

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Letters to Santa shared

We asked Santa if we could share some of the Letters to Santa he received at the Vernonia Fire Hall. Here's a selection he sent us.

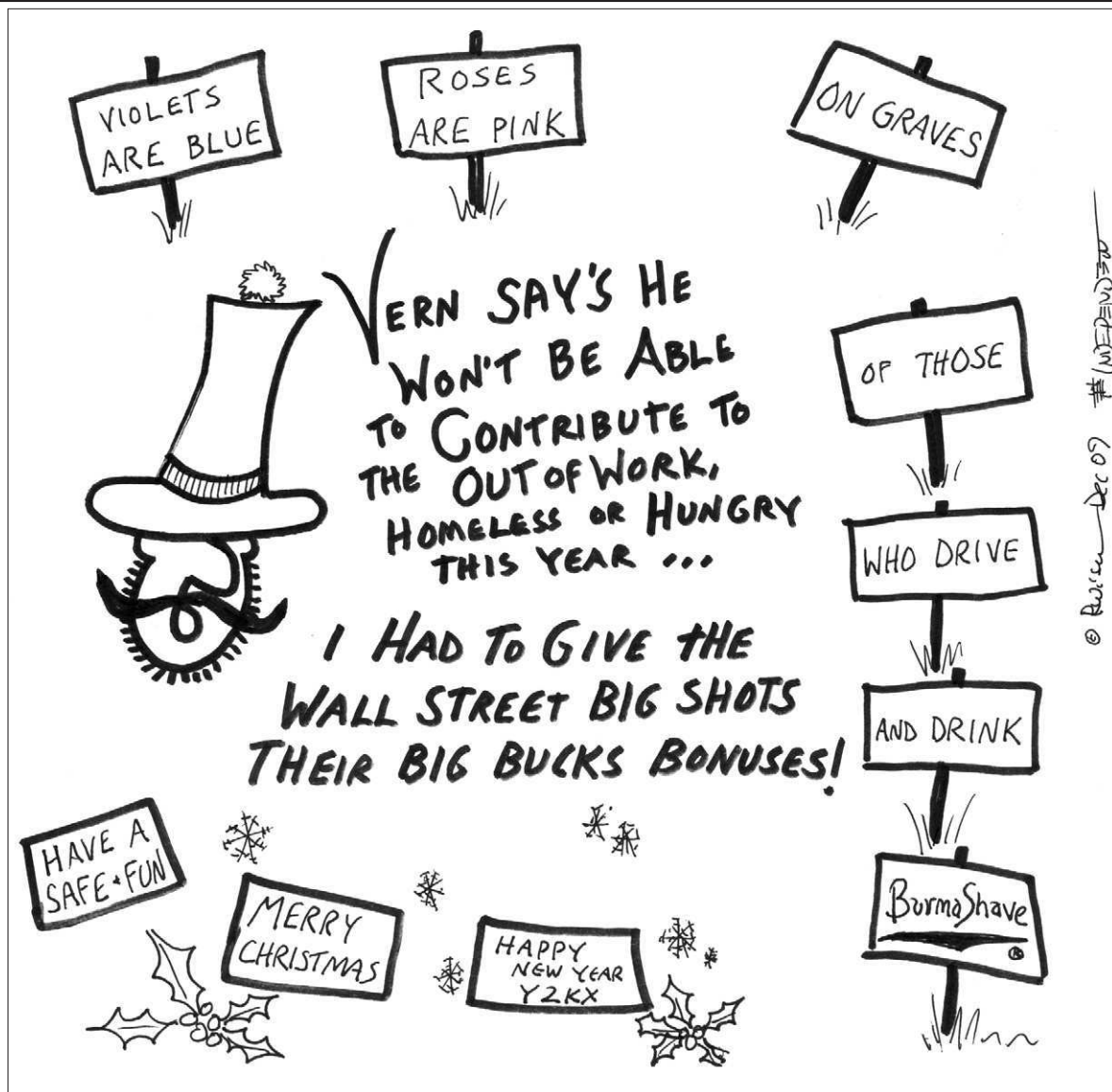
Santa
 Miss Clause
 I am good How old is Santa?
 7 old 360X box Bike
 T.

Santa
 I am 8
 Please bring us food and me a purple bike
 Love
 B.

Dear Santa
 I have been a very good girl this year. I would like a laptop please. I would also like a real cell phone, a dress with high heels, and a pair of boots please. Oh, Polly Packets! My babydoll needs a crib! Have a merry Christmas.
 Love,
 B.

Santa
 Please bring me hunting things
 boy building things like bird houses & bird feeders
 L. (age 11-1/2)

Unfortunately, there was more than one letter asking for food. Please help put food on children's tables, if you can. And, Merry Christmas to all and a Very Happy New Year.



Out of My Mind . . .

by Noni Andersen



While thinking about the various elements that make the Christmas season special, I found it necessary to go beyond slogans. Yes, "Jesus is the reason" works well for those who find inspired meaning in the Gospel according to Matthew.

But how many Americans celebrate the birth of Christ without adding a Christmas tree or gift-giving?

While growing up, I had opportunity to observe and participate in the various religious communities in California's Sacramento, San Joaquin and Imperial Valleys. Although ours was a secular household, my parents never objected to my explorations of religion and, even better, my father would discuss religion with me without being dismissive of others' beliefs.

So, while developing an understanding of the importance of faith, however it was expressed, I also developed an awareness of how rarely people fully embrace their stated faith. Faith requires a commitment that doesn't always fit into people's everyday lives.

"Peace on Earth" is a frequently used expression during the Christmas season, although relatively few people rely on Jesus, the Prince of Peace, to achieve that goal. True pacifism is very difficult and requires an abiding, unshakable faith.

So, if the birth of Jesus is not the sole factor for Christmas, what drives some of the other expressions – food drives, toys for tots and other generous actions? The season also brings bright colors during winter's gloom, glorious music, gifts and more.

Today, brightly lit Christmas trees are considered to be Christian symbols, even though they derived from pagan celebrations of the winter solstice to welcome the coming of longer (and brighter) days. Hanukkah, often called the Festival of Light, is a multifaceted Jewish celebration of victory over conquerors, rededication of the temple, and the miracle of olive oil that lit candles for eight days when there was enough oil for only one day.

The basis of gift giving is much easier to explain because the Christmas story includes the three kings who brought gifts to the infant Jesus. That lovely idea has been horribly abused by advertising that loudly trumpets the "perfect" gift.

Santa Claus, we know, isn't part of the Biblical Christmas story. But with centuries of tales about winter surprises and gifts, no matter what anyone says, Santa Claus is as real today as he was yesterday.

Now, after spending a lot of time learning about the elements of Christmas, I find that I really don't care about their derivation. I love the lights, the colors, the music, the food and most of all, the *spirit* of Christmas.

I hope that everyone, everywhere, will someday enjoy a world of peace and have a very...

Merry Christmas!