

Reel B...

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MN

TEMPLETON, BILL

Feel Big. book

Mrs. Claus to join Santa — the world's too big for one

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By SUSAN de STEIN

Bill Templeton isn't much different from the average five-year-old.

He believes in Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, reindeer, elves, and animals that fly. He believes in everything that's magic.

He's also 60 years old. His hair is graying, even thinning in places. His children have children. He even talks about retirement. Sitting behind an executive-type desk in his glass-windowed modern office in Don Mills, complete with plush carpet and secretary, he just doesn't look like a kid.

But he hasn't any intention of growing up, crossing that barrier into adulthood. But then, he doesn't intend to grow old either.

He has a knack with kids — maybe because he thinks like them. And it's not just that he believes a person is only as old as he feels. He just doesn't draw a very distinct line between fantasy and reality. One gets the impressions he'd prefer living on the fantasy side of the line anyway.

So when he talks about Mrs. Claus joining Santa on his Christmas Eve trip from the North Pole, you believe. And he wants everyone to believe.

He's even written a book so we'll believe and pass it on. He created *How Mrs. Claus Saves Christmas*, released this month by Collins Publishers.

We don't want to give it away, but the story involves Mrs. Claus and how she's called in to duty on Christmas Eve —

she and McMoose, the flying moose, and Goodinuff, Santa's chief elf. The upshot of the story — peppered with lots of suspense, and featuring a little girl named Donna Lea who's in hospital, a thief who has a change of heart, and a doll — is that Mr. Claus joins her husband on his Christmas trip on a permanent basis.

A graphic artist by profession, Templeton, a Clarkson area resident, heads up several companies that produce live and animated TV commercials.

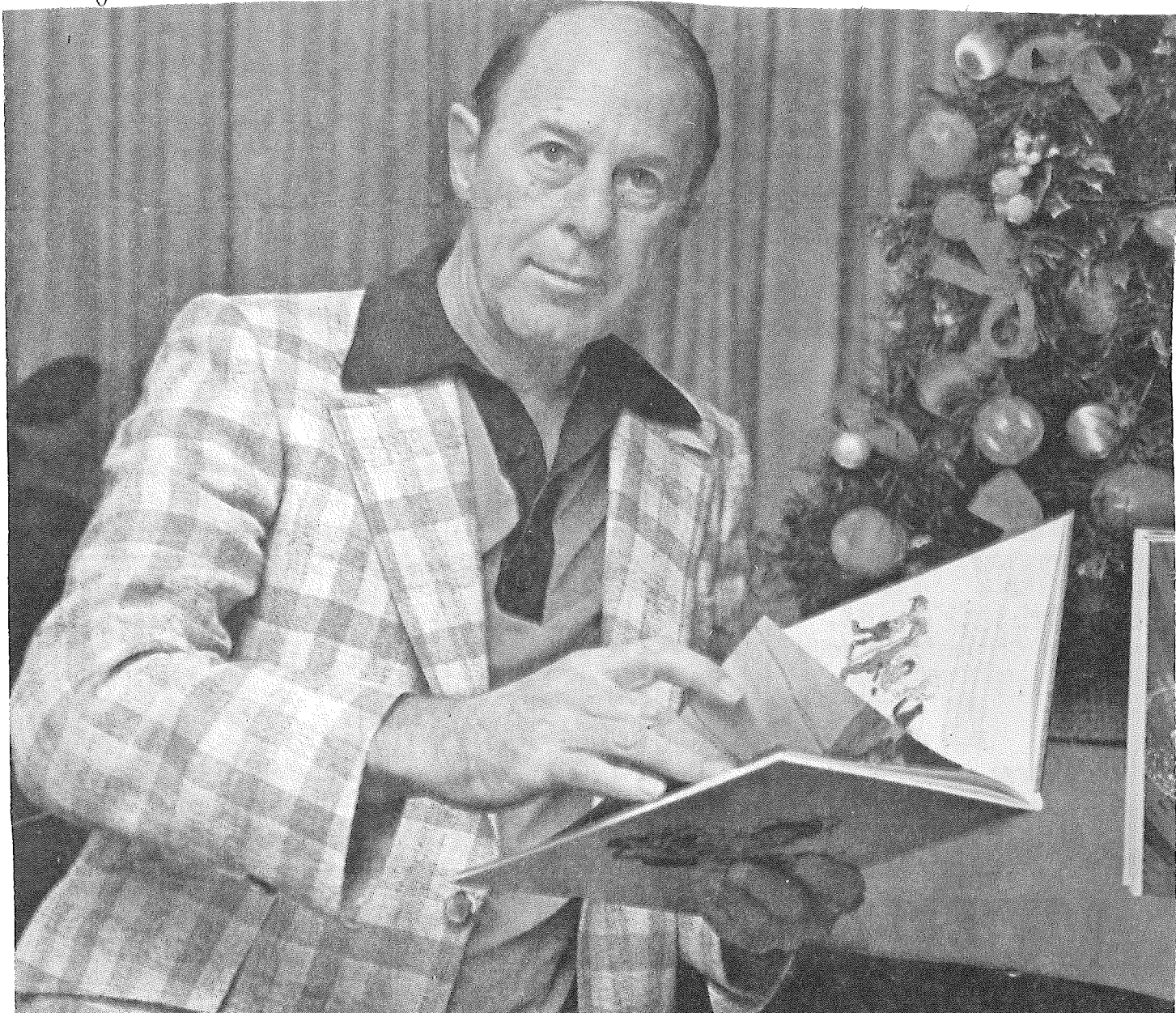
An artist and creator, he's also, however, a storyteller from way back. Since he's always loved kids, the book was a natural thing to do, the result of a combination of talents and loves. A winning combination.

He actually likes kids better than most adults. "Most kids," he says, "have a tremendous sense of humor. They absorb things quickly. Their minds are alert; they're more exciting. And they haven't learned to be devious yet."

One of five children (his brother Charles is the author of international bestseller *Act of God*), he remembers his own childhood in Regina, Saskatchewan, as a time of great happiness.

"And I grew up with one thing in mind, having my own kids." His own five children have in turn had ten of their own.

The book's focus on Christmas isn't a fluke either. Christmas, in his home, was always a big event. "I guess it



Christmas is Bill Templeton's favorite time . . . so he wrote a book about it . . . for kids age three to 80.

started with my dad. He always tried to make us believe in Santa. He'd pull off some clever stunts . . . so good that no kid on the block could convince us there wasn't a Santa Claus."

"One year, he crossed the wires for the front door bell. Just as Christmas Eve dinner was almost over, the maid in the kitchen rang the bell. He went to the door, opened it and no one was there.

"This happened again. And again, no one was there. So then we all stood, hanging on to dad's legs, at the door waiting for it to ring again. When the bell rang, we snapped open the door.

"And there was no one there . . . not even footprints in the snow. Dad showed us anything could happen at Christmas. So with that background, I just carried on the tradition. The children love it."

The book wasn't originally conceived as a book. "When the idea for the story came to me, I thought first about producing a fully animated film.

"We had an animation house make a 12-minute pilot for us — of which three minutes were fully animated. But before we went any further — it would probably cost \$325,000 for a half-hour of full animation — we needed sponsors.

"We've had the go-ahead from a couple of networks and tentative approval for Christmas 1979, but we're working on sponsors."

Meanwhile, an editor from Collins decided the idea could be converted into book form.

Templeton admits he had difficulty putting it down on paper. "I'm not a writer. I'm a storyteller."

He dictated the entire book into a tape recorder during a drive north from Toronto to his cottage near Midland. "Written with a pencil, it was too heavy. This way, I told the story simply, directly, as I would to a child."

He tested the idea on his oldest grandson Chad, to whom the book is dedicated.

How Mrs. Claus Saves Christmas is intended for children of any age, three to eight years. "And 80", he smiles.

He hopes to change centuries-old tradition that says Santa travels alone. "That's the key to the whole story . . . Mrs. Claus is going to be there, too.

"It's an absolute natural. This book wasn't meant to be a women's lib thing. The world has grown so big, Santa needs help delivering Christmas presents. The mother is a natural."

Besides, he says, "the world of magic is real".

He's convincing.