



Merry Xmas!

Now that the weather has turned warm again, and the windows thus stay open during the day, I am more in touch with the world outside. The room where I spend most of my time when not down in the workshop is at the front of the house, and as I have no front garden (nor rear garden either!), the building is very close to the street. The only thing giving me any privacy at all is a thick *aoki* bush (*Aucuba japonica*) growing right in front of the window.

People in the street walk past this greenery, not realizing that somebody may be sitting inside the open window just the other side of it, so I am sometimes able to listen in on some interesting conversations. Now don't get angry at me for saying that! I'm not trying to eavesdrop on anybody; I'm just sitting peacefully in my own room. I can't help it if people talk loudly enough for me to hear!

Of course most of the scraps of conversation that float to my ear are nothing to do with me, or otherwise of no interest. I hear a few seconds of talk, as the people are within 'range' for a moment, then they disappear down the street.

But quite often, passing my house does trigger a conversation about me. A couple of school students may say "This is where that *gaijin* lives - the guy we saw on TV last week." "Eh? Doing what?" "I dunno ... drawing pictures or something ..."

If the passersby are women of a certain age, they may comment on my 'garden'. "Pretty scruffy ... that bush hasn't been trimmed in years!"

But the ones that are the most enjoyable for me, and which eagerly bring me near the window so that I can catch everything they say, are kids from the local daycare center on the way to a neighbourhood park. There are usually a couple of dozen of them parading by, holding onto a long rope guided by their caretakers. Because they have sometimes seen me outside, they know who lives here, and - because they are still young and innocent - have no hesitation in raising their voices and chatting about me.

"This is where that *hige ojisan* lives!" ... or ... "Where's the funny guy today?"

And then one phrase I eagerly wait for, because I know it's coming, especially on those times when I have heard them approaching and stand up visibly in the window ... "There's Santa Claus!"

I give a big grin, and say 'Good Morning', while the teachers sometimes try to shush the giggling kids.

I get such a kick out of this because, honestly speaking, nobody in my own society - not even little pre-schoolers - would ever think I look like Santa Claus. Having a white beard is one thing, but I lack the other essential requirement, the big fat belly!

But there's no need to spoil their fun; if they want to call me Santa, I'm happy to oblige. As long as they don't expect me to show up one day with a sack full of presents!

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