

I fell for Santa

Now it's Christmas every day!

Rebecca is encouraging everyone to embrace the true meaning of the festive season
Rebecca Richardson, 34, Sydney, NSW



Me, Trevor and Reeve



I love making hampers to give away



A baby set I put together for an op-shop



We wanted to show our neighbours how grateful we are to have them next door



I left a little nappy pack in the baby change room

When I tell people I fell in love with Santa, I'm often greeted with a laugh. But it's true! I tumbled head over heels for the man in the red suit, and I'm proud to say he loves me too! Yes, my hubby Trevor, 29, was wearing a Santa Claus costume when we crossed paths six years ago. And strangely enough, as I was making my way home from a Christmas charity event, I was dressed as Father Christmas as well. But our similar taste in costumes wasn't the only thing we had in common.

We soon discovered that we were

soulmates and four years later we got married. But bagging my own Santa isn't the only reason I love Christmas. I have always felt passionate about the spirit of giving – and I don't mean buying flashy, expensive gifts.

Who says you need to wait until December 25 to make someone's day? That's why, last year, I embarked on a mission to make a difference.

It started simply enough.

I had been working as an executive assistant for a corporate company and I'd always tried

to bring joy into my colleagues' lives. It was the littlest things – like leaving a note on their desk to tell them their outfit was nice or surprising them with a cake.

Seeing their faces light up made my day. So, when Trevor and I discovered I was pregnant with our first baby, I wondered if I could turn my passion for pleasing into a special project. 'Put your energy into it and you'll make it happen,' he encouraged.

So in July last year, I decided to start a not-for-profit company called Ways to Amaze. I wanted to inspire others to perform acts of kindness by getting them to share their selfless stories on a website. For each tale that was published online, I donated my own money to a different charity.

Launching the site was nerve-racking, but the response was

amazing. Within weeks, people from all over the country were posting about generous things they and others were doing. *My beautiful daughter's been helping me care for my dad who has terminal cancer*, one person said.

I take a single mum's children to school every day, as she can't afford a car, another shared.

Each tale warmed my heart and I also posted my ideas about

ways we can all share a special moment with a stranger.

I wrote of the time

I drove someone who'd missed the

bus to their ferry wharf so they wouldn't be late for work, and another time I asked an elderly lady dining alone to sit with us.

The first organisation I helped was Mums Like Me, a group that provides support and advice to new mothers. Instead of gifts for my birthday, I asked friends and family to make a donation. We raised \$448 for the group!

I felt proud that people were embracing the idea, and as my belly bloomed, so did my site. As people shared more stories, sponsors got on board. Soon I was able to make donations to The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Yasminah's Gift of Hope – which supports families who have lost a child – and The Flower Project, which promotes community kindness.

When I gave birth to our son,

I wanted to inspire others to perform acts of kindness

Reeve, in November last year, I had an even greater sense of purpose. Cradling him in my arms, I so wanted him to grow up in a world filled with positivity, happiness and generosity.

As Christmas approached, I embarked on a '12 days of giving' project, where I'd spread a little joy throughout December.

Luckily, Trevor was supporting us financially, so for every kind gesture I carried out I vowed to donate five dollars to a charity called Givit. It gives items like furniture and clothes to those in need.

For my first deed, I bought a piggy bank. Feeding all my loose change into the slot, I asked Trevor to do the same. 'Once it's full I'll donate it to the World League for Protection of Animals,' I told him.

Two days later I treated a friend to a massage and offered to watch her son while she enjoyed the session. 'You deserve it,' I smiled. I felt touched as tears welled in her eyes. 'I don't know what to say,' she gasped. But I didn't stop there.

I donated a pamper pack to a charity that helps women and men in refuges, put together a hamper for an op-shop and left nappies and wipes at the baby change room in a local shopping centre. But my mission wasn't just about material gifts. I also volunteered my time to a mums'



Trevor was dressed as Santa when we met!

group, called my grandparents for a long overdue catch-up and started leaving notes in Trevor's lunch box. *You're an amazing dad! Have a great day*, I wrote.

On December 23, I thanked the Royal North Shore Hospital, who'd been so supportive during my pregnancy, by giving a basket filled with treats to the nurses.

On Christmas Eve I gave a new baby bouncer to a mothers'

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group. Then on Christmas Day, the final day of my challenge, I left specially wrapped parcels on my neighbour's front step to tell them how grateful we were to have them living next door.

'I'm so proud of you,' Trevor smiled when I got home. His words meant a lot, but I didn't do it for the praise. I never have.

My mission is simply to prove that if we all dig a little deeper we really can make a difference.

Last year, my website helped raise \$1300 for various charities

and I don't want to stop there.

That's why, this festive season I encourage you all to carry out one random act of kindness. Because with a little thought, it can be Christmas every day! ■

As told to Smita Mistry
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