

My father, Roland Gosselin, dressed up as Santa in the Yellowknife Christmas parade for over 20 years and provided a lifetime of fond memories for those privileged to witness him in his glory.

I am grateful to all those who helped establish the “The Roland Gosselin Ho Ho Ho Award in his honour to keep his Christmas spirit alive.

The Santa hat was one of the many hats my father wore, but it was the one people were enamored with as they got caught up in the magical spell only Santa can bring. This particular hat gave him a glimpse into the lives of others, allowing him to share their private wishes, which he carried with care and fragility.

Growing up in the Depression in Ottawa, my dad was raised by his grandma in a humble home. Dressing up as Santa was his way of making up for things he may have missed out on in his young life. He loved seeing the smiling faces of children because he didn't have many reasons to smile as child. He wanted to bring happiness into peoples' lives and knew there was no better way than donning the suit of all suits. My late mother, his loving wife, Lena Gosselin would say, “He's not just one of these fly-by-night Santas. He really cares about what he does!”

Christmas magic coursed through my dad's veins. He carried two business cards with him - one he would hand out for those seeking services from his funeral business, and the other for those that needed the services of Santa Clause. My mother would say, “You want to see him in his red suit not his black suit”.

The first time my dad first dressed up as Santa was over 44 years ago for my sister Jacqueline and I. He wanted us to have something special and we always heard about Santa but we never really saw him. He had heard that an elderly Ukrainian lady rented some Santa suits, so he

rented a raggedy old suit for \$35. He meticulously sewed it all back together and cleaned it up. He delighted us, and our delight ignited his passion for donning the red suit and bringing out his inner Ho Ho Ho.

It wasn't just a hobby. He was passionate about it and he had pride in being the best. He was overjoyed when he landed one of the best gigs as Santa in the annual Yellowknife Christmas parade. He loved to entertain people young and old and children of all ages received a little gift from his red Santa bag. He would listen intently as people shared their wishes with him, whether it was the latest gadget, a bed to sleep in, or good health. Some were heartbreaking to hear, but he never broke character as he listened with enthusiasm and compassion, realizing he was blessed to be hearing their deepest wishes.

He would don the suit as if it had super powers, allowing him to enter houses unbeknownst to the owner to lead the children in Christmas carols and then leave to everyone's bewilderment while they bubbled with excitement and Christmas spirit.

My dad did so many things to infuse Christmas joy into the lives of the people he came into contact with. More than 2,000 children would sit on his knee each year. He would walk into banks and head straight behind the open tills to wish the tellers Merry Christmas. He marched up to the airport traffic controllers and would scold them for diverting jet traffic too near his reindeer. He was hired by Canadian North to do home visits in communities and also travelled to see a young boy who was in Edmonton undergoing chemotherapy. He was one of the first mall Santas in Yellowknife, and he recruited me to dress up as an elf and take polaroid photos of people on Santa's knee. At the time, I was mortified being dressed up as my friends were shopping in the mall, but I recall those memories fondly now.

Our home was full of Santa suits as my dad was constantly improving his suits year after year. I would help him put on the suit, and in those moments, he would transform into a larger than life person. I would help brush his fur so it was perfectly coiffed at the cuffs, ensure his makeup was expertly applied with just the right amount of blush and grey to the brows. He was impeccable. He wanted to always look fresh, clean and cheerful, just like Santa.

He wore his suit for over 50 years, it was his badge of honour. He played the part with zest and finesse. He wanted to bring out the child in everyone. He had a way about him, his laugh was infectious and Ho' Ho Ho was booming and thunderous. He is missed dearly, but his memory has left a lasting legacy.

-Submitted by Roland's daughter Tanya