



Christmas would not be Christmas without the magical chubby elf in the white trimmed red suit and bulging bag of goodies. Franklin eLocal managed to snatch a few minutes in a very busy workshop to speak with Santa Claus.

Santa, I can see you and all your elves are very busy preparing for Christmas – how do you feel now that Christmas Day is almost here?

We have been working all year, preparing not just for Christmas Eve but for all the wonderful meetings with children before the big day. You know, I consider myself the luckiest elf in the world to be Father Christmas. The children are wonderful, they understand all about magic. And it doesn't stop with the children – elderly people look forward to Christmas just as much.

Santa Speaks – Christmas secrets revealed

What is your favourite part of Christmas?

You know, I have to be very secret and quiet delivering gifts on Christmas Eve, but leading up to Christmas, I love being out and about, meeting lots of people. I visit schools and kindergartens, indoor bowling clubs, lodges – there are dozens of organisations who love to have Santa come to call. I like to walk around the shopping areas, going to all the shops and giving sweets and little gifts to children. I sit down when I'm in town, and sometimes people say "oh, Santa is tired." But I'm not tired at all – I want to be at the same level as the little children, so they feel they can come up to me.

How do children react when they see you down town?

If they suddenly come around a corner and see me, they are sometimes unsure what to do and can be quite shy. I wave to them and then they want to come and see me. One little girl was being carried in her mother's arms, and she wriggled and wriggled so hard her mother nearly dropped her and had to put her down. She ran to me and threw her arms around me. Most children don't say very much, so I tell them how much they've grown since I saw them last year, and I never ask what they want for Christmas, because, of course, they've sent me a letter or an email and can be confident that I already know.

What are some of the things children say to you?

One very engaging little boy wanted to know what my reindeer eat – so I told him grass, carrots and apples – apples are like pudding to them. His mother later told me that by Christmas Eve he had worked up into a state of high excitement. He neatly placed a row of carrots on the table, then a row of apples and was just skipping off to bed when his father asked "What about Father

Christmas? Aren't you leaving him a bottle of beer?" The little boy replied "he can't have beer, he's driving."

I can know a lot about some children's families, and the little ones are amazed that I know so much detail about their lives. You would expect that of a magical elf.

I give small children baby animal toys and one little child took his baby animal to bed with him for weeks after. It is a precious thing for children to have a touch of magic in their lives.

Mother Christmas (who incidentally, sewed her husband's suit) tells me you are looking after yourself by eating healthily, but HOW do you fit down those narrow chimneys? Fairy dust

How do you manage to be in so many places, all over the world, at the same time? Fairy dust.

People have expressed concern that reindeer are not eco-friendly because of their carbon emissions through flatulence. What is the answer to this problem? Fairy dust

Has your role changed over the years?

I am always the same – I love and accept everyone, but my job changed when it was decided that men were bad and that children couldn't sit on my knee, or hug me. You would think those who make rules would realise I am an elf and that Christmas is magic – but those rules don't stop children from rushing up to hug me. Hugs are very, very important – to everyone you know. One woman asked me if I could give her a hug and her teenage daughter looked horrified, she gave me such a 'look.' So I asked if she would like a cuddle too, and there we were, the three of us in a big hug. As they walked away, I heard the girl say to her mother "he really is quite cuddly, isn't he mum."

Some of your own magical memories?

I loved sitting with Mother Christmas in a horse drawn carriage at the Waiuku Christmas Parade and helping the elves make Thomas the Tank Engine, the Fairy Carriage, gingerbread house and the new sleigh for the Pukekohe Christmas Parade. Then, there was the day when I came across a group of children playing in boxes left outside a shop. They were all over the footpath. They took one look at me and quickly gathered up the boxes and stacked them neatly again. There are magical moments of laughter with the children and the warmth of giving a much-needed hug to an elderly person in a rest home. Some have no one at Christmas, but they remember that I was there when they were little – if I can make someone smile, I've done something. Another Christmas I went to see some special needs children. Imagine a big room with everyone sitting on the floor, and one by one, they all jumped up and ran to me for a cuddle. Then there was the kindergarten, where 30 plus children came up for a big group hug – how can hugs be wrong? A young backpacker from Canada who was feeling lonely and homesick came and asked me for a hug – no trouble at all. Three days later, she came back for another cuddle. One lady in her 80s asked if she could sit on my knee for a photo for her grandchildren. She was saying "oh Santa, I've been a good girl.." when a man walked by, snorted and said to me "You'll never give up that job, will you?"