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On Christmas Eve, even children living on the light stations get an annual visit from Santa Claus.

A long, long time ago, in 1969, Santa Claus hopped on a train from Toronto all the way to Prince Rupert for an off-season visit to the North West Coast. He fell for the beauty of the area and relocated his station a year later so he could work

with the Coast Guard to deliver presents to all the boys and girls living in the remote light stations.

“There were a lot of kids in the light stations in those days and over the years I’ve watched them all grow up become moms and dads themselves and I get emails from them,” Santa says.

He remembers one family that had nine children at the Pulteney Point light station. “There was not a lot to do on a light station you know,” he says with a jolly chuckle.

Santa remembers that every one of those children could play a musical instrument. “I would take song sheets along and we’d have a big carol singing there on the light station. I’d be there for an hour.”

Joining forces with the Coast Guard was convenient for Santa. He could give his reindeer a much needed rest on Digby Island and he would hop on the Coast Guard’s aircraft during the Christmas grocery run. It didn’t cost any extra money, he just took up two seats, one for his merry self and one for his helper elf.

The Coast Guard would also act as Santa’s helper. They would send him the list of good boys and girls at each of the light stations, including the parents’ phone numbers. When the children were sleeping he would call the parents to check in on how the children had behaved and — if they had been good — what they wanted for Christmas. It made his job a little easier because his elves were busy doing similar work for him in other parts of the world.



**A little-known fact is that Santa Claus used to rest up Rudolph and his team before the big night by using a Coast Guard helicopter to visit isolated children living at light stations along the North Coast. / SHANNON LOUGH**

**"I found the kids who were raised on the light stations to be very intelligent kids," Santa says. "They were so well-mannered. They lived in isolation with mom and dad. They had excellent manners."**

**Santa has travelled with the Coast Guard from the tip of Haida Gwaii, at Langara Point, all the way to Pulteney Point near Port Hardy.**

**He has memories of flying over the west coast of Haida Gwaii at tree top level, going up and down every beach and looking at the shipwrecks.**

**"You see I would go all the way down to Vancouver Island. Sometimes it would take a week, depending on weather. In a helicopter sometimes it would take as long as a week because you get weathered out."**

**Once he got stuck on Addenbroke Island due to mechanical issues with the aircraft. But it was all part of the festive adventure.**

**Santa says he used to love the thrill of hanging outside of a helicopter.**

**"We would open the door on the helicopter, throw the steps out, and I'd put a safety belt around my waist. I would step on the outside of the helicopter, hold onto the rail and take my hat off, because it would get blown off from the blast from the blades up above you, and Santa would wave to all the kids in the school."**

**Santa is nostalgic of those days with the Coast Guard. He even got married to Mrs. Claus on Bonilla Island light station. They wore their red suits, and his mother, Granny Claus, was there along with his white maltese dog, Fluffy Claus. But that was a very long time ago.**

**Over the past five-to-ten years most of the children have grown up and Santa phased out his special visits to the light stations. Instead, he stays around Prince Rupert. He was in the Christmas parade on Saturday, Dec. 5 and last Thursday he once again took flight to wave from another aircraft in the sky to more than 30 children at the Seal Cove Coast Guard base.**

**Cookie, his elven helper, joined him. She's been with him for nine years and assists him in preparing his full Santa regalia to meet the kids.**

**"Santa always has a helper. Cookie is my sweetheart."**

**It takes him about an hour to get ready. He whitens his six months of untrimmed beard, puts on some festive make-up and reddens his nose. In turn, he helps Cookie put on her freckles.**

**Being the Coast Guard Santa for 45 years has been a slice of life and a whole lot of fun for the ageless white-bearded man.**

**"It's one of the few jobs left in the world that just brings happiness to people and it doesn't cost you anything but your time."**

**After the Christmas season, Santa bids adieu to his duty for the year. He packs his bags, trims his beard and winters in Waikiki Beach, Hawaii.**