

# Pippens help bring the North Pole to Kirksville

BY LAURA PRATHER  
Features Editor

Santa Claus is in town. La Plata resident Glen Pippin plays the part of Santa at the Adair County Courthouse during the holidays. His wife, Sherry, joins him by adopting the role of Mrs. Claus. Their season starts the day after Thanksgiving and lasts until Christmas day and involves appearances at more than 25 different places in surrounding towns.

The Pippens have dressed up as the famous couple for about 13 years now and said they have become very passionate about it.

"It's the look on [the children's] faces, and for some of them, you can tell there is sheer excitement there," Sherry said.

This is the Pippens' fifth year visiting with kids at the courthouse as Mr. and Mrs. Claus. They also make appearances at the Bank of Kirksville, the A.T. Still Thompson Center and various schools and nursing homes in La Plata, Macon and New Cambria.

Glen said he first was mistaken as Santa when he was eating at a restaurant in Kahoka, Mo., wearing bib overalls and a red sweatshirt.

"This little boy ... come up bailing through the door hollering, 'Ho, ho, ho, ho, ho, ho,' and ran away from his mom and jumped up on my lap and told me what he wanted for Christmas," Glen said. "And his mom came and grabbed him and said, 'No, that ain't Ho, ho,' and the guy that was with me said, 'Yes it is, just leave him alone. He's doing a pretty good job telling him what he wants for Christmas.'"

Since then, Sherry said anywhere she and her husband go, children think he is Santa.

"The kid just thought he

was Santa Claus, and they always do," she said.

One time, they were fishing at Truman Lake (ASK LAURA) in the middle of the summer, and a boy confused him for Santa. They said the little boy just kept saying how he couldn't believe Santa goes on vacation.

Sherry made costumes for the both of them, but Glen's didn't fit him the way he wanted. He said his sister ended up making him one out of red car upholstery.

Glen also said he grows out his beard for the role, which really helps him look more authentic to the children. He said he never has had a kid sit on his lap and pull his beard be-

cause they know it is real.

**"He jumped out of the car before the car stopped, came running in and jumped on my lap, ... I asked him, 'What do you want for Christmas this year?' and he said, 'I don't want nothing. I got everything I wanted last year.'"**

**Glen Pippin**  
La Plata Resident

One year when they went to Fort Madison, Iowa, there was a blind girl who sat on Santa's lap.

"She felt Santa's [face and features], but the look on her face changed when she felt the beard," Sherry said. "She could tell it was real, and big tears welled up in her eyes because it was really Santa."

Some children are harder to manage because they ask

for such unrealistic and despondent things, Sherry said.

"We had one little girl come up ... and she had a real attitude, a chip on her shoulder," she said.

"... He asked her, 'What would you like for Christmas sweetie?' And she said, 'If you're Santa Claus, I want my uncle to come home.'"

The girl's uncle was in Iraq, and Sherry said she could tell by the look on the girl's mother's face that even she didn't know that her daughter understood the war and thought about it like that.

"For some of them, being able to talk to somebody that's not family, somebody that's not going to judge them, somebody who already thinks they're good to start off with, they just

need that kind of jump-start on a new year," she said.

Sherry said many children are surprisingly honest with Santa through what they tell him when they are visiting and what they write in the letters they give to him.

"For grown-ups [Christmas] is all commercial, but to little kids, it's altogether something different, they're serious," Glen said. "That makes it all worthwhile."

Although not all kids pay Santa a genuine visit, a majority do because they think Santa is the real deal, and if they are honest with how they acted during the year, they will get the Christmas presents they want.

Glen said one boy went so far as to tell him all he wanted for Christmas was to be able to not wet the bed.

"The next year when [his family was] driving up, he jumped out of the car before the car stopped, came running in and jumped on my lap," he said. "I asked him, 'What do you want for Christmas this year?' and he said, 'I don't want nothing. I got everything I wanted last year.'"

One of the funniest things the Pippens said they get asked by kids is what they feed their reindeer back at the North Pole.

"We tell them that the candy corn you get at Halloween time, we save all of that for reindeer corn," Sherry said. "It's easy to explain to them, 'You know how your parents say you shouldn't eat too much sugar, you'll get on a sugar high, too much sugar makes you active? Well, we feed that special reindeer corn to the reindeer so that then they have a lot of energy, so they can fly all over the world.' And kids understand that, it's something they can relate to."

Glen and Sherry said they prepare for the holiday season by doing work ahead of time. Sherry said she writes all of her Christmas cards and does most of her baking before Thanksgiving because she knows she won't have time for it once their Santa appearances begin.

The Pippens also keep track of popular toys and items that a lot of kids will be asking for



Laura Prather/Index

La Plata residents Glen and Sherry Pippin travel to about 25 different places in surrounding towns the month before Christmas to make appearances as Mr. and Mrs. Claus.

which they do by listening to what their 7-year-old grandson talks about.

Glen said he and Sherry never ask to be paid for what they do, although they do usually expect to be reimbursed for gas since they often travel to local towns. He said some places do pay them, but because schools especially can't afford it, they make up for it by having the kids make cards or get them a

small gift of appreciation.

Glen is retired, and Sherry works as a teacher's aid for special needs children in La Plata. They said that although they are getting older and the job is getting hard to keep up with, they have come to love it more and more every year.

"We love it, we really do," Sherry said. "He keeps saying, 'Oh I'm not going to do it anymore, I'm not going to do

it anymore.' But then it gets about August and he already starts thinking about like, 'Do you think we need to check the suit yet?'"

Although the Pippens mainly do it for the kids, they also get a lot of joy out of it.

"Really, it's just more that it's available to us — that's the way I look at it," Sherry said. "It's available to us to help make our Christmas better."

## Columnist says 'Ciao' to friends, readers and packs for home



**la dolce vita**  
with Sara DeGonia

They have diagnosed me with an imminent, yet non-life-threatening disease.

Something frighteningly called Reverse Culture Shock (RCS) that sounds to me like the effect of seeing too much Renaissance artwork and drinking too much sophisticated wine ... backwards.

Supposedly it's nothing like that but instead involves the homemaker (me) feeling ridiculously depressed and all angsty toward my family and friends like a sullen 15-year-old once I have arrived back in the States. It has a whooohy-whubity percent chance of afflicting me no matter how excited I've been the last few weeks to reunite with my beloved Mommy, Daddy and Boy-friendly.

According to the experts, it occurs because of the adjustments I have to make and the enormity of my experience.

For instance, imagine my Aunt Margie asking me at Christmas, "How was Italy?"

See, this part I understand. I mean, what do you say to that?

"Well Aunt Margie, how much time do you have because I spent 3.5 months there, and it would take me about 24 hours to explain it in briefest detail."

No. Who am I, Scrooge McDuck? Instead I'd say, "It was great! So much amazing food and plenty of fantastic sights."

But how annoying is it to reduce your potentially life-altering, gigantic cultural experience to about two sentences?

So that, in a nutshell, is RCS.

Apparently there's not much I can do to prevent the agony of such frustration and brief emotional return to teenagerdom. Thus, I've made it my goal to enjoy my last week here to the utmost.

I know undoubtedly that I will miss many aspects of living in this Mecca of beauty and new experiences, so there is absolutely no use to rush through my final days like a homesick puppy. Father Time never listens to me anyway.

My to-do list is now an ironic blend of firsts left to experience, tasting the best cocoa in Florence or visiting Michelangelo's casa, and lasts, one more margherita pizza or an "Arrivederci" to my preferred grocery store.

People will be the hardest to leave behind, as they usually are. One more bottle of vino from Happy at Happy Wine. A last wave to blow-drying extraordinaire, Dario, at Sabrina's salon. One final tomato and mozzarella sandwich from Simone, who now has my entire order memorized.

Of course, my closest new friends will return to the States with me, and we'll give keeping in touch the ol' college try. Some darlings will stay close without effort, and others will drift away.

I'm toting home a suitcase packed with plenty of souvenirs and Christ-

mas presents, and I've taken enough photos to line the walls of my entire house. My travel journal and memories, although somewhat unreliable, will fill in the gaps.

But other than all of that - those things we already expect to bring back after a trip, vacation or semester abroad - what is it that I got out of this overall experience?

It's funny because I sort of loathe that question for two reasons: Firstly, I hate the word "got," and secondly, it reminds me of confirmation class.

Although that two-year Catholic experience wasn't all fun and games, I did learn a thing or two. One Sunday evening, our lovely volunteer leaders told us, "Church is not about what you get out of it. It's about what you put into it."

Catholic or not, Christian or not, spiritual or not makes no matter - it's an idea I find applicable in many respects.

My time in Italy has been about the effort I put into enjoying myself, forming attachments and stepping out of my former American, Midwestern, even Kirksvillian boundaries.

And while I might be bringing back a nasty case of RCS, I'm also determined to come home content with the chance I gave myself in Italy to make it all worthwhile.

Now I can tell you that the blood-red tape, mountain of paperwork and endless fees are just antihills to be hurdled before the cultural pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. I can chat with you confidently about what to pack, how to budget, even where to eat, shop and play once you arrive.

Look for me on the Quad or in Barnett Hall, and we'll grab a cup of joe.

Ciao ragazzi, and here's hoping you get a shot to experience la dolce vita.

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with Gerald Osborn, D.O.  
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## Stay sane this holiday season

The holiday season is a time for family gatherings, hearty cuisine and good cheer, but it is not unusual for many of us to feel lonely or isolated during the holidays — a condition that has become known as the "holiday blues." For many people, these feelings arise soon after Halloween and often run through New Year's Eve.

Back-to-back holiday celebrations can provoke a sense of overwhelming responsibility and even anxiety. Along with holiday blues comes the added anxiety about what gifts to buy for whom and where to find the time to buy them. Often, fatigue plays a major role because we are running extra errands and scheduling more events and activities during the day.

For many, an ideal vision of what the holidays should be is far from reality. Hosting a holiday party, entertaining out-of-town guests, buying gifts and caring for children on school break all can be demanding tasks. Additionally, financial constraints, the inability to spend time with loved ones and unrealistic expectations can cause depression during what is supposed to be a joyful time.

Many people become sad when they think about the way things used to be during the holidays. Others become lonely if this is the first holiday without a loved one. In both instances, taking advantage of social support is key. Seeking support from clergy, friends or companions can help lift spirits during the season. Getting involved in the community and helping local charities can lead to meeting new acquaintances.

Other tips for fighting the holiday blues include:

- Be realistic
- Family tradition will always be important during the holidays, but unfortunately, as families grow and change, so do the rituals. If the entire

family is not able to get together, think about exchanging holiday photos by e-mail, talking on the phone regularly or even swapping scrapbooks.

• Stick to a budget

As the holiday season quickly approaches, try to set aside money each month for gifts. Over-spending can cause anxiety when trying to pay holiday bills. Try alternatives such as making homemade gifts or drawing names within your family.

• Don't abandon healthy habits

The holiday season can be stressful, so maintaining a daily exercise routine is important. Eating a healthy snack before a holiday party can make snacking on sweets less tempting.

• Learn to say no

It is almost impossible to attend every holiday party and social event, agreeing to attend only the events you truly want to will minimize stress and the feeling of being overwhelmed.

• Plan ahead

Develop a calendar and designate certain activities for specific days such as shopping, visiting friends and other social events.

**The holidays can be a difficult time for many people. For more information or if feelings of anxiety, stress and hopelessness continue, talk with your physician or contact Dr. Osborn at Northeast Missouri Health Council Behavior Health at 660-627-3621.**