

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus

(This timeless classic is from the Editorial Page of The New York Sun, written by Francis P. Church, September 21, 1897)

To the Editor:

I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, "If you see it in The Sun, it's so." Please tell me the truth, is there a Santa Claus?

Virginia O'Hanlon
New York

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's are little. In this great universe of ours man is a mere insect, an ant, in his intellect, as compared with the boundless world about him, as measured by the intelligence capable of grasping the whole of truth and knowledge.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy. Alas! how dreary would be the world if there were no Santa Claus! It would be as dreary as if there were no Virginias. There would be no child-like faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment except in sense and sight. The eternal light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

Not believe in Santa Claus! You might as well not believe in fairies! You might get your papa to hire men to watch in all the chimneys on Christmas eve to catch Santa Claus, but even if you did not see Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that is no sign that there is no Santa Claus. The most real things in the world are those that neither children nor men can see. Did you ever see fairies dancing on the lawn? Of course not, but that's no proof that they are not there. Nobody can conceive or imagine all the wonders there are unseen and unseeable in the world.

You tear apart the baby's rattle and see what makes the noise inside, but there is a veil covering the unseen world which not the strongest man, nor even the united strength of all the strongest men that ever lived, could tear apart. Only faith, fancy, poetry, love, romance, can push aside that curtain and view and picture the supernal beauty and glory beyond. Is it all real? Ah, Virginia, in all the world there is nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus! Thank God! he lives, and he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.



Out of My Mind

by Noni Andersen

Christmas can be complicated. Most of us enjoy the music, the baked goodies, the colors, the lights that brighten the middle of winter and, especially, the smiles on so many faces.

Complications arise when we get caught up in feelings of obligation. Even sincere Christians sometimes lose sight of the message of peace and good will amid the emphasis on the perfect gift. Others are depressed because they can't afford the gifts our consumer culture emphasizes, or because their families are broken. The reason makes no difference at all; depression still weighs them down.

Because of the flood this month, many of us are either "camping out" in our homes or we're living elsewhere. When we're fortunate, as I am, we're with family or friends. Still, I find it hard to get into the spirit of the season while looking at thousands of dollars worth of flood damage in my home, magnified by many worse experiences in the homes and lives of others.

The negatives of our most recent experience have made me work harder to remember the positives. Yes, they do exist.

As the water rose, my son, Clark McGaugh, was working to get as many of my belongings up high as possible. Without his help, I would have lost much, much more. When I left, I took some necessities (mostly medications and clean socks) up to Jamie Jones home on E. Bridge Street.

After unloading my car, I went to the Vernonia

Fire Hall, headquarters for emergency operations. There, I took over the role of Public Information Officer (PIO) from my daughter-in-law, Rebecca McGaugh, freeing her for other needed activities.

The next two days were spent faxing and calling television and radio stations with updates of the local situation, or responding to media representatives when they called or were able to get to Vernonia.

The role of PIO wasn't new; I did the same job during the flood of 1996, and in other places over the years. The best part of the job was being able to observe how others responded to the community's needs.

Thousands of phone calls were handled, volunteers were sent to evacuate people or to check on their welfare. Local ham radio operators ensured no loss of communications regardless of infrastructure failings.

Others prepared food to keep everyone going, set up generators for people with special health problems, took boats out on raging torrents to evacuate people, maintained lists of needs, or provided medical care.

I watched heroes and heroines, and there were so many I can't begin to name them all. But a few must be acknowledged for their dedication to the effort and for the many hours they went without sleep in order to bring our community through a traumatic experience. Fire Chief Paul Epler, Police Sgt. Mike Kay, public works supervisor Jeff Burch, Dr. Phyllis Gilmore, and Helen Hudson, an extraordinary phone handler.