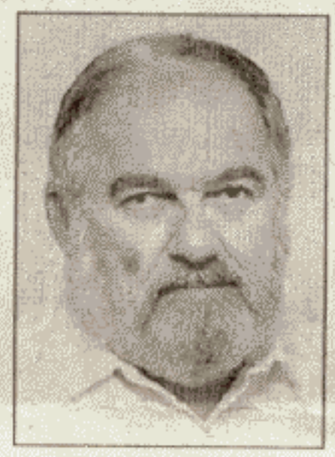
Littlest parade the best of all



JERRY LANE

Tonight's the night we've all been waiting for. The kids have been getting ready for the past month — and they've been reminding us almost that long that we have to come to see them marching in the Montrose Christmas Parade. It's this annual event that starts the Christmas season for me, and I am almost as excited as the kids are.

I love this parade. It's a local happening and it seems like every kid from every town anywhere near will be participating in some manner. Unlike the Tournament of Roses, the Montrose Christmas Parade isn't polished to perfection; it's sort of homemade and that's the charm of it. Some groups are well organized and their performances are proficient — and others, well they make it from start to finish, but that's the best you can say.

Every so often, a whole group will realize that it has lagged behind a bit — and all of its members will start running down the street to catch up. I wait for those groups and cheer them on as my soulmates. They are the ones I love best.

The motorcycle policemen perform, local celebrities ride by and wish everyone happy holidays, bands liven up the scene with their music, flag girls and majorettes show their dexterity and rhythm, and an old fire engine usually rolls by with lots of passengers waving. I'd like to be riding on the back of the hook and ladder because it looks like such fun.

Almost as much fun as the paraders are the folks who line both sides of the street to wave to the marchers as they go by. After all, what's the fun of being in a parade if there's no one to wave to? Parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and neighbors all smile and wave and yell "Merry Christmas" to the paraders.

Some bring chairs, more bring dogs, and many sit on the curbs with blankets to keep themselves warm. Hollywood can have its flashy Christmas parade. I'll take our Montrose parade — a real old-fashioned family celebration.

And to cap it off, there's good old Santa Claus ho-ho-hoing his way along Honolulu. Of course, there is always some skeptical urchin who broadcasts to the others of his age group that the red-suited fellow in the sleigh or helicopter isn't Santa Claus at all, because there is no Santa Claus.

And the little girl who has been laboring over her letter to Santa has shock registered on her sweet little face as she turns to her Daddy for the answer to the question she can't bear to ask.

"Of course, there is a Santa Claus," he tells her. He is the spirit of love and giving that fills our hearts at this time of year. He is the fun of putting up the Christmas tree and hanging the ornaments you made in school on it. He is Christmas cookies that your Mama makes and the love you put into the napkin holder you made for her. He is the spirit that makes everyone light up our world with bulbs and lighted figures so that every street looks as cheerful as we feel.

Christmas is dinner with the family and singing carols about Bethlehem and Santa and Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer. It's "We Three Kings" and "Jingle Bells" and "I Saw Mommy Kissing Santa Claus."

But more than all the lights and songs and gifts and holiday foods, Christmas is for sharing. It's a time to help Santa by remembering people who are not as fortunate as we are by collecting food, clothes and toys and taking them to the fire station or the sheriff's department to make another family happy. It's a time to remember people who are sick and visit them with something to make their days brighter. It's a time to remember people who live alone and might enjoy sharing a meal with you and your family. It's also a time to say thank you to our sheriff's deputies and firefighters for taking such good care of us all year long. Yes, it is their job, but they do so much more than we ever pay them for. They are dedicated to our safety and that deserves recognition.

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And it's a time to remember our servicemen who are far from home and loved ones and their families who miss them. Let's all remember to say a special prayer that next year will see them all home safe and "Peace on Earth" will be realized.

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