

Educationally Speaking  
The Salem Leader  
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12/11/06

### **It's a big house**

Two weeks ago I returned to Salem for the Stevens Museum's annual Christmas Open House. It's really too bad if you missed it because all the big names were there: Willie Harlen, Kathy Wade, Clara Marie Burns, Tina & Raymond Lee, Dorothy Cottongim, Rhodella Martin and Tony Terrell (I think. Tony may have been Santa. It was really hard to tell).

Kathy, the museum's librarian, emailed me before the open house asking if I would be available. I took this as meaning, "Justin! Quick! Salem needs you!" After which point I put on my cape and prepared to fly down to Salem following precisely the same path as I-65 at about 75 MPH for two hours. Once I arrived in Salem I noticed two things:

- 1) As Christmas draws near people think it's acceptable to put up even *more* ugly junk in their yards and;
- 2) Salem seems to be running along just fine.

While I was glad to see that Salem seemed to be chugging along without me around all the time, I spoke to Mayor Judy Chastain briefly about a photo I took of her hog calling at this year's Old Settlers' Days. Mind you, she can never run for any office above city mayor because the news media would have a field-day if they ever got a copy of that photo. Nevertheless, while speaking to her she seemed calm, cool and collected but deep down inside I knew she was screaming, "Justin! Salem needs you! We want you to be our king! Please hurry before someone like Jim Ritz writes another tirade to the newspaper!" I shrugged it off and decided to wait for a formal invitation.

The open house's main attraction is the presence of children. As I was taking photos of students from East Washington Elementary I overheard one woman proclaim, "Those little kids are so cute together." Evidently little people are "cute" and "adorable" when they're singing in a group. I immediately wanted to know what the age cutoff is for cuteness. If a bunch of high school students got up and sang at the open house you can be guaranteed no middle-aged woman would call any of them "cute". She might call a few middle school students "cute", but probably just the sixth graders. That's why I've determined that the cutoff for cuteness is age 11. Once you hit midnight on your eleventh birthday you're officially a drug-seeking, sex-craved menace to society. Even if you tried to sing to counteract this effect you wouldn't be able to because your voice would crack in half.

During my hefty four hour duty I met a lot of people who were looking for gifts to give this Christmas. I always knew that the Stevens Museum had a lot better selection compared to Macy's or Nordstrom's, but I never knew exactly how much. Evidently a

pictorial history of Washington County is worth a lot more in this economy than a ladies' fur coat. Just think of the joy on the eyes of your loved ones this season when they open their stockings and receive a membership to the Washington County Historical Society. The twinkle in their eye will be there – it may have to be surgically implanted but I assure you it will be there. Eventually.

Of course, I have to mention that every time I visit Salem people automatically assume I will be staying that night, or two or twelve. I really can't understand this phenomenon and trust me, I've tried. It goes something like this: (I've indicated the thought process I feel people go through during this sort of conversation with asterisks):

Some Guy: "Welcome back!"

Me: "Thanks."

Some Guy: \*I bet he's packed up all of his clothes, belongings, two cats and their supplies, all of his toiletries and most of his furniture and will stay in Salem for weeks.\*

Some Guy: "So, are you sticking around for a while?"

Me: "No. I have to go back to Indianapolis tonight so I can be a productive member of society tomorrow at my job. Then I have class, too."

Some Guy: \*Hmm...he must have just packed up a few things in a suitcase then.\*

Some Guy: "Oh, so you're just staying for a couple days then?"

Me: "No, I really don't live here anymore. I sorta have my own place and am working on that whole 'career-path' thing. I can't just sit around staring at a wall – I have things to do tonight."

Some Guy: "Oh. Well. Hmm."

Some Guy: \*Maybe I should scratch something.\*

Honestly, I get asked by at least two or three people if I'm staying the night whenever I come to Salem and normally I get questioned by all of those people when I say I'm not staying. By that logic I could just ask why they aren't staying the night at my apartment when they come to Indianapolis. It could have something to do with the fact they're not living there and they aren't on a vacation.