

# You better watch out...for Santa



## JERRY CAMMARATA IS SUPERPOP

Around the holiday season parents develop a very unique strategy of maintaining discipline and good behavior in the household. You guessed it. The name Santa Claus is used as the verbal whip and, in a crack, everything our youngsters should do is being done and then some; the evening meal of not well liked spinach pie and beets is eaten and the hour of bed time is adhered to without a fuss.

And in the background of all the acknowledgement of Santa Claus's arrival can be heard the 11-year-old's words of wisdom: "There's no Santa Claus—you're Santa Claus. Why are you fibbing to my little sister?" The little child of the last 11 years has grown up quickly and realizes that Santa Claus is all make believe, a myth, a fairy tale based on some long ago good will mission of someone.

Hearing your 11-year-old's accusation that Santa is make believe, you try to stifle all conversations, thinking that the younger children in the family will realize the truth of the matter and stop believing. However, to the contrary, one of the younger children seems to step forward to vehemently object to the blasphemous statement of the 11-year-old and offers his or her version of why there is a Santa Claus: "Mommy and Daddy say so."

### A rebuttal of sorts

To my 11-year-old daughter who

has rejected the concept of Santa Claus as being childish, I offered the following passage:

*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 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..... Not believe in Santa Claus? You might as well as not believe in fairies.... No Santa Claus, thank God, he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousands years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.*

This passage was written by Francis Church and published in the N.Y. Sun on September 21, 1897, in response to a question posed by Virginia O'Hanlon.

Having changed each mention of Virginia to Elizabeth and after a review of the style of language used in the passage, Elizabeth and I took a long walk through the first snow fall now blanketing our neighborhood and tried to derive some of the true meaning of Santa Claus, Christmas and the holiday season.

We talked about sharing, giving, making friends and a host of good will gestures toward our fellow man. We tried to differentiate between

believing in the reality of a good man like Santa Claus and accepting the idea of Santa Claus so we may have a reminder once a year as to how our conduct of behavior should be toward others. I was impressed how much Elizabeth really did believe. She wanted however to be accepted into the ranks of those of us that "really know."

There is no doubt Christmas is a very important time of the year for parents and children alike. It is a time to renew our vows about love, friendship, and unselfishness. For parents, just the spirit of the season can be all that is needed. For children, it takes the man himself—Santa Claus—to drive the message home in his sleigh.

We should look for experiences like our holidays to invest time in teaching our children the principles of life, whether they be civic or religious. Since all holidays are not celebrated by everybody in this pluralistic society, it would be a good idea to alert your children to those holidays not celebrated by them, offering understanding of their meaning.

I have just been requested by my children to put down the pen on this column and assist in wrapping some presents and preparing the Christmas tree for the decorating party that is a tradition at the house. I like many of you, will be lying in bed Christmas Eve (with a stocking hat on) awaiting the pounding of huffs of Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Blitzen, Donner, and Rudolph upon my roof. What I can't understand is, why Santa never finishes his milk and Rudolph never finishes his carrot?

May the holiday season be a family experience and help in creating understanding and good will between all those you know and love.

