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ETCETERA

It's never too early to strike up a friendship with Santa, as 10-month-old Giulia Farrell knows.

STAFF PHOTO/ SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Santa's Secrets

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

At the tender age of three, Michelle Donaghy already knows the drill when it comes to Santa Claus.

Waiting for the jolly old elf to return to his castle at Markville Mall, she knows, as sure as she knows how many more sleeps there are to Christmas morning, that St. Nick needs a break now and then.

"Santa's having lunch," Michelle says with a worldly air.

"Then he's going to feed his reindeer. Then he's going to the washroom. Then he's going to come back and give me a candy cane."

While Michelle isn't sure how long it will take Santa to fulfill all those duties, there's no doubt about her feelings for the bearded man in red.

"Santa's good. And he's good," she says.

"I asked Santa for a puzzle with a Barney picture. He brings presents to Nana's and I sleep over and then she calls me and she says Santa comed."

Michelle's cousin, Brianne Barker, 4, seems as equally enchanted with Santa but is more hesitant about expressing her feelings.

All the same, she's looking forward to receiving a baby Cabbage Patch doll under the tree.

Two-year-old Alexa Torrington of Markham isn't shy in the least when discussing Santa.

Unfortunately, it's a little difficult to understand her as she stuffs into her mouth the candy cane Santa handed to her.

But she's articulate enough to have passed on her wish list to the big elf.

"A choo-choo. It cross the bridge," says Alexa, who is also looking forward to getting a Barbie doll house.

She's also sure Santa will bring something for her baby sister, who is sleeping in the stroller, oblivious to the excitement swirling about her.

Anzel Hennip, 8, travelled a long way to sit on Santa's knee.

Her family has come all the way from South Africa to visit relatives.

"I love him very much," Anzel says after she and her sister Wilandri, 6, spent several minutes chatting with Santa.

Because no other children are waiting to see him and because the girls have come so far, Santa tries to teach Anzel and Wilandri how to twirl candy canes around their fingers.

Let's just say that while they enjoyed the lesson, the girls have a little more practising to do.

Anzel is hoping to find a Barbie doll who walks and crawls under her tree.

But she's really dreaming of a white Christmas.

"Every night we ask for snow. I want to build a snowman. I want to ski."

Five-year-old Reed Pereira's tastes are predictable.

The Stouffville youngster is wishing for Pokemon stuff and more Pokemon stuff, especially a Game Boy Pokemon game.

And like Anzel, Reed is hoping more snow falls. He's looking forward to leaving cookies and milk out for Santa and carrots for the reindeer.

Unlike her brother, who gives St. Nick a high-five, Reed's little sister Chloe, 2, is very wary of Santa as he approaches her.

"I don't like it," she repeats often.

But she manages to pluck up her courage as long as Santa remains at least 15 feet away.

"Bye Santa, bye Santa," says Chloe, making it clear to her mom she'd much rather go and see a dancing bear in a different location in the mall.

After seeing the kids at Markville Mall, Santa takes a short trip in his sleigh to Richmond Hill's Hillcrest Mall.

But other than a toddler who insists on making repeat visits, only to appear totally overwhelmed when perched on Santa's knee, and 10-month-old Guilia Farrell of Woodbridge, who is mesmerized by Santa's suit, there aren't many visitors at the moment.

That's OK.

The downtime gives St. Nick a chance to chat about some of the hundreds of children he has greeted over the years.

"I had a seven-year-old boy come and he wanted a chainsaw and a repair kit. I said, 'Why would you want a tool box full of tools?' He said, 'Santa, don't you know chainsaws break down?'" Santa says.

"I was dumbfounded. I was afraid to ask what the chainsaw was for."

Despite some unusual requests, Santa says most of the boys who visit him this year want Pokemon merchandise, while the girls are wishing for Barbies and their accessories.

Trying to make sure their kids aren't focusing solely on the commercialism of the season, almost all the parents prodded their children to tell the story of Baby Jesus and how His birth is the reason Christians celebrate Christmas.

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