

By Chris George '94

I believe in Santa Claus. My great uncle, Pat Thissen, who passed away just a year ago, exemplifies this belief.

Thump, thump, on the roof. Jingling bells ring through the cold air

Anxious anticipation grips me. Is Santa here?

With a knock on the door and a "Ho! Ho! Ho!" a jolly old man in a red suit, black boots, and white beard walks into the room.

Santa asks "Chris, have you been good this year?"

He knows my name!

I nod my head up and down in disbelief. Santa is sitting in front of me. With a beaming smile, I hop into his lap and tell him what I want for Christmas.

Santa then grabs a cookie and heads out the door. Moments later, hooves are thumping and bells are jingling. Santa is gone.

Not 10 minutes pass and my uncle Pat walks into the house. He gives me his full attention as I give him the details of Santa Claus' visit, even though he had been in the room all the time.

I've learned that at least two and maybe even three generations of families in the communities surrounding Janesville, MN knew my uncle Pat as Santa Claus, but it was this and so much more that leads me to believe in Santa Claus.

At age 22, Pat's father passed away. As the only man in his family, a choice needed to be made. He could give up his dream of singing with a big band and marrying his girlfriend or take care of the family farm, his mother, and his sisters. He took over the family farm and never married, while committing himself to provide for his mother and unwed sisters for the rest of their lives.

As a mailman, my uncle would help the sick or elderly on his mail route by delivering groceries to them. He would find a grocery list in the mailbox and deliver the list to the store. The store would fill the order, charge the person's account and give the groceries to my uncle to drop off. Probably illegal by Postal standards, my uncle did it regardless.

As a singer in the church choir, there was also the time a man came out to the farm for a cup of coffee. While having coffee, the man asked my uncle if he would sing at his wedding. Never turning down a chance to sing, my uncle said "Yes – when is the wedding?" The man said; "This afternoon...and the reception is a potluck, so can you

ask Mary (Pat's sister) to bring the wedding cake?" That afternoon, Pat sang and Mary brought the cake.

That was my Uncle Pat. From what I have heard about him, he was a man who gave his all to everyone. He was a throwback to a time when you did what you could to help whoever needed it and expected nothing in return. He was Santa Claus 365 days a year.

I believe in Santa Claus.