In 1897, eight-year-old Virginia O’Hanlon wrote the New York Sun to ask a simple question: Is there a Santa Claus? The editor’s response was a stirring defense of hope, generosity, and the spirit of childhood. His essay has been reprinted countless times since, and the phrase “Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus” has become part of American Christmas lore.

Here is the original letter and response.

Have a wonderful Christmas!!!

Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus

In 1897, eight-year-old Virginia O’Hanlon (1889-1971) wrote to the then-prominent New York Sun newspaper and asked a very simple question "Is There a Santa Claus?"

The original letter.

Newsman Francis Pharcellus Church wrote The Sun’s response to Virginia
Is There a Santa Claus?

We take pleasure in answering at once and thus prominently the communication below, expressing at the same time our great gratification that its faithful author is numbered among the friends of THE SUN:

"Dear 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.
"115 West Ninety-Fifth Street."

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 Virginia's. 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 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 they did not see him, what would that prove? He is not in their eyes, but he exists. He may come when they least expect it. He may come through the falling snow, or sometimes the rushing wind. He may come in a sea of clouds, or in a metal car, but he exists.

Virginia, life is so full of wonder and mystery that even if Santa Claus were not real, the children who believe in him are so happy that we should want him to be real. The children of the world are so full of love and faith and joy that we should want him to be real.
Francis P. Church’s editorial, “Yes Virginia, There is a Santa Claus” was an immediate sensation, and went on to become one of the most famous editorials ever written. It first appeared in the *The New York Sun* in 1897, almost a hundred years ago, and was reprinted annually until 1949 when the paper went out of business.

Thirty-six years after her letter was printed, Virginia O’Hanlon recalled the events that prompted her letter:

“Quite naturally I believed in Santa Claus, for he had never disappointed me. But when less fortunate little boys and girls said there wasn’t any Santa Claus, I was filled with doubts. I asked my father, and he was a little evasive on the subject.

“It was a habit in our family that whenever any doubts came up as to how to pronounce a word or some question of historical fact was in doubt, we wrote to the Question and Answer column in *The Sun*. Father would always say, ‘If you see it in the *The Sun*, it’s so,’ and that settled the matter.

‘Well, I’m just going to write *The Sun* and find out the real truth,’ I said to father.

‘He said, ‘Go ahead, Virginia. I’m sure *The Sun* will give you the right answer, as it always does.’ ”

And so Virginia sat down and wrote her parents’ favorite newspaper.

Her letter found its way into the hands of a veteran editor, Francis P. Church. Son of a Baptist minister, Church had covered the Civil War for *The New York Times* and had worked on the *The New York Sun* for 20 years, more recently as an anonymous editorial writer. Church, a sardonic man, had for his personal motto, “Endeavour to clear your mind of cant.” When controversial subjects had to be tackled on the editorial page, especially those dealing with theology, the assignments were usually given to Church.

Now, he had in his hands a little girl’s letter on a most controversial matter, and he was burdened with the responsibility of answering it.

“Is there a Santa Claus?” the childish scrawl in the letter asked. At once, Church knew that there was no avoiding the question. He must answer, and he must answer truthfully. And so he turned to his desk, and he began his reply which was to become one of the most memorable editorials in newspaper history.

Church married shortly after the editorial appeared. He died in April, 1906, leaving no children.

Virginia O’Hanlon went on to graduate from Hunter College with a Bachelor of Arts degree at age 21. The following year she received her Master’s from Columbia, and in 1912 she began teaching in the New York City school system, later becoming a principal. After 47 years, she retired as an educator. Throughout her life she received a steady stream of mail about her Santa Claus letter, and to each reply she attached an attractive printed copy of the Church editorial. Virginia O’Hanlon Douglas died on May 13, 1971, at the age of 81, in a nursing home in Valatie, N.Y.