

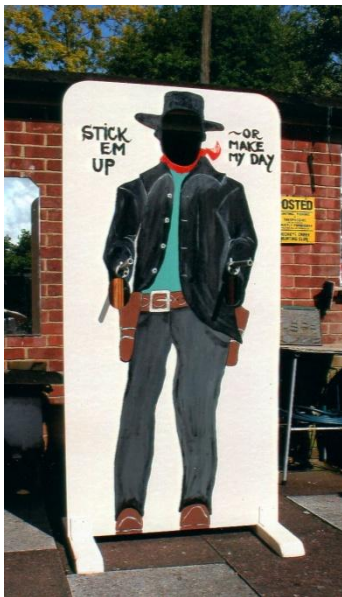
ANDY BRIERLEY'S BLOG

Greetings Shipmates,

Occasional voluntary jobs for the grand kids' junior school did, one year, get me in a situation that no amount of squirming would get me out of. Cornered at very short notice I acted as Santa Claus; suit and grotto were provided. I am no thespian, being self-conscious in situations like that. My saving grace was the children, quite blind to false beards and stick-on eyebrows. Young minds fill in gaps with consummate ease.

I had bodged up a spiel about the date and its significance, like whose birthday was it?, where did they live?, did they own a donkey? etc.. Ethnic diversity in that small school was an eye opener - but every one of them knew the Anglo Saxon take on that celebration, and enjoyed it.

I find it saddening how prejudice is a thing taught by parents - perhaps adults is a better word. Anyway, back to Santa, who thought his performance an Oscar winner. A reality check soon makes one aware.



The Goody Bag was the magic ingredient, not Santa ! I had made an Aunt Sally that went on each year, much liked as it allows juniors to throw soaked sponges at their betters. I enclose a picture, more Clint Eastwood than Sally. It is against a black door so you can't make out the cut-a-ways for hands and face.

He has a brace of pistols with chambers sticking out. With hindsight I thought him a bit aggressive, but the kids thought him an absolute hoot. If he made little impact on the Christmas Story he did a great deal for the Wild West.

What wearies one this time of year is the constant reminders that have to be left about - is the car taxed? - was the gas bill paid? - am I M.O.Td? - what date did you say we were wed dear? At the risk of a deluge of death threats did you remember to get your letter off to Santa Claus? I know, I know; the world is full of 'nay sayers', so who does write all those letters that allow Norwegian Airways to embrace a boom time about the 25th - scanned by news cameras, most addresses seem to be in adult hands.

Ah, that young pre kids period of pouting passion, when anxious to please and curry favour one leapt into the breach - post tucker -with the cry, 'You relax dear, I'll do the washing up. It will give me the opportunity to try out your lovely present, the shiny bright silver pot scourer from Woolworth, that still has the sale tag affixed, and, no dear, the tears in my eyes are tears of gratitude'.

What a lucky old set of aches we are this Yuletide, with generous contribution of free cash to pay the gas bill, T.V. licence of £140 paid for, you can watch those interminable repeats for NOWT!

A plastic pass allowing free rides on the bus to collect your turkey, an old age pension, if not generous, does take sharp corners off existence. Our blessings are countable. Today they will

not enjoy the privilege of retirement at max. 65, we will be objects of envy - but we may be in our boxes, so remember to expire with a smile on your face.

My doctor, he's Nigerian, has shaken the bones and assures me, we old Superbeans are in for a relaxed, contented 2018.

Life is about memories and we have plenty, sit back and enjoy, be you Baptist or Buddhist, Jesuit or Jewish, Christian or Coptic, we are the chosen ones...

Happy New Year and Tatty Bye Shipmates.

Crucial advice - Keep breathing...

