

Understanding Montessori

The Kids Talk Way



Santa Claus: Making the Invisible Visible

December 13, 2009

"I've never gotten a present from Santa Claus," said Iliana, my 12-year-old seatmate on an east coast flight. "My parents thought I should only be given verifiable facts. They told me there is no veracity in Santa Claus."

"It's too bad that no one ever told your parents about the Secret of Santa Claus. When you know the Secret, you believe in Santa Claus all your life, even if you can't verify facts," I said.

"You believe in Santa Claus? What secret?"

"It's simple, but...."

"Please, tell me," Iliana said.

"We're flying on a plane right now. Who built this plane? Who designed it? Who got it ready to fly? Who trained our pilots? We know that someone had to do it, and with some research we could find those people. We won't though. We'll never meet those people. I'll call them invisible workers since they work to give us something we couldn't do alone."

I took a sip of coffee. "There are thousands of invisible workers for almost everything we use. I have no idea who planted the beans for this cup of coffee, or who picked them, roasted them and packaged them. I can only thank our flight attendant, the last person in this invisible line of people."

"I have faith," I continued, "that when I wish to fly on an airplane, or have a cup of coffee, these unknown people will have done their jobs, and my desires will come true. I don't have to grow my own coffee beans or build my own airplane because of all these wonderful people."

"So you're saying that Santa Claus is an invisible worker?" said Iliana.

"I see Santa Claus as being all these people in the world, who strive to serve humankind, to make life more enjoyable, more comfortable, more magical. I will never see these people who do so many things for me, but they are most assuredly real. When I understood this, and I was older than twelve, I wanted to be that helpful kind of person. In the first stage of believing in Santa Claus, when we're little, we're on the receiving end. When we live the secret, we are on the giving side, which is fun. Being like Santa, which is doing our jobs with cheerful intention to help others, makes amazing things happen, such as flying at 30,000 feet at 500 miles an hour, while sipping coffee and talking to you about Santa Claus."

"I get it. Once you know how Santa works, you become Santa Claus. You do your regular stuff with love in your heart and try to help others, not expecting anything in return. Santa is people helping people. I'm pretty sure

nobody told my parents that," Iliana said. "I think I'm going to have some fun being an invisible worker."

I was hoping I could show Iliana that Santa is that invisible force of faith, charity, believing and doing that cannot be easily explained. For young children, one way we can help them see and experience this force is in Santa's work. As the young child enters a developmental stage of reasoning, around age six, and begins to wonder about Santa, we need to give them opportunities to work and contribute to something bigger than themselves. We need to show them how to choose to be part of the magical power of giving, service and surprise.

As we walked off the plane, Iliana said, "I'm so excited about Santa Claus. I've already got some great ideas. I think this feeling is what the saying, "It's more blessed to give than to receive," means. Boy, are my parents and a few other people going to be surprised."

Iliana spied her grandparents and started singing, "Here Comes Santa Claus." They laughed and said, "What are you so happy about?"

As I walked away, Iliana waved and winked at me, then answered, "It's a secret."

Next week: Pull an Art Box Out of Your Hat