

Siuslaw News  
P.O. Box 10  
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# Opinion

## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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## Siuslaw News

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### From the Editor's Desk

NED HICKSON

As we approach the eve of Christmas tomorrow, we thought it appropriate to take a break from our Letters to the Editor for this edition. In their place, I'd like to share a Christmas tale based on a true-life experience. It's a mixture of fact, whimsy, hope and belief that a heartfelt wish is the cornerstone of life's most important magical moments — particularly in an age where our constant need to be "plugged in" to the world often competes with being plugged into those in our lives who are within arm's reach. That said, our sincere thanks to all of you for sharing the magic in your own way, every day, within our community...

He looked very out of place sitting alone in the flight terminal, his arms folded over a Superman backpack, and large brown eyes peering out from beneath his baseball cap. A few seats away, a keyboard recital was being performed by a businessman wearing Bluetooth headphones and chastising someone at "headquarters" about overspending.

"I said gifts for the immediate staff only. That means Carl, Jody, Jessica and what's-her-name — the gal we hired last month," he instructed, keyboard clattering continuously. "Yeah, her — Loni. But that's it. I never said anything about the sales department. What? Of course you're included with the immediate staff. Get yourself something."

The boy shifted, causing his plastic chair to squeak a bit as he leaned toward the businessman. "Hey, Dad..."

For the first time, the man's fingers left the keyboard, just long enough to wave his son to silence.

The boy obeyed, and hugged his backpack a little closer to his chest.

"Hold on a second," Laptop-man said, cupping the microphone. "Hey, Alex, keep an eye on this for me. I'm going to the restroom." He slid the computer onto the empty seat next to his son and made his way through the crowded terminal, still talking into the headpiece.

Alex watched his dad disappear, then brought his gaze to the laptop's glowing screen. It wasn't a look of intrigue, or

## A different kind of Letter to Santa: A Christmas tale

even mischief. Reaching over, he pushed the device forward, teetering it on the edge of the seat. He sat staring at it, the debate of whether or not to push it to the floor evident on his face. After a minute, he thought better of it and slid the laptop back on the seat.

"You should've done it," I said, startling him. I had been watching the events unfold for the last few minutes as I waited at Portland Airport for my friend to arrive from Dallas.

Slowly, an uncertain smile materialized on the boy's face, then quickly faded. "My dad would be pretty mad."

"Madder than you?"

He shrugged.

I looked up at the departure board. "You guys live in Chicago, huh?"

"My Dad does. We're gonna spend Christmas together."

Does your Dad know that? I wondered, but nodded without comment, deciding instead to change the subject. "Did you see Santa this year?"

He shook his head. "I wrote him a letter."

"What did you ask him for?"

The boy withdrew into the chair, suddenly interested in the large, red zipper running along his backpack. He traced it with his finger, averting his gaze for a time before finally whispering, "Only Santa can know..."

*(Note: The next part of this story is pure speculation, based on a hastily spoken eyewitness account. And a handwritten note bound for the North Pole...)*

Still talking into his Bluetooth, Alex's father emerged from the restroom stall and squirted soapy gel into his hands.

"Are Alex's presents there yet? Great. What did I get him?" he asked, rinsing himself, then pressing the hand dryer to life. "That sound's good. What else?"

Suddenly, flurries billowed from the dryer, covering his hands with what appeared to be snow.

"What the...? Hold on a second," he said, shaking off the cold, white powder. He moved to the paper towel dispenser and cranked the handle.

Christmas wrap emerged and, along with it, a letter addressed simply:

To Santa Claus

Next to the postmark, the image of a mittened hand pointed to the words "Return to Father." He studied it curiously, then flipped it over and noticed his son's name above the return address.

"You get that from the towel dispenser?" asked a man who was standing at the next sink.

"Yes... yes I did."

"You going to open it?"

Uncertain, he rubbed his chin. "It says 'Return to Father,' and that's me, so I guess I should, huh?"

The other man stepped to the hand

dryer, thought better of it, reached for the towel dispenser — then simply wiped his hands on his pants. "I'm not sure what's going on, but I know I'd open it," he finally said.

With that, Alex's father peeled back the lip of the envelope and extracted a piece of notepaper. Unfolding it, he immediately recognized his son's printing, and felt himself skip a breath.

Dear Santa,  
If you give me a new dad, I promise I'll never ask for anything ever again.

Love, Alex Riley.

His father stood staring at the note, oblivious of the man reading over his shoulder.

"Sure ain't no 'Hallmark,'" the man commented.

Wordlessly, Alex's father refolded the note and carefully slipped it back inside the envelope, then absently stuck it into his coat pocket. As he left the restroom, a muffled voice could be heard emanating from his headpiece — which was now in the trash. Mr. Riley made his way back through crowd to the terminal, his footsteps awkward and uncertain. As if retracing a once-familiar path that had become neglected and overgrown.

Over the loudspeaker, boarding calls for Chicago had begun.

"My dad's coming back. I have to go," Alex said, and stood from his seat, backpack hanging off one shoulder.

As his dad approached, he studied Alex for a moment, then reached out his hand and nodded in the direction of the terminal gate. They had only gotten a few steps when I noticed the laptop still sitting on the seat.

"Hey!" I yelled, waving it in the air.

Mr. Riley stopped and looked at me through the crowd, shrugged and then boarded the plane with Alex to Chicago.

More than a bit confused, I set the computer down and wondered to myself about what had just happened. That's when I saw the man sitting just a few seats away — and the identical look of curiosity on his face. Looking up, he noticed me staring.

"Listen, in a few minutes, I'm leaving for New York," he blurted. "I'll probably never see you again, so I can tell you this." He moved closer and, with his hands clasped tightly in front of him, spoke of what he'd seen in the restroom.

When he finished, the two of us sat wordlessly, neither of us certain of each other. That's when we noticed the laptop screen, which I'd left open, and these words scrolling continuously from top to bottom:

Merry Christmas!

And from everyone here at Siuslaw News, a Merry Christmas to all of you.

— Ned Hickson, editor

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Siuslaw News welcomes letters to the editor as part of a community discussion of issues on the local, state and national level.

Emailed letters are preferred. Handwritten or typed letters must be signed. All letters need to include full name, address and phone number; only name and city will be printed. Letters should be limited to about 300 words. Letters are subject to editing for length, grammar and clarity. Publication of any letter is not guaranteed and depends on space available and the volume of letters received.

Libelous, argumentative and anonymous letters or poetry, or letters from outside our readership area will only be published at the discretion of the editor.

### POLITICAL/ELECTION LETTERS:

Election-related letters must address pertinent or timely issues of interest to our readers at-large.

Letters must 1) Not be a part of letter-writing campaigns on behalf of (or by) candidates; 2) Ensure any information about a candidate is accurate, fair and not from second-hand knowledge or hearsay; and 3) explain the reasons to support candidates based on personal experience and perspective rather than partisanship and campaign-style rhetoric.

Candidates themselves may not use the letters to the editor column to outline their views and platforms or to ask for votes; this constitutes paid political advertising.

As with all letters and advertising content, the newspaper, at the sole discretion of the publisher, general manager and editor, reserves the right to reject any letter that doesn't follow the above criteria.

Send letters to:  
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