One camera operator later said: *"For a moment, I did not feel like I was filming a movie. I felt like I was witnessing Santa ride away."*

It was the perfect closing moment for a man who embraced the role not as fantasy, but as a gift he wished to give the world.

A Legacy That Lives in Two Generations

Together, Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough represent two eras of storytelling, one in black and white, one in warm 90s glow, yet both carried the same truth:

Santa Claus is not a suit. He is a spirit, expressed through kindness, humility, and the ability to believe in goodness.

Chapter Six

Attenborough became a modern reflection of the same magic Gwenn brought decades earlier. Each man offered the world not merely a performance, but a portrait of who Santa Claus *could* be, sincere, compassionate, and wonderfully human.

"Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to"

~ Doris Walker

Chapter Seven

The Psychology of Belief.

- Why We Believe in Santa— And Why It Still Matters

One of the most remarkable things about portraying Santa is discovering just how powerful belief truly is. It is not something that can be forced or explained. It is not created through costumes, gadgets, or rehearsed lines. Belief comes from something deeper, an emotional connection that begins the moment a child looks into Santa's or Mrs. Clauses eyes and feels safe, seen, and valued.

Chapter Seven

This chapter explores why belief happens, how Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough portrayed it so beautifully on screen, and why understanding belief helps modern Santas and Mrs. Clauses create truly magical moments with the families we serve today.

The Heart's Willingness to Believe

Children believe in Santa not because they are instructed to, but because belief speaks to deep emotional needs within them. They are naturally drawn to wonder, wired for imagination, magic, and storytelling as a way to make sense of the world around them. Santa becomes a living story; one filled with surprises and possibilities that stretch beyond the ordinary.

Belief also grows from trust. Santa represents safety: a warm presence who listens carefully, smiles without judgment, and meets children exactly where they are. Through him, children are reassured that adults can be gentle, patient, and kind. That reassurance connects to goodness as well. Children *want* to believe the world is filled with kind people, and Santa offers proof that generosity, compassion, and joy truly exist.

Finally, belief is strengthened through tradition. Writing letters, watching the parade, sitting on Santa's knee, and carefully placing cookies by the fireplace all become meaningful rituals. Over time, ritual turns into memory, and memory becomes belief. For children, belief is rarely about logic, it is about feeling. And when that feeling is nurtured and protected, the magic becomes real.

How the Film Santa Actors Invited Belief

Both Gwenn and Attenborough understood the emotional truth of Santa better than almost anyone who ever put on the red suit.

Their power was never found in grand gestures or booming voices. Instead, their magic lived in the small, quiet moments that made others feel seen and safe, a warm and steady gaze, a gentle smile offered without hurry, a patient pause before responding, and an understanding nod that acknowledged more than words ever could. Their voices were soft and unforced, guided by kindness rather than performance, reminding those in front of them that true magic often speaks most clearly when it whispers.

Chapter Seven

In the 1947 film, Edmund Gwenn's scenes with the Dutch girl remain unforgettable. He does not rush. He does not overwhelm her. He simply meets her with compassion. That stillness, his calm certainty, creates the perfect environment for belief.

Richard Attenborough continued that legacy in 1994. His moment signing with the deaf girl captures Santa's heart in a way words never could. It shows that Santa speaks every language of love. His gentleness invites not only the child to believe, but the entire audience.

Both actors understood something important: Belief does not come from convincing. It comes from connection.

Children Believe What They Feel, Not What They are Told

As a Santa performer, you can have the most beautiful suit, the perfect beard, and a sleigh that shines like new snow, but if a child does not feel emotionally safe, belief cannot grow.

Children notice everything. Long before they remember words, they absorb tone, expression, and presence. They feel whether your voice is gentle or hurried, whether warmth lives in your eyes, and whether you take the time to kneel-down and meet them at their level. They notice if you truly listen, or if you are simply waiting for your turn to speak. They sense when you are rushed, distracted, or elsewhere, and when you are fully present with them in that moment.

To a child, these signals speak louder than any rehearsed line. They determine whether Santa feels safe, trustworthy, and real. Belief is built not through performance, but through attention, and children know instinctively when that attention is genuine.

They may not be able to articulate it, but they know the difference between a Santa who is *"acting"* and a Santa who is "*sharing a moment"* with them. When a child senses you are authentic, gentle, and truly interested in them, belief blooms naturally, without effort or persuasion.

Santa's Kindness Teaches Adults to Believe Again

Adults believe differently than children. They no longer expect reindeer on rooftops or magic down the chimney, yet the meaning behind Santa still resonates. A visit with Santa often stirs nostalgia, reconnecting adults with memories of childhood innocence and simpler times.

Beyond that, Santa offers a gentle reminder that kindness and goodness still exist in a world that often feels rushed and heavy. He also represents comfort: a calm, listening presence that asks for nothing in return. For adults, believing again is less about fantasy and more about rediscovering warmth, generosity, and reassurance.

In both Miracle on 34th Street films, Santa's interactions with adults are just as moving as those with children. Edmund Gwenn's Kris Kringle listens earnestly to grown-ups, often revealing their own longing for wonder. Richard Attenborough's Santa speaks softly to stressed parents and tired shoppers,

reminding them that kindness does not disappear when we grow older. Adults may not *"believe"* in the literal sense, but they believe in what Santa means. That is just as powerful.

The Silent Language of Santa Claus

Belief often takes root before Santa ever speaks a single word. Long before a greeting or a question, Santa is already communicating through a quiet, unspoken language, one that children instinctively understand.

A soft chuckle offered without exaggeration feels warm and reassuring rather than performative. A gentle hand placed on a shoulder conveys safety and care. Leaning in to hear a shy whisper signals respect and patience. A sincere smile can say you matter far more clearly than words ever could. And perhaps most importantly, Santa meets children at their emotional pace, not his own, allowing each moment to unfold without pressure or hurry.

This silent language is where trust is formed. It is where belief begins. When Santa understands how to speak without speaking, the magic feels natural, personal, and real.

This silent language is what Edmund Gwenn mastered. It is what Richard Attenborough radiated. It is what every Santa performer should strive for. Children trust a Santa who is calm.

They trust the Santa who listens. They trust Santa who does not hurry their moment. When Santa slows down, belief speeds up.

When Belief Happens

Every Santa and Mrs. Claus knows this moment. It is unmistakable. A child steps close, looks carefully, studies your eyes… and then something changes. Their shoulders relax. Their smile grows an inch wider. I have seen it happen many times to myself, but it is even more amazing when I see a child's eyes looking at my Mrs. Claus and I can see belief written all over their face.

Chapter Seven

The guarded curiosity melts into trust. That is the moment belief arrives. It is not dramatic or loud. It is quiet. It is sacred. It is the miracle of the Claus. When you experience that moment, truly experience it, you understand why this portrayal means so much to us as performers. We are not just posing for pictures. We are shaping memories that a child may carry for the rest of their life. It is why I put on a red suit, and it is why my wife wears the red dress. If I ever lose this magic the role of Santa will be over for me.

What This Means for Today's Santas and Mrs. Clauses

If we wish to honor the legacy that Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough gave us, if we truly hope to embody the spirit of Santa, we must embrace a quieter, more intentional way of being. That means slowing our pace in a hurried world, responding with gentleness instead of urgency, and offering our full presence to those in front of us. Kindness must guide every interaction, not as an act, but as a sincere expression of care. Magic cannot be rushed, and authentic connection can never be faked, it is felt, earned, and remembered long after the moment has passed.

Every child you meet is looking for reassurance, wonder, and hope. They are not as much analyzing the wig or checking the boots. At least as not as much as we think they are.

They are asking simple, quiet questions:
“Is this a moment I can trust?”
“Is this a person I can trust?”

When your heart answers *“yes,”* belief follows—every time.

The Gift of Belief

Belief is the heart of the Christmas season. It is what makes the lights shine brighter, the music sound sweeter, and the red suit feels a little heavier with responsibility and pride.

Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough showed us that Santa is not defined by the suit, but by the spirit behind it. The kindness. The gentleness. The love.

The Season of Questioning

As children grow, belief often begins to shift. The magic of Santa, Mrs. Claus, the elves, and the North Pole can feel harder to hold as logic grows louder and peer approval becomes more important. For some children, this change shows up not as quiet reflection, but as a need to challenge belief publicly, to test Santa with questions, to call him out in front of others, or to prove something to themselves and those around them.

In those moments, Santa does not argue, correct, or take belief away. Instead, he gently reframes it:

"Belief is a gift you choose to carry. Some people hold it in their hearts, some in their memories, and some in the way they treat others. Belief works a little like glitter—once it is gone, it is very hard to put back. So, Santa never takes belief away…I only help protect it for those who still need it." - Doug Van Der Weide

Belief, after all, is not about denying reality, it is about preserving wonder. Wonder, once lost too early, can leave a quiet absence where joy, generosity, and imagination once lived.

Santa's role is not to convince, but to guard that spark of belief for as long as a child's heart is willing to hold it.

As modern Santa performers, we continue that legacy every time we offer a moment of compassion, every time we listen to a child's whispered wish, and every time we bring joy to a family who needs a little Christmas magic. Belief is not pretend. Belief is not childish. Belief is a gift; one Santa is privileged to give.

And when we step into the role with sincerity and heart, we discover that the miracle of Santa Claus is not only in helping others believe… but in remembering to believe ourselves.

"Belief is a gift you choose to carry. Some people hold it in their hearts, some in their memories, and some in the way they treat others. Belief works a little like glitter—once it is gone, it is very hard to put back. So, Santa never takes belief away…I only help protect it for those who still need it."

~ Doug Van Der Weide

Chapter Eight

– A Claus for All Seasons

Santa Doug & Jenny Kringle

Some Santas are born from a moment. Some from childhood memories. Some from a spark they cannot explain. But some, like Santa Doug and Jenny Kringle, are shaped by a calling shared between two hearts. Our story begins like this….

Chapter Eight

There is a saying at the North Pole: *"Magic doesn't always arrive in a sleigh—sometimes it sneaks in through an unexpected door."*

For me and my wife Jenny, that magical door opened one December night at a friend's ugly sweater party. We did not own a single ugly sweater between us. *"What are we going to wear?"* I asked.

Jenny shrugged. *"Well… do you still have that cheap Santa suit in the back of the closet?"*

It was the kind of suit you could practically see through; the kind made of thin felt and holiday hope. Jenny laughed. *"Go on then, put it on! I'll wear an elf onesie. Let us just have fun."*

What my wife Jenny did not expect was that me, being me, could not *just* wear the suit. I am what they tend to call… EXTRA! Months earlier, my son had challenged me to grow out my beard, no trimming, no shaping, just letting it become whatever it wanted to be. By the time of the party, it had become a glorious, untamed, snowy forest of whiskers. With a little wash-out beard

whitener, I looked like I had stepped straight out of a Christmas card.

So, the two of us went, she in her cozy elf onesie, and me in that nearly transparent Santa suit… dressed up just enough to make it sparkle with Christmas charm.

Then the magic began.

When I walked into the party and the room lit up.

Laughter, cheers, and hugs greeted him from every corner. People kept saying, *"You look exactly like Santa!"* One woman was so enchanted that she hired me on the spot for a Christmas event at her home. Later, when pictures of us at the party hit social media, Jenny's own hospital called to hire us too. She is a nurse.

Suddenly, I found himself swept up in something joyful, something unexpected, and something that felt strangely right.

But deep inside, I personally struggled. When our children were young, we had stepped away

from the Santa tradition so we could keep Christmas centered on Jesus Christ. I personally worried—*Could I become Santa without distracting from the true meaning of the holiday?*

Yet… something tugged at me. A feeling…almost a calling.

I began searching the internet and discovered a world I had never knew existed: professional Santas, state chapters, workshops, schools, conventions, a whole community of men and women who brought Christmas joy to families everywhere. Much to my surprise… many of them were Christians too. I began to realize that I could use this calling to be Santa to share Christ with others and through this I could offer faith-based visits.

My beard grew longer. My curiosity grew stronger.

One night I went to see my wife Jenny and poured out my heart, my excitement, my struggle, my calling. She listened carefully and said, *"I did not marry Santa… Are you going to be Santa all the time?"* She was not sure what any of this meant yet.

Still, I followed the tug in my heart. I attended my first Santa school. I listened to podcasts. I learned, practiced, grew, and found myself walking in a 4th of July parade while Jenny "played" Mrs. Claus beside me, though she was not sure the role was meant for her. Then came the day everything changed.

I was hired for a *Christmas in July* baseball game. I bought us matching North Pole baseball jerseys and my wife, still hesitant, agreed to come.

That day, a group of special needs children arrived at the game. The moment they saw me Santa and Mrs. Claus, their faces lit up like Christmas morning. They ran to us, arms open, voices full of joy. Another group of children asked questions, hugged tightly, laughed freely, and stayed with me and my wife almost the entire time.

I saw something softening in Jenny's eyes, something warm and wonderful.

On the drive home, she kept talking about the children, about how they made her feel, about how magical the whole experience had been.

Then, a few days later, one of those wonderful children sent both of us individually a hand-written letter… along with her school picture tucked inside.

Jenny held it to her heart, and at that moment, Mrs. Claus was truly born. She was truly hooked on wearing the red dress, and she has never looked back.

From that day forward, my wife and I were no longer just husband and wife, we were Santa Doug and Jenny Kringle, a Christmas couple who shares joy from parades to hospitals, from community events to living rooms filled with excited children.

So, the story unfolds, beginning not with grandeur, but with a cheap Santa suit, an elf onesie, and a beard that slowly grew into something more than costume. What started as simple choices became gentle nudges, then unmistakable signs: a quiet calling from God, a single magical baseball game, and moments that felt far too intentional to be coincidence. Woven together, these threads revealed a purpose that had been waiting patiently all along, guiding us into the roles we were always meant to portray.

Ever since, we have been spreading joy, hope, and the love of Christmas, hand in hand, heart to heart, every season of the year.

Together, we offer something rare: A marriage of hearts portrayed as a marriage of characters. Children sense the authenticity immediately, and adults feel it too.

The Clauses aren't performing a role. They share their relationship and share belief.

The Magic of Two — Why Performing as a Couple Matters

Most Santa experiences feature Santa alone, but when Santa Doug and Jenny Kringle arrive together, something unmistakably changes in the room. The atmosphere softens. The energy settles. The experience deepens. Because when two Clauses enter side by side, we bring something more than tradition, we bring wholeness.

There is comfort. Shy children often reach for Mrs. Claus first, drawn to her warmth and gentle presence, while nervous parents relax as they witness the easy affection and trust shared between us.

Chapter Eight

There is balance. Santa answers the big questions, the ones filled with wonder and imagination, while Mrs. Claus tends to the quiet hearts, the hesitation, and the emotions that need reassurance. There is believability. Two people sharing a life, a story, and a visible love make the North Pole feel real in a way one person alone never could.

There is also energy. We play off each other's expressions, humor, tenderness, and timing, creating moments that feel natural rather than staged. Above all, there is heart. Together, we model partnership. We model joy. We model the kind of love Christmas is built on, the love of Jesus Christ, reflected through kindness, service, and genuine care for others.

Together, we do not simply visit events, we transform them.

Chapter Eight

Our Performance Philosophy — The Five Pillars

After years of performing together, Santa Doug and Jenny have shaped a philosophy built not on old clichés, but on intentional compassion and genuine connection.

Pillar 1: Every Child Matters

No child is rushed.
No child is dismissed.
Every child's question, story, fear, or excitement is treated as important.

Pillar 2: Warmth Above All

Children are not impressed by performances they are moved by kindness.
The Clauses lead with gentleness, soft voices, and calm dignity.
Even though we love to perform, warmth and kindness always come first.

Pillar 3: Respect for Families

Parents are invited into the moment.
Adults are acknowledged, thanked, and uplifted.
Parents stories matter too.

Pillar 4: Magic Must Feel Real

This isn't about tricks or illusions.
The magic is emotional. It is a look. It is a whisper. It is a small moment of wonder.

Pillar 5: We Give More Than We Receive

Christmas is not about applause. It is about service. It is about connection and kindness. It is about making people feel valued. Our Claus work is not something we do. It is something we are.

The Power of Partnership — How Our Love Enhances the Story

The greatest Christmas performances are not about props or costumes; they are about relationships.

Chapter Eight

Santa Doug and Jenny bring something special: their marriage becomes magical.

Children see two people who care for each other. They see kindness in action. They see teamwork. They see laughter. They see love. They see what they hope Christmas feels like.

Our partnership adds: humor, tenderness, balance, emotional warmth, and real connection.

Santa Doug provides the classic Santa demeanor. Jenny brings the heart and glow that makes every child feel embraced. Together, we create a North Pole that feels alive.

Moments That Matter — Why We Do What We Do

There are moments only a Claus couple truly understand. Moments that pass quietly, often unnoticed by the crowd, yet carry tremendous weight.

A child leans in and whispers a private wish meant for Santa alone. A parent stands nearby, fighting back tears stirred by memory, hope, or loss.

Chapter Eight

A family, worn by a difficult year, gathers close seeking not spectacle, but reassurance. In these moments, Santa and Mrs. Claus share a silent understanding, reading the room together, supporting one another without words.

It is in these spaces that a Claus couple becomes more than performers. Together, we hold the moment with care, balancing joy and tenderness, offering warmth without intrusion. We witness stories entrusted to us briefly yet remembered forever. In that shared responsibility, Santa and Mrs. Claus quietly serve as keepers of belief, comfort, and hope.

These moments cannot be scripted. They cannot be rehearsed. They can only be lived. For Santa Doug and Jenny Kringle, these moments are the reason we keep returning to the suit, the sleigh, the cocoa mugs, the lights, and the magic. Because we know that what we bring is more than a performance. It is a gift.

The Legacy We Are Building

Just as Edmund Gwenn shaped the cinematic Santa… Just as Richard Attenborough carried the magic into a new century… Just as Macy's built a foundation for generations of children… Santa Doug and Jenny Kringle are contributing to their own legacy:

A Claus partnership built on love,
heart, authenticity, and joy.

Our approach reminds us: Santa is gentle and fun. Mrs. Claus is compassionate and wise. Together, we represent something bigger than tradition.

We represent what Christmas was meant to be:

A story of togetherness.
A story of kindness.
A story of love.

A story of two people choosing to bring light into the world — hand in hand.

And that, more than anything else,
is our miracle.

Reflection:

"You Don't Play Santa, You Become Him."

Do not get confused, you are NOT Santa! There is NO real Santa, but everyone can be Santa. It is the spirit of Christmas that is Santa, it is the heart that becomes a Claus. Becoming Santa is becoming the Spirit of Christmas that you live each and every day.

The two *Miracle on 34th Street* films do not teach us how Santa looks. They teach us how Santa lives. The films show us: Santa listens. Santa reassures. Santa believes. Santa is steady. Santa is gentle. Santa brings peace. Santa brings hope. Santa lifts spirits. Santa creates memories.

Most of all, these films teach us that Santa is a calling a sacred form of service that requires heart, discipline, and compassion.

Every Santa or Mrs. Claus performer today, whether on a parade float, in a mall, at an event, or during a private visit, carries forward the legacy defined by Gwenn and Attenborough:

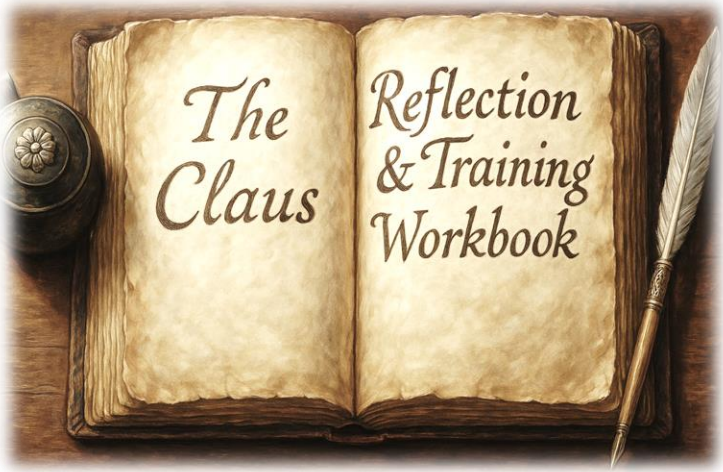
Chapter Eight

To guard the wonder of Christmas.
To carry joy into every room.
To believe for others when their own
belief feels small.

In the end, a Santa, or a Mrs. Claus, who believes does more than wear the suit; they awaken belief in others. That, in itself, feels like a miracle.

Yet the greatest miracle of all was not a wrapped gift found beneath a tree, but it can be found in a manger. May we always have belief in the…

Real Reason for the Season…Jesus Christ!



Chapter Nine

– The Claus Reflection & Training Workbook

A Practical Guide to Becoming a Claus the World Remembers

This workbook is designed to be a companion to the lessons learned throughout this book. Each section corresponds with one chapter, giving you intentional space to reflect, grow, and develop your own Claus presence. Grab a notebook and lets go!

Chapter Nine

Whether you are brand-new to the suit/dress or a seasoned performer, use these pages to deepen your calling, sharpen your craft, and align your heart with the true spirit of Christmas.

Introduction to the Film Study

Before beginning this workbook section, I invite you to take a fresh look at both versions of *Miracle on 34th Street*, the 1947 classic starring Edmund Gwenn and the 1994 remake featuring Richard Attenborough. Whether it is your first viewing or your fiftieth, this time watch with new eyes. Grab a notebook, settle in, and approach each film as a student of the craft.

As you watch, pay close attention to *how* each actor portrays Santa Claus in key moments. Observe *how* they handle scenes such as:

- The Macy's Parade and the encounter with the drunk Santa.
- Their first meeting with young Susan.
- Speaking to the Dutch girl (1947) or Deaf girl. (1994)

- The psychological exam in the doctor's office.
- Their courtroom testimony.
- And any other moments that stand out to you.

Take notes on the tone, tempo, and emotional choices each actor makes. What emotions are being communicated without a single word? How does each Santa respond to pressure, to joy, to children, and to adults? What type of Santa does each actor embody—grandfatherly, gentle, whimsical, dignified, magical?

This exercise is designed to help you see the character of Santa Claus through the eyes of two legendary performers and to discover how their choices can help shape your own portrayal. Let your observations guide you, surprise you, and inspire your personal journey as Santa, Mrs. Claus or as Christmas performer.

Chapter Nine

SECTION 1 — After Chapter One –

Belief, Risk, and the Courage to Try

Miracle on 34th Street was a movie Hollywood never believed in… but it became a legend because someone dared to try something gentle, warm, and magical.

Reflection Questions

1. When in your own Santa Journey did you do something, others doubted or did not understand?
2. What "fears" or insecurities have held you back as a Santa or Mrs. Claus?
3. What does it mean to *"be brave in kindness?"*

Practice Activity — Your Santa Mission Statement

Write a short mission statement describing the Santa you want to be: *How do you want people to feel after meeting you? What values matter to you as Santa? What legacy do you want to leave?*

Chapter Nine

SECTION 2 — After Chapter Two -

Embodying Santa, Not Playing Him

Edmund Gwenn did not "act" Santa — he *became* Santa.

Reflection Questions

1. What qualities of Edmund Gwenn's Santa speak most to your heart?
2. How can you carry the spirit of Santa even when you are out of costume?
3. What are small daily habits that can help you live joy, gentleness, and patience?

Skill Exercise — The Santa Presence Drill

Practice the following daily for 2 minutes:

- Soften your eyes.
- Slow your breathing, let your posture relax.
- Smile gently.
- Imagine speaking with warmth.

Chapter Nine

This is your “reset button” before every Santa moment.

SECTION 3 — After Chapter Three –

Understanding the Weight of Tradition

Macy’s helped define what Santa *is* to the world.

Reflection Questions

1. What parts of the Macy’s Santa tradition feel most meaningful to you?
2. Which “classic rules” do you naturally follow? Which challenges you?
3. What does authenticity mean in the context of Santa performance?

Chapter Nine

Checklist — The Authentic Santa Standard

This checklist is not about perfection; it is about intention. Use it to note where you feel strong and where you want to grow. Focus on one or two areas at a time. Small changes, a calmer tone, slower pace, or deeper listening, can have a big impact.

Children remember how Santa made them feel. When you lead with presence, compassion, and integrity, belief naturally follows.

Check the boxes you want to work on:

☐ Warm, gentle tone.
☐ Never rushed.
☐ Listens more than speaks.
☐ Legally safe gift responses.
☐ Compassion-first communication.
☐ Character integrity (on and off stage).
☐ Maintaining a magical appearance.
☐ Emotional safety for children.
☐ Calm presence during chaos.

Chapter Nine

SECTION 4 — After Chapter Four –

Kindness as the Center of All Magic

Richard Attenborough's Santa taught that *kindness itself* is proof of Christmas.

Reflection Questions

1. Think of a moment you offered pure kindness how did it feel?
2. What does it mean to "carry wisdom gently" when playing Santa?
3. When have you seen kindness heal someone?

Practice Activity — Kindness Rehearsal

Write three gentle responses Santa can give when a child is sad, fearful, or overwhelmed:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Chapter Nine

SECTION 5 — After Chapter Five –

Applying the Ten Santa Lessons

This chapter offered the ten fundamental pillars of modern Santa work.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the ten lessons do you already model well?
2. Which lesson will you commit to strengthening this year?
3. How can you bring peace to parents as well as children?

Exercise — The Listening Practice

For one week, practice saying less and listening more. Journal one insight per day about what children *really* want when they approach Santa.

Chapter Nine

SECTION 6 — After Chapter Six –

Learning from the Two Greatest Kris Kringles

Gwenn and Attenborough showed that Santa is not defined by costume but by heart. A beard can be worn, and a suit can be tailored, but belief is earned through gentleness, attentiveness, and emotional honesty. Their Santas succeed not because of how they look, but because of how they make others feel, safe, seen, and valued.

Reflection Questions

1. Which behind-the-scenes story moved you the most, and why?
2. How can you model humility the way these two actors did?
3. How can you bring comfort to others the way Attenborough comforted Mara Wilson?

Chapter Nine

Self-Assessment — The Santa Heart Scale

Rate yourself 1–5 in each area:

Trait	Rating (1–5)
Patience	___
Warmth	___
Calmness	___
Listening	___
Emotional awareness	___
Kindness	___
Humility	___
Joy	___

Circle two areas to work on first.

Chapter Nine

SECTION 7 — After Chapter Seven –

Deepening Your Connection with Children and Adults

This workbook section is designed to help you reflect on the emotional heart of Santa Claus and strengthen the moments of connection that create true belief. Take your time with these questions. Write honestly. Let the answers guide your growth as a performer.

1. Remembering Magic

Think back to the first time *you* believed in Santa or felt Christmas magic.

What moment stands out most from your own childhood?

- What made that moment feel special?
- Was it something someone said—or something you *felt*?
- How does that experience influence the way you portray Santa or Mrs. Claus today?

Write your reflection:

2. The Power of Presence

When portraying Santa, belief often comes from your presence more than your words.

Think of a recent Santa interaction where you felt genuinely connected to a child or family.

- What did you do physically? (posture, eye contact, pacing)
- What did you say—or choose *not* to say?
- How did the child respond?
- What about your presence that made the moment feel authentic?

Write your reflection:

3. Nonverbal Magic

Children often trust Santa based on subtle, nonverbal cues.

Reflect on your own performance:

- What nonverbal habits do you already do well?
- Are there habits you would like to improve?
- How can you use your hands, eyes, posture, and pacing to create a deeper sense of calm and safety?

Checklist to consider:
☐ Soft eye contact
☐ Gentle smiles
☐ Kneeling or sitting to meet a child's height
☐ Speaking slowly and quietly
☐ Leaning in to listen
☐ Creating moments of silence instead of rushing

Write your thoughts:

4. Creating Belief for Adults

Adults do not believe in Santa the same way children do, but they believe in what Santa represents.

Think of an adult who seemed especially moved during one of your appearances.

- What do you think they were feeling?
- What part of Santa's demeanor touched them?
- How can you intentionally bring comfort and hope to adults during your visits?

Write your reflection:

5. When a Child Is Unsure

Not every child approach Santa with confidence. Some are shy. Some are scared. Some guarded.

Reflect on a time a child was uncertain or hesitant.

- How did you handle the situation?
- What worked?
- What could you try differently next time?
- How can you read nonverbal cues to better guide your approach?

Write your reflection:

6. The Gwenn & Attenborough Influence

Think about specific scenes from the two Miracle on 34th Street films.

- What did Edmund Gwenn do that made belief feel natural?
- What did Richard Attenborough do that felt emotionally grounding?
- Which qualities do you want to incorporate into your own portrayal?

Write your reflections and examples:

7. Your Santa Philosophy

Every Santa has their own internal definition of belief. Children experience that belief through your presence, tone, and patience. The challenge is aligning that belief with consistent, compassionate action.

In your own words:

What does it mean for you to help a child believe?

- What are you trying to give them?
- What emotions are you hoping to create?
- How does it feel when you see belief spark in a child's eyes?
- How does this work shape you outside the suit?

Write your personal Santa philosophy:

8. Personal Growth Goals

Based on your reflections, set one to three goals that will strengthen how you create belief.

Examples might include:

- Slowing down my pace.
- Kneeling more often to speak eye-to-eye.
- Speaking more softly.

- Listening without interrupting.
- Practicing stillness and calm.
- Adding quiet, gentle storytelling moments.
- Focusing more on the adults in the room.

Write out your goals.

Final Reflection

Belief is a gift you give.

What have you learned about yourself through portraying Santa or Mrs. Claus, and how has it deepened your own sense of wonder, kindness, and humanity?

Write your closing thoughts:

Chapter Nine

SECTION 8 — After Chapter Eight –

Your Personal Calling as Santa & Mrs. Claus

Your story shows that calling and connection are the heart of portraying Christmas.

Reflection Questions

1. What moment confirmed your own Santa calling?
2. How does partnership shape your Claus work (with a spouse or with a support team)?
3. How do you want families to feel when you enter their event?

Exercise — The Claus Couple Connection (Optional)

If you perform as a Claus couple:

- Describe your unique strengths as individuals.
- Describe your strengths as a team.
- Write three ways you can support one another in the magic you bring.

Chapter Nine

FINAL WORKBOOK SECTION –

Your Ongoing Santa Journey

Three Questions for Every Season

1. How did I bring joy this year?
2. What did I learn about myself or others?
3. What kind of Santa do I want to become next season?

Your Santa Growth Pledge

Write a personal promise to yourself, and to the world about how you will carry the spirit of Christmas in your life. This promise belongs to you alone. It is a moment to pause, reflect, and put intention into words. There is no right answer and no expectation, only an opportunity to acknowledge what the spirit of Christmas means to you and how you choose to carry it forward after what you have learned in this book.

Believe

To say there is no Santa Claus is the most erroneous statement in the world. Santa Claus is a thought and is passed from generation to generation. After time this thought takes on a human form. Maybe if all children and adults understand the symbolism of this thought we can actually attain Peace on Earth and good will to men everywhere.

- Charles W. Howard

Resources - References

The following books, films, archival materials, interviews, and historical resources informed the research, reflection, and analysis presented throughout *The Miracle of Santa Claus*. These sources were used for historical context, performance insight, cultural understanding, and professional Santa tradition. All interpretations, conclusions, and commentary remain the sole work and opinion of the author.

Films & Motion Pictures

1. *Miracle on 34th Street* (1947). Directed by George Seaton. 20th Century Fox. Performance by Edmund Gwenn as Kris Kringle.

2. *Miracle on 34th Street* (1994). Directed by Les Mayfield. 20th Century Fox. Performance by Richard Attenborough as Kris Kringle.

3. Academy Awards Broadcast Archives (1948). Edmund Gwenn acceptance speech and related coverage.

Books & Published Works

4. Thompson, Jeffrey Paul. *Miracle on 34th Street: The Making of a Christmas Classic*.

University Press of Kentucky.
(Recommended for readers seeking a comprehensive production history of the 1947 film.)

5. O'Hara, Maureen. *'Tis Herself: An Autobiography*. Simon & Schuster.
(Referenced for firsthand reflections on the production and Edmund Gwenn's performance.)

6. Charles W. Howard,
Writings, recorded teachings, and quoted principles associated with early professional Santa standards.

Historical & Institutional Resources

7. Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade historical archives
(Dates, traditions, and public historical accounts related to Santa's role in the parade.)

8. Macy's Santaland historical descriptions and public documentation
(General operational traditions, visitor experience evolution, and cultural influence.)

9. American Film Institute (AFI) Catalog (Historical verification of film credits, release information, and technical advisors.)

Professional Santa Tradition & Education

10. The Charles W. Howard Santa Claus School Founded 1937. Midland, Michigan. Historical teachings, philosophy, and standards attributed to Charles W. Howard and continued by Tom and Holly Valent.
Website: santaclausschool.com

11. Oral histories, professional conversations, and community knowledge shared by Santa performers, Mrs. Clauses, and Christmas professionals across the United States.

Interviews, Commentary & Public Statements

12. Public interviews with Edmund Gwenn, Richard Attenborough, Maureen O'Hara, Natalie Wood, Mara Wilson, and associated cast or production members, as published in print

13. interviews, documentaries, and reputable media retrospectives.

14. Contemporary interviews and commentary from professional Santa performers regarding best practices, belief-centered performance, and emotional safety for children.

Personal Experience & Professional Practice

14. The author's lived experience as a professional Santa Claus and Christmas performer, including parade appearances, private visits, public events, educational conferences, and collaborative community engagements.

15. Firsthand observation of modern Santa performance environments, including malls, parades, private homes, churches, schools, and charitable settings.

Resources - References

Editorial Notice

This book is a work of creative nonfiction, commentary, and analysis. While every effort has been made to ensure historical accuracy, some details may be interpreted or summarized for narrative clarity. References to real people, organizations, films, and traditions are made for educational and descriptive purposes only.

This work is not affiliated with, endorsed by, or sponsored by Macy's, 20th Century Fox, or the producers of *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Resources - References

Disclaimer

This chapter is a work of creative nonfiction that blends documented history, film scholarship, industry standards, and long-standing oral traditions within the professional Santa Claus community. While grounded in reputable sources and historical records, certain descriptions, interpretations, and narrative elements have been presented for clarity, storytelling continuity, and cultural context.

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Some industry practices and traditions described herein are based on widely accepted professional standards and oral histories that may not be formally documented but have been consistently upheld across generations of professional Santas. Any errors or omissions are unintentional.

A division of Santa Doug LLC

How did two legendary performances and one iconic store create the Santa the world believes in.Their influence still defines Santa Claus today.

Professional Santa performer Doug Van Der Weide (Santa Doug) explores the timeless portrayals of Santa Claus in Miracle on 34th Street and its 1994 remake, examining how Edmund Gwenn and Richard Attenborough shaped the modern image of Santa through warmth, humility, and authenticity. Blending film history with real-world Claus wisdom, this book reveals why belief isn't created by spectacle, but by presence, trust, and heart. A must-read for Santa performers and anyone who treasures the true spirit of Christmas.

Bonus Workbook Included: to help you strengthen your Claus persona and protect the magic that matters most.