Dear Editor, I am eight 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

Dear Virginia,

I’m so glad that you wrote to The Sun with your important question, that you’ve entrusted us with guiding you toward the truth. And we understand why it’s so important to you—because it was important to us when we were children, too. Santa is such a significant part of growing up, not just for the magical qualities that he excites us with (his list-reading and toy-making, his one-night globe-trotting in a flying sleigh, his chimney-fitting and happy ho-ho-ho-ing) but also for the spirit of giving and kindness that he instills in us. He’s like a wonderful grandfather who never changes. It’s no wonder that your friends’ comments about Santa not existing would worry you, and it’s also no wonder that your father wanted to make sure you went to the right place to find and answer.

But the truth is that in a very important way your friends are right. The Santa whom you imagine living in the North Pole and flying on a sleigh and climbing down chimneys is an imaginary man—a fiction—who has been thrilling kids for years but was created by adults to satisfy the inate yearning for magic that all children have. The Santa at the mall is an actor playing the role of Santa Claus: he is a kind man who smiles and listens to your wish-list for presents, but he will defer to your parents and family members, who are the real ones who will get you gifts. So in the way that you’re imagining Santa Claus, I must tell you that your friends are right.

But if your friends also mean that the spirit of Christmas that Santa represents is not real, then they are very wrong. Santa is a symbol of the spirit of giving and kindness and love, human qualities that are always in great demand and which are rekindled every year around this time when Christians remember the birth of Jesus and remind themselves of the virtue of goodness that he expressed and asked others to find in themselves. What Santa means to us is still very real and very important. Your friends are misguided if they think that this Santa does not exist.

Virginia, you asked for the truth, and as a newspaperman, I’m compelled to tell you the truth as I see it. Santa is a fictional character who represents something very, very real. This is something you can take with you to share with your little friends.

Have a Merry, Merry Christmas,

Alan Reinstein
Editor of The Sun
Dear Editor, I am eight 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

Dear Virginia,

We at The Sun are so glad that you’ve entrusted us to address your very important question about Santa’s existence, brought to you by your well-meaning and thoughtful friends. They are among a group of many smart and good people whose clear view of the world cannot imagine the magical qualities of a Santa Claus—with his list-reading and toy-making, his one-night globe-trotting in a flying sleigh, his chimney-fitting (even his ability to be in so many shopping malls all at the same time). They have never seen flying reindeer and so are convinced that the character of Santa—and all the parts of his world—must be fictional. And the very idea of getting to every child’s house in one evening is such a logical impossibility that seeing Santa not as a real person but as a symbol of something abstract seems much more plausible.

We understand this and don’t blame your friends with wanting you to see the truth that they see.

But they’re wrong: Santa exists in the very magical way that you believe he does—flying reindeer and all—because your belief makes it real. When you get older, you will see that belief alone will not make something true—that truth in the adult world is related to evidence that can be proved through the senses. But the requirements for truth in childhood are different. Belief is enough. Santa’s magic is not only that he can travel around the world in just one night using a flying sleigh but also that he can convince you that your good actions in the world matter. The kindness you show to your siblings and your friends; the honesty you express to your parents and teachers; the joy and pain (called empathy) that you feel for other people’s happy and sad experiences—these are real human virtues that, when you express them, have very real consequences, and so they can be attributed—in a very real way—to your belief in Santa Claus. He is as real as it gets.

Virginia, do not blame your little friends for being wrong about Santa. They have lost their way because of their yearning to join the world of adults and can no longer see the very real connection to Santa that you still have. But some of us in the adult world do see the magic of Santa and know that it is your belief in him that yields that palpable effects of kindness, honesty, empathy, and love that are so important to the world’s health.

Have a Merry, Merry Christmas,

Alan Reinstein
Editor of The Sun