

Nothing Explains Santa Claus Better than a 100 Year Old Editorial to a Little Girl

This letter to the editor of *The New York Sun* from eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon first appeared in December of 1897. The letter and the reply penned by Frances P. Church have been reprinted thousands of times. No one has come up with a better answer to the Santa Claus question than Church. The words "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" have become a part of Christmas lore.

Church was considered a sardonic man. He was the son of a Baptist minister and had covered the Civil War. Church was usually assigned to write editorial opinion on controversial subjects and those dealing with theology. He would probably be surprised to know that his reply to Virginia has become one of the most memorable editorials in newspaper history.

Church married shortly after he answered Virginia's letter. He died in April of 1906. He had no children.

Virginia O'Hanlon Douglas died in May of 1971, at the age of 81. She graduated from Hunter College and received her Master's from Columbia. She taught school in New York City for 47 years. In the final years of her career, she was assistant principal and teacher at a special school for chronically ill children in hospitals.

Throughout her life she received a steady stream of mail about her Santa Claus letter. For her, the editorial was an inspiration in her life. She believed that Frances Church was the one who should be remembered. It was from his pen that flowed the philosophy of hope and love that was the heart of the editorial answer to Virginia's simple question.

Here is the letter from Virginia and Church's answer:

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?
Signed: Virginia O'Hanlon.

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 man'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 childlike faith then, no poetry, no romance to make tolerable this existence. We should have no enjoyment, except in sense and sight. The external light with which childhood fills the world would be extinguished.

'Tis 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 this 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, 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 this world there is

nothing else real and abiding.

No Santa Claus? Thank God he lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, may 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.



How to Care for Your Poinsettia

Colorful red, pink and white Christmas poinsettias are a part of the holiday decoration and gift-giving tradition in many homes. Poinsettias purchased early in December can last until May if given proper care.

Many poinsettias are used as dining room table decorations. Move the plants to the dining room table prior to a meal, but keep them growing by placing them near a window where they can get some indirect sunlight. Like all living plants, they need some sunlight and water.

Keep the growing medium evenly moist by watering twice each week, but keep water off the foliage and colorful bracts. Cooler temperatures will help keep the deep color so many consumers prize.

In the spring, plants can be grown outside. However, making them flower again is a difficult task best left to the professionals.



by Clement C. Moore

'Twas the night before Christmas
When all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;

And Mamma in her kerchief and I in my cap
Had just settled our brains for a long winter's nap;
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the lustre of midday to objects below;
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer,
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;
"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen;
On, Comet! on, Cupid! on, Donner and Blitzen!"
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too—
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.
He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes—how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth;
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump—a right old jolly elf—
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself.
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew, like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

We all join in wishing you a wonderful Christmas
with happiness and prosperity throughout the
coming year! May God bless you with His
richest blessings!

Happy Holidays!

from your friends in the



— Cyndie, Margaret, Janet, Sheila, Ruth —

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