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Oak Harbor artist illustrates 'Santa & Me'

By **SUSANNE CERVENKA**
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As December rolls around and minds turn to the holiday season, children may start to ask questions about Santa.

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Why does the jolly, old man say "ho-ho-ho"?

How come Santa fly his sleigh with reindeer instead of using sled dogs?

"Santa and Me," illustrated and co-authored by Joshua Janes, 29, Oak Harbor, answers holiday inquiries. The theme of the children's book is a scrapbook put together by Mrs. Claus that traces the history of how Santa came to be.

Mrs. Claus explains the some of the little-known Christmas "facts" -- like that Vixen was almost named Thunder Hooves -- written on gift tags that she taped to the scrapbook. Along with Santa's story, the book includes pictures, newspaper clippings and other tokens from past Christmases, like a giant, overstuffed teddy bear and files of the good boys and girls of the world.

The book is fully of quirky clippings, like an advertisement telling children that their lump of coal could be worth two cents to the local energy company. It also includes a number of references to Janes' family and Oak Harbor.

"Santa and Me" is the first story book Janes has worked on, he said. Janes, a graphic designer for Columbus-based School Specialty Children's Publishing, normally illustrates covers for educational activity books.

When the manuscript for "Santa and Me" popped up, School Specialty went to Janes to do the art.

The main story included in the gift tags was written by Erik-Jon Slangerup of Columbus. Janes wrote and designed the

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Cover of 'Santa & Me,' a book illustrated and co-authored by Oak Harbor artist Joshua Janes.

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mementos found throughout the book, he said.

Janes said he used Slingerup's manuscript and let his creativity run with the illustrations.

"(The publishers) really gave me a lot of freedom on it," Janes said.

Janes said his wife, Angie, helped come up with the name and other play on words --like elf reporters Ginger Bredd and Boris Tudeth -- in the ads and news clippings.

The book's design and illustration took three months to complete, Janes said.

The drawings began as quick pencil sketches that were later scanned onto a computer, Janes said. On the computer, Janes redraws the sketches into solid lines that make the drawing look like a coloring book picture. Janes said he then airbrushes the illustrations, shading the drawings to add depth for a 3-D like effect.

"By the end, it's 50 layers of different chunks of art," he said.

While the production for "Santa and Me" proceeded quickly with few problems, it took a bit of work for Janes to get into the Christmas spirit -- all of the illustrations were done during spring, he said.

Janes said he went searched through Christmas specialty stores and pulled out winter decorations to give him the holiday feel as the weather warmed.

"It was kind of bizarre. I had Christmas ornaments all over my desk," he said. "It turned into Christmas in my office."

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The book, which has been in print since June, is selling well, Janes said. The first 12,000 copies printed sold quickly and the book is now in its second printing of another 60,000, he said.

Growing up, Janes always enjoyed art, but never saw illustrating children's books in his future.

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Janes, a 1993 [Port Clinton High School](#) graduate, said his career goal in high school was to become a comic book artist and attended Kubert School of Cartoon and Graphic Design in Dover, N.J.

But when he was finishing at Kubert, the comic book industry was in a downswing and those jobs were scarce.

The shift to illustrating educational and children's books fits better with his family life, he said. Janes and his wife have one daughter, Gabrielle, 1, and are expecting a second child.

"They're making me into a big softy," Janes said.

Janes and his wife plan on working together on a second children's book, which could be in stores next fall, he said.

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Cover of 'Santa & Me,' a book illustrated and co-authored by Oak Harbor artist Joshua Janes.

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