

# *Jaime the Elf Story*

## *By Kathleen Sheridan*

Every child knows, and so do most grownups if they don't forget, that Santa and Mrs. Claus live at the North Pole. Because the Claus' have a big job to do every holiday season, they have a community of elves to help them.

One young elf named Jaime, had red hair, a big smile and a peculiar habit of sneezing four times in a row. Because Jaime was young, she was an Elf-in-Training, and had to wear a badge that said "Trainee". She was not allowed to do the things the older elves could do, like make toys or take care of the reindeer. She was stuck with chores like sweeping and taking out the garbage. More than anything, she wanted Santa to give her the chance to prove herself worthy of full Elfhood.

One day in November, Santa took her aside and said, "Jaime, I have a job for you. This is a tough one but if you can do it, you will become a full Elf. In California there is a small town called Hollister. It's a beautiful place in the country, with fields and ranches, rolling hills and oak trees. Mrs. Claus and I want to visit Hollister, but I don't think we'll be able to find it because it is so dark at night. I need you to light up their downtown on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, so me and the Mrs. can find it."

Jamie was thrilled. Here was her big chance and it wasn't even hard! Excited she began to sneeze, achoo, achoo, achoo, achoo! "That's easy!" said Jaime between snuffles. "All I have to do is turn on some lights!"

"Not so fast", said Santa. "I'm not talking about just flipping a switch. I'm talking about the light in a child's smile, the lightness in a mother's step and the light of truth. These are the lights that bring the true spirit of the season."

Jaime was crestfallen. She didn't want Santa to know that she had no idea how to turn on those kinds of lights. It seemed like she would be taking out the garbage forever.

"How will I know if I can turn on those kinds of lights?" she whispered.

Santa said, "For each act of love, peace or hope, a tiny light will shine. The light may be in a window or in a tree or on a building. If there are enough tiny lights shining all at once, then I will be able to find the town of Hollister."

The next day, Jaime left for California. She rode the bus into Hollister, got off on San Benito Street and had a good look around. There were business people and parent people, small people and old people. They were walking very fast, with worried looks on their faces. They didn't look very light. Jaime took a deep breath, gathered up her courage and walked right up to a frazzled looking lady carrying heavy bags of presents.

"Have you thought about love lately?" asked Jaime.

"What I would love, snapped the lady, is a ton of money! All these presents are going to ruin me!" And off she stomped, wrestling with her packages.

"Well, that didn't work," thought Jaime. Strolling down Fifth Street, she saw a tall, elegant man in a business suit reading a paper.

"Have you done anything for peace lately?" asked Jaime.

"I've asked for peace!" snarled the man. "I am sick and tired of all this stupid holiday music and ridiculous decorating. There ought to be a law against it!" He ranted and raved, talking to no one in particular while Jaime quietly slid by.

Vision of brooms and garbage bags filled Jaime's mind as she walked down San Benito Street toward Vet's Plaza. There seated on a bench, was a kind looking old woman. Feeling more confident, Jaime stood up a little straighter and walked right up to the old woman.

"Have you given anyone any hope lately?" asked Jaime.

"Oh, I hope someone else has," sighed the old woman. "I hope that someone will take care of those poor homeless people. I hope someone will do something about those nasty toxic waste dumps. I hope I won't have to do too much, because I'm just an old woman." The old woman kept on talking, fiddling with the hem of her shirt while Jaime walked away.

Jaime slumped down to the curb and hid her face so no one would see her cry angry tears. "This isn't fair," she thought. "These stupid people wouldn't know love or peace or love if it came up and hit them in the face!" The more she thought about it, the more furious she became. In a snit, she began to sneeze, achoo, achoo, achoo, achoo!

"Bless you", came a voice.

Jaime looked up and saw a little boy watching her from a distance. "What are you looking at?" snarled Jaime, wiping her nose.

"Why are you crying?" asked the boy timidly. This red-haired person looked a little crazy to him.

"It's none of your business!" cried Jaime, who was now angrier than ever.

"Hey, I'm only trying to help you," said the boy. "Relax, calm down and tell me what's wrong."

In a tidal wave of tears, Jaime told the boy her entire story. She told him about being an Elf-in-Training, about Santa and the lights. She told him about the frazzled lady, the elegant man and the old woman. When she was done, she put her head on her knees, exhausted from the whole ordeal.

The boy reached gently into his pocket and pulled out a warm and sticky granola bar. Carefully, he broke it in half and gave one piece to Jaime. Feeling somewhat sheepish for having been so mean to the boy, Jaime gratefully took the treat and together they ate in silence.

"Thanks," said Jaime.

"You're welcome," said the boy. "You looked like you needed something nice."

As they sat in silence, Jaime's elf ears heard a new sound, a gentle buzzing sound like the winds of a hummingbird. Jaime looked around and behind, and finally overhead. The sound came from the tree next to them.

"You know," pondered the boy. "Maybe I can get my three friends to help out. If each of them does one act of kindness or peace or hope, that would light three tiny lights. If they tell three other friends, that would be..." He had to stop. Math was not his best subject in school. "Anyway, I think we could light a lot of tiny lights that way."

"I'll give it a try," said the boy as he stood up. Respectfully, he and Jaime shook hands and the boy left.

The buzzing overhead filled Jaime's elf ears and unable to stand it any longer, she climbed up to the tree to investigate. The tree was covered with strings of tiny lights and two of them were buzzing, shivering like an excited puppy. Jaime smiled a big, slow grin. "The boy was nice to me and then gave me hope," she thought. "And now two lights are ready to light up the night." As a feeling of peace and understanding washed over Jaime, a third tiny light began to buzz. "One good thing leads to another," thought Jaime. "All it takes is one person to start."

In the days that followed, each act of love, hope and peace led to more acts of kindness. And like the rain which begins drop by drop, the goodness spread over the town of Hollister. Jaime stayed downtown listening to the growing chorus of humming lights. Lights on the trees, on the buildings and in the store windows soon were quivering in their sockets, singing the song of the season. Jaime was pleased but still worried. Would there be enough lights for Santa to find Hollister?

The Saturday after Thanksgiving soon arrived. The townspeople prepared for the Lights On Celebration. The merchants decorated their shops, carolers practiced their songs, and the dancers put on their best costumes. As darkness descended on the town the people, all bundled up in their sweaters and caps against the chilly night air, gathered in the streets.

Jaime put on her best elf suit, her jingle bell shoes and nervously tugged on her cap. "Achoo, Achoo, Achoo, Achoo!" Jaime frowned. She couldn't start sneezing now. She was to lead the parade down San Benito Street and to signal for the lights to come on. The big question was, would there be enough lights for Santa!?

Jaime stepped out in front of the parade and waved her lantern. The people began the countdown. ".....five, four, three, TWO, ONE!" A group of trees burst in a sparkle of lights! Then another and another. Like a row of dominos, building after building lit up until the entire downtown was aglow! The band conductor waved his baton and music filled the air. The parade marched out with Jaime joyously dancing in the front.

A shout of joy from the children made Jaime look behind her. There were Santa and Mrs. Claus riding on the bright red fire engine! "WE DID IT!" shouted Jaime. Like magic, the lights of goodness had brought Santa to Hollister.

The rest of the evening was a blur of excitement and joy. At the end of the evening, a tired Jaime plopped down to rest. In her hand was an official Elf Badge that Santa had given her. But more importantly, in her heart was a new understanding. Jaime the Elf had learned that only in the light of love, peace and hope does the true spirit of the season shine.

*The End*