

The Man Who Would be Batman

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December 11, 2007

It's good to be with you today to share a Christmas story. I've billed this talk as Philosophy, Philanthropy and Phun. The truth is the only philosophy involved may have been when at times I asked myself – "What the Hell am I doing here" and the philanthropy was not mine but those who gave to the cause I represented – but the phun was all mine - and I had plenty of it.

In the Fall of 1992 I was a 55 year old executive with a large division of a major corporation; a recognized civic leader; father and grandfather - and I was Batman - yes, that Batman, the Dark Knight, the Caped Crusader: pointy ears, black tights, cape and even a Batmobile.

My transformation from conservative businessman to Batman began innocently enough when I happened to see an ad for an adult Batman cowl – the headpiece - in a Halloween magazine.

Just the thought of an adult Batman cowl first made me laugh and then made me think how much fun it would be to hand out candy to our neighborhood full of young children while dressed as a super hero.

So began a one night stand on Halloween that would lead to a three year run as Batman - with numerous personal appearances before hundreds of people at many events - and crowds up to almost two hundred thousand people in parades – while raising thousands of dollars and toys for needy kids at Christmas.

It was an adventure I will always remember with great joy, tremendous satisfaction and yes, maybe some lingering concern for my sanity.

At that time, 1992, Elaine and I were relatively new residents of Franklin, TN having moved there with my job in January of 1992.

Franklin is 18 miles south of Nashville. It's a very welcoming community. Elaine and I soon made many friends. But as parents and grandparents we were homesick, missing our kids and their kids back in Cleveland.

Helping to alleviate the absence of our grandchildren were the children in our neighborhood. Our "Grandpa's Toy Box" attracted many to our house – which sat on a small hill with a slopping front lawn - excellent for launching airplanes of all descriptions, and other games.

Given this background, it only seemed natural that first Fall in Franklin that I should do something special for my young friends on my first Halloween with them. Why not be Batman?

Batman, a perennial favorite, had become particularly popular with the success of the Batman movies and merchandising. The Batman cowl featured a one piece rubber head set which covered head, shoulders and the upper chest exposing only eyes, lips and chin - enough coverage that even an old guy like me could play the much younger character.

While I did not have a particularly athletic body, at almost 5'11" 180 pounds with nothing significant hanging over my belt, I could wear a Batman outfit without embarrassing the character - only myself – and I would be wearing a mask.

Once I had the idea, I tested it first on Elaine:

“Batman?” she said, as if I had said I planned to streak naked through the neighborhood. So I then asked our neighbors with young children since I didn’t want to scare anyone: “My kids would be thrilled to see Batman,” and then our oldest grandchild, Kaitlin, who was six – “It wouldn’t scare me Grandpa.”

With these approvals, I ordered the cowl. (“No ma’am,” I said to the order taker, “I don’t want the child size cowl, I want the adult size. Yes, there really is an adult size, it’s right next to the child size on page 16. Uh, my son has a big head.” The embarrassing moments had just begun.)

The cowl, of course, was just the beginning of a Batman outfit. No matter how authentic it may look, if worn over a T-shirt and shorts, you would be just another guy in shorts wearing a rubber mask.

So my next task was to complete the costume. A cape was easy. I bought a Dracula cape and modified the end by cutting the Batman curves. A tight fitting black turtleneck shirt would cover the top half of my body; the cowl provided the Batman logo, and black tights the bottom half.

(Another embarrassing moment - I had to buy lady’s tights to get them tight enough - “My wife will love these, I told the sales person, she’s taking ballet – yes, she is a big woman.” Later as Batman, a small girl came up to me and said her Dad told her I wear panty hose – I told her that Batman does not wear panty hose – not mentioning the lady’s tights.)

I fashioned gloves with the help of some black duct tape and used a weight belt turned backwards, painted yellow and decorated with a Batman logo as the Bat belt. Bat-Boots were my biggest problem but I finally settled on some rubber boots.

No sooner had I completed my outfit and had modeled it for my wife (“You look like Batman to me,” she said, “and you’ll even look better in the dark.” I wondered if this where the term “Dark Knight” came from?)

My thoughts then turned to my company car, a black Bonneville, and how it could become the Batmobile. To convert the car, I made Bat wings from form board, designed to fit into the trunk lid slots, painting them black. I then made a “Bat Thruster” out of a waste can which, when painted black, filled with plastic red flames and fitted to the rear of the car gave it a “jet engine” appearance. Small American flags were then placed on each side of the front hood. Adding the name “Batmobile” to each side of the car positively identified it.

Batman and the Batmobile were now ready for Halloween.

I could see that night in my mind. The Batmobile in the driveway under the glow of the light over the garage doors; Batman standing on our front stoop, lit by spot lights creating the Bat shadow covering the front of our two story house – Ah, I just couldn’t wait.

Soon after my preparations were complete, I learned that Halloween was not just a day of children treat or treating in Franklin. Halloween Saturday was set aside for an event called Pumpkin Fest.

The main street in town and the town square would be closed off; there would be a parade and then special events for children.

Upon learning of these activities, I immediately signed up for the parade. (“Yes ma’am,” I said to the parade lady, “a Batmobile - it’s a car and Batman will be riding on the trunk.” Oops, why did I say that, I had originally planned to drive it but now I needed a driver.)

The Batman movie that year featured Catwoman. How neat it would be, I thought, to have Catwoman driving the Batmobile while Batman rode on the trunk waving and greeting the children. So I invited Elaine to be the feline fem fatale. (“Catwoman!” She yelled. “You may be getting senile but I’m not.”)

No, she didn’t seem to like the idea at first, but as you folks know, a “no” is sometimes just a sign that you have to try harder - besides she actually hadn’t said no - not absolutely positively no anyway so I bought her a Catwoman costume at Wal-Mart.

I told her when I showed it to her that she should see what the costume looked like before she made up her mind. (“I have made up my mind - the costume looks just like I thought it would.”) “Look honey,” I said. “It has a mask, no one will even know who you are.” “I know who I am she replied and I’m not Catwoman.”)

But then, over time, some philosophy here - the power of a well-defined vision took over - even a silly vision can have power. One day she tried on the suit and finally agreed to join me if she didn’t have to get out of the car. (Later when young guys started hitting on her as Catwoman I wished she had stayed in the car.)

Halloween Day was beautiful - sunny with temperatures in the low 70s as we prepared for the mid morning parade. The Batmobile was assembled the night before so all we had to do to get ready was to get dressed.

If you ever thought that it would be possible for a man to get into the Batman suit while sliding down a pole into the Bat Cave, as Bruce Wayne used to do in the TV Batman series, forget about it. No one gets into such an outfit quickly.

I started with the tights - there is no more aptly named piece of clothing than tights especially lady’s tights on a man. These leggings (Had I gained weight since I bought them?) gave new meaning to the term, skin tight - it would have been easier to paint my legs black although leg hair may have detracted from the desired effect.)

The turtleneck went on next. Glancing in the mirror, I saw that I now resembled a tall slightly chubby piece of licorice. If I didn’t have a mask to hide my face and a cape to hide my butt, I would have quit right there. My boots came next and then my belt and then the cape. Since there are no pockets in the Bat tights, I added a small pouch, which I wore in the rear to hold my keys.

I then applied black face paint around my eyes to try to give me the look of the movie Batman. Pulling the cowl over my head with Elaine’s help, I looked in the mirror again and saw that the licorice had become Batman.

I was Batman! Elaine, Catwoman. I put on my Bat gloves got behind the wheel, pushed the button to open the garage door and backed slowly out into the driveway - hoping that no neighbors would see us.

I immediately learned - while backing out that when I turned my head the cowl did not turn with me - one eye stared into the inside of the mask and the other into the nose of the mask. By hunching my shoulders, I managed to turn head and mask together - a relief to Catwoman. Turning into the street, I heard a neighbor, Kevin, calling.

Rolling down my window, I heard him say that the end of my cape was outside the door and dragging. I would have a lot to learn about wearing a cape although I would never master the cape in the door problem. Fortunately, town was just 3 miles from the Bat Cave.

Pulling out of our development I did have a brief moment of sanity – a philosophical moment - “Oh my God, what am I doing? The moment passed - too late for such thoughts - I was Batman, driving the Batmobile and I was going to have a great time entertaining the kids.

The first thing I learned about driving a Batmobile in public was how few people notice you are driving a Batmobile, even if you are dressed as Batman. Most cars coming at us didn't seem to notice anything - Elaine kept checking for their drivers' reactions. It was fun to see reactions when we were noticed, especially by the children.

I would see in their excitement, the great popularity of the Caped Crusader and I started to feel much less foolish.

This pattern would continue in later appearances - I would always feel like a fool until I saw the first smile from a child and that would make it all worth while.

We soon arrived at the side street where the parade was being formed and I turned over the wheel to Catwoman. I got up on the truck - Let the parade begin.

The parade route was only two city blocks down the main street to the town square. The whistles blew, the parade started and we turned the corner making our first appearance to the people lining the street.

My fantasy was more than fulfilled - the greetings from adults and children were far greater than I had ever imagined it would be. We were a hit, filled with the rush it gave us as people reached out to touch us and say howdy. The look in the eyes of the children made me feel like a desired present on Christmas morning.

Catwoman did an excellent job - not running over anyone.

Reaching the town square we parked in front of its historic County Courthouse where we were immediately surrounded by our fans of all ages. We were instant celebrities - posing for pictures, signing autographs - and we loved it – well at least I did.

That night at home everything also went according to plan we greeted old and new young friends on their rounds to collect treats. Word spread fast, even to other neighborhoods, that Batman and Catwoman were at our house. Our lawn was covered with our fans and their parents. (The best line of the evening festivities came from a passing neighbor in a car yelling out to us, “If this is what you do for Halloween, we can't wait to see what you do for Christmas!”)

I would hear for years from many that my picture with their child or children was still on their refrigerators.

Getting out of the Bat suit is as great relief as getting into it is a chore.

The cowl fits the head - at least my head - like a tight glove fits a hand. It squeezes the face and if you have a round nose as I do the sharp-nosed mask rubs it raw. It's hot, your hair is always wet and you can't hear well with your ears enclosed in rubber. The face staring back from me in the mirror when I removed the cowl was almost unrecognizable - soggy hair covered my forehead, red lines divided my face and the black that had surrounded my eyes ran down my cheeks.

Hopefully these features that would not wash off would quickly fade away. (I could hear myself telling my boss that my red nose did not mean that I had been drinking - just that I had been Batman. Maybe it would be better to admit to drinking.)

In any event Batman was retired - or so I thought. - I would learn that being Batman is a lot like making love to a gorilla - you don't quit when you want to quit, you quit when the gorilla wants to quit.

During the course of my Pumpkin Fest appearance several people asked me if I could make an appearance at their children's birthday parties. I told them I did not do Batman for a living and would not be interested.

However one mom persisted and in a weak moment I gave her my phone number, telling her I would think about it. If I did I said it would require a donation to The Marine Corps' "Toys For Tots.

I'm not sure what made this organization come to my mind but looking back on it, with my interest in children, toys and my great respect for the Marines, it now seems natural. T4T, as the Marines call it, with its many contributors has made Christmas happy for many children since 1947.)

The lady did call, Batman did appear, a contribution was made - "The Toys For Tots Batman" was born. I would make two other public appearances that year, collecting several bags of toys, some money, and appear in one more parade, advertising the T4T campaign.

This parade was the annual county Christmas parade. Joining me in this event were my young neighbors, 8 year old Danny as Robin and 3 year old Joe in his car seat as the "Toys for Tots" Tot - we were Batman, Robin and the Tot in the Batmobile which now included T4T signs. This parade was televised increasing our advertising coverage.

We had great fun, entertaining hundreds of children and many adults - and we had even more fun when we stopped at a McDonald's on the way home still dressed in our costumes. (I don't know if the boys were as hungry as they claimed to be or whether they just wanted to extend our experience.) The restaurant was crowded with after parade customers.

We were greeted with cries of "Batman, Batman!" as we entered and stood in line, waving to our fans, just as if we did it every day. I signed many autographs

I learned what it must be like as a celebrity to be out in public - constant demands from children and adults for handshakes, high fives, signatures and pictures. One small boy wrapped his arms around one of my legs and wouldn't let go as I walked, stumbling to a table where we were surrounded by our fans. I'm not complaining it was truly a unique and wonderful experience for a home sick grandpa.

Once was enough however and Batman would never willingly again enter the “real world.” Unlike other “celebrities,” I could easily disappear - or could I?

I would learn during my toy collecting activities that year that there was no real active Toys campaign in our county. Its one collection site had limited space so when I had collected a car full of toys I delivered them to the Marine Reserve Station in Nashville for distribution.

There I met the sergeant in charge of Toys in middle Tennessee. I told him I thought I could do more for T4T, especially in my county, the following year if they would like me to help. They took my name for future reference.

The following spring, Batman was in demand for special birthday parties throughout the area - apparently at almost any price. Batman - “Bat Ham,” - I now referred to him in the third person as if he were someone else - appeared at several parties at party centers where there were always a lot of children.

I enjoyed entertaining the kids and the donations to Toys were nice too. My routine was meeting each child, shaking hands, answering questions, sometimes drawing a few sketches of Batman.

In September, the Marines asked me to chair the Toys campaign in Williamson County and to get it organized. After accepting I told them I thought that I could get Batman to help me. Learning of my alter ego, they asked if he could also help the Nashville Campaign too. “Well, maybe,” I said. Little Franklin was one thing but Nashville – the big time - was something else.

I found my county’s business community to be very supportive. By the end of October, we had over 45 locations ready to receive the distinctive traditional Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Barrels. They would hold donated toys until picked up weekly by the Marines.

Since our plan was to first meet the needs in our county with the toys and money collected in our county, we needed a local warehouse. More than enough space for this was soon donated, including utilities by the manager of a local shopping center. It was so nice that my Toys team and I - thought that we should hold a grand opening. Press releases were sent out and handbills were distributed.

It was a huge success. Donors filled 14 barrels with all kinds of toys and raised several hundred dollars. Catwoman, Batman, along with Santa Claus, the entertainers, face painters and other helpers, had a great time. We had “on site” radio coverage attracting people to our activities. Reporters from the local papers interviewed performers and fans, taking many pictures.

A special feature was Santa (a man who had never previously enjoyed the Christmas season) sitting on a throne like chair, flanked by elves, greeting children, who were not there to tell him what they wanted but to bring him toys for other children. A picture of a small boy in line, wearing a movie Batman shirt, holding a toy for Santa was printed on the front page of the Sunday paper. (I had my own Batman T Shirts made for the opening with proceeds to the campaign.)

All we needed now was to fill our warehouse with toys - actually to keep filling it since we distributed toys as we collected them.

We chose two established church programs for most of our distribution. When local needs were met, we were also able to provide items to a shelter home for abused women and their children; a home for troubled teens; a refugee program in Nashville - some of these children had never even seen a toy - and several inner city church programs.

Batman made a number of appearances on behalf of the campaign that year. He was the keynote speaker along with the mayor of Franklin for the 1993 kickoff lunch for the Middle Tennessee Toys Campaign in Nashville. It was another new experience - speaking to an adult audience including Marine officers, civic and charity leaders - while dressed as a large bat.

Batman was later the featured attraction, along with some local radio personalities, on a Marine sponsored Toys river cruise on the Cumberland River which wraps its way around three quarters of Nashville. It was yet another new experience - being trapped on a boat with about 100 children for almost 3 hours with almost nothing for them to do but have me entertain them.

I shook hands, signed autographs, posed for pictures, answered questions, drew pictures, parried with hecklers (older kids who apparently had to attend with younger siblings), threatened hecklers (a new game was promised - "Toss a Smart Mouth into the River," all in good fun. And I told stories. I did everything but what I really wanted to do after the first half hour - swim for shore - but I didn't think I would make it wearing a cape.

Batman also opened the annual Halloween festivities in Franklin. By this time, since I didn't have time to sign autographs and spend a little time with each child, I had autograph cards printed at no expense with my Batman signature on one side and information on Toys and how to donate on the other. They became very popular and we passed out thousands that year.

(Batman's suit had also been improved - the previous turtle neck shirt and tights had been replaced with a skin tight spandex black biking outfit, the gloves were now authentic, like the cowl, the rubber boots were now high black leather boots.)

I took advantage of opportunities to speak without Batman at some civic group meetings on behalf of our campaign. Batman and I also appeared on local cable TV and radio - but not together as some had requested - doing interviews etc. Local TV created and ran commercials for us, and local radio stations had me tape commercials, which they aired throughout the holiday season.

This experience with the radio station would later lead me to do other work with it on political activities - and still later in Cleveland doing a TV talk show.

Our last big event that year was an auction of items donated by the country music stars. My Friend Diana, a country singer whose husband played in Dolly Parton's band, through her friends and connections in the business, and the Marines through contacts made with the record companies in Nashville had amassed a large collection of the stars' personal items, autographed pictures, posters, cassettes and CDs.

Almost all of the stars were represented with items including Garth Brooks (autographed picture) and Dolly Parton (autographed teddy bear.) The auction was held on a Saturday afternoon in December, on a stage in the food court in our local mall that served a good part of lower middle Tennessee.

Batman hosted it with the assistance of Diana and a young lady who once starred with David Hazelhoff on a TV show - Night Rider. (She would have also qualified for Baywatch. I was beginning to look less crazy to my friends.)

Thanks again to local radio, TV and newspapers, and a crowded mall this event was well publicized and well attended. We raised over \$2000 in two hours before selling out. It was a great success for us, and the buyers, who were thrilled to get mementos of their favorite stars.

I left the mall that night still in my Batman suit, arms loaded with my Batman briefcase, several boxes of various items and all of the money. When I reached my car, I discovered that my keys were not in my pouch. How could they have gotten out of the zippered pouch? Was this a plot to rob Batman? I could see the embarrassing headlines - "Batman Robbed at Mall! Caped Crusader Conked etc.!"

I quickly returned to the mall where I unwillingly entered the real world dressed as Batman. People of all ages stopped me as I tried to make my way to a phone. Shaking hands, while juggling my boxes, putting them down to sign autographs and smiling at everyone, I finally got to a pay phone. My pouch still held several quarters.

I used one to call my neighbor. "Kevin, "I said when he answered, "This is Batman and I need your help." I was safe and so was the money.

Batman and friends would appear in three parades that year. The first was a return to the Pumpkin Fest parade where I was joined by my son Rick visiting from Cleveland, dressed as the Joker. The Joker and I rode on the trunk of the Batmobile, while it was driven by a friend, Dave, dressed as Alfred the Butler.

We arranged to have the parade led by a Marine Corps Honor Guard making it a big ad for Toys. (The Joker even won the best costume contest and was congratulated by Naomi and Ashley Judd. (Batman got to dance with the pretty Ashley too. No, she hasn't called me about a movie yet.) Wynonna Judd would later quietly donate many of the items her fans had sent her for her new baby to T4T.)

The County Christmas Parade was next and we entered it as "Batman and the Toys for Tots." We loaded the roof of the Batmobile with all kinds of toys, Alfred drove, Batman rode on the trunk and friends from work with their children, all dressed as toys, walked beside the car. It was much fun, except those times when the toys had to run to stay up with the car. (There's nothing worse than a bunch of tired, cranky toys.) Marines were our GI Joes - and they quit before the other toys.

The Nashville Christmas Parade soon followed. This very well attended annual event with over a hundred floats and other units follows a 3 - 4 mile route down Broadway - the biggest, broadest, some times baddest street in town.

(Batman, while not a country star, was especially well known in Nashville since the new BellSouth building - a high rise with antenna like structures on two of its peaks made it

look like a silhouette of the man himself. It immediately became known as the Batman Building.)

This parade forms at the lower end of Broadway near the Cumberland River, close to the historic Ryman Auditorium, home of the Grand Ole Opry for many years, and the watering holes frequented by its stars between performances. This part of town was also the gathering place of many of the city's homeless. Some of whom we got to know well while we waited for the parade to begin.

It was probably hard enough for these folks to leave a dark bar for the bright sunshine without having to run into a large bat when they did. I'd like to think that it caused some to give up drinking but it probably caused some to drink even more.

Almost all of these good people would eventually ask me for money (maybe they thought I really was wealthy Bruce Wayne) but they quit asking when I showed them I had no pockets.

It was a great day - sunshine in the mid sixties. An estimated 180,000 to 200,000 people lined the parade route while another million or so watched on TV. We were once again "Batman and the Toys for Tots." Alfred drove, Batman rode and the "toys" walked as thousands shouted. "Batman! Batman! Batman!" It was a wonderful, if somewhat deafening experience, as I tried to wave at as many people, particularly children, as possible without falling off the car. TV anchors did an "up close and personal" interview view with Batman as we passed the anchor booth. We got in a good plug for Toys.

(I shook so many hands that year at the various events, that I wore a hole in my right hand glove.)

I don't know how many toys we collected that year since we never had all of them at any one time - and even if we did we wouldn't have had the time to count them. I can only estimate that we collected and distributed at least the equivalent of several well-stocked toy stores. And no expenses were ever charged to the campaign.

The money we raised was used to buy toys and items for teenagers. (Toys for Teens). Elaine and I would visit stores like Toys R Us, make a list of what we wanted and the stores would prepare our purchases after hours for later pick up.

When time grew short we would shop during store hours using several carts leading people to speculate who we were - grandparents with many, many grandchildren; coaches, since we sometimes only bought footballs and basketballs, and managers of a child care center etc. We always had a good time in line waiting to check out and to further advertise T4T.

On Christmas Eve, just like Santa, we were through for the season sometimes after personally delivering some toys to needy families that had qualified too late for any other help.

The procedures we established in 1993 carried over to the following years.

In 1994 - we finally won the first place trophy in the county parade - but then we were the only one entered in our division. Dave, as Alfred the Butler, did most of the work for these events using his decorated red Jeep as The T4T Toymobile - Alfred drove and Batman rode, with safety straps, on the hood.

We were able with even more help than ever from friends in the media and business with special promotions etc. collect more toys and raise more money than our first year.

Our last year was 1995 - more businesses than ever got involved with bigger promotions, including the donation of a new car, which was raffled off.

With all of this help and the generosity of a lot of people, we were able to provide more toys and teen items than ever before to local and Nashville needy children. (Our program had also become the model, without Batman, for other counties in Middle Tennessee. A new record was set for T4T donations that year in Middle Tennessee.)

I then turned over the T4T chairmanship to two friends (civic and business people) early in 1996. (Neither one wanted to be Batman.) With an early retirement, Elaine and I sold our house in Franklin and moved back to greater Cleveland to be close to our family.

We would miss our Tennessee lives while enjoying living in the same city with our, now eight grandchildren for the first time.

Before leaving however, we did need to wrap up a few things. My “secret identity” as noted earlier, after three years as Batman was an oxymoron. One way or another nearly everyone in Williamson county knew that I was Batman, although almost all went along with the fantasy that the identity was a “secret.” I would always deny my alter ego. All of my little friends in the neighborhood knew my secret and all kept it.

While my name was never printed as playing Batman at any events, it frequently appeared in newspaper accounts in parentheses after “Batman.” Batman would also be called “Mel” from time to time when interviewed on radio and TV. Even when appointments were made for me at local medical facilities during an illness the schedulers would ask those making the appointments if I would be wearing my mask when I came. Not much of a secret but a lot of fun for everyone.

My double life was never mentioned whenever I participated in anything as a businessman - speeches, civic and political events etc. (During this time, I also hosted a monthly political roundtable for the Chamber of Commerce. If any of the local, state or federal politicians, including Senator Bill Frist, knew Batman was questioning them, they never let on.

Had I stayed in the county, I would have also headed that year’s grand jury – becoming a real crime fighter.

By the time we were to leave town, I felt it only right to officially confess that I was the pointy eared super hero and did so in a letter to the editors of the local papers which they printed. In the letters I said good-bye, thanking everyone for all of their support while announcing the retirement of Batman. (I also pointed out I had noticed several other “Batmans” were appearing around town to publicize videotapes and used cars. I didn’t want anyone to think these people were me, telling them I had a better retirement plan than that.)

Batman is now retired. I will always be grateful for my experiences as the Caped Crusader, stealing his celebrity for a good cause, entertaining thousands of children and having many laughs. It was one of the most satisfying things I’ve ever done

If time permits – some special memories...

I'll always remember the look in children's eyes when they shook Batman's hand, their hugs and kisses, their many questions (Was I the real Batman? Where's Robin? Can I fly? Where's the Bat Cave, the Joker, the Penguin etc.?)

Their generosity - one little girl put her favorite doll in a barrel which had to be retrieved by her parents since they didn't think she could sleep without it, their intelligence and most of all, their love.

Favorite Batman picture - when Batman and Santa Claus visited a daycare center for children of welfare mothers who were back in school. We were literally buried with children. A picture of this event shows only Batman's pointy ears above the children's heads.

Memories of the parades, in which we appeared like costumed mail carriers - in sunshine, cold and rain - still bring smiles - panhandlers, exhausted wet friends, happy children and adults, and pleasant relief when Batman got back to his cave.

Little blonde Jessica who lived across the street who said she knew I was Batman because of my smile.

Taking some toys with a welfare worker, who wanted me to see the good the campaign did, to a very poor home of new immigrants from Asia and having to show the kids how to play with toys since they had never seen any.

Hugging a boy, as Batman (his hero), who we had sent Batman toys prior to his open-heart surgery, after he was home and on his way to full recovery.

Distributing hundreds of books at schools in poor areas – reading to some of the children, playing with them as Batman.

A welfare worker, desperate for Christmas items for her charges, telling us we were sent from God to meet her needs – I think it was the donors that were sent from God.

Mel Maurer