



David Lias
Between The Lines

Yes, Virginia...

Editor's note: Eight-year-old Virginia O'Hanlon wrote a letter to the editor of New York's Sun, and the quick response was printed as an unsigned editorial Sept. 21, 1897. The work of veteran newsman Francis Pharcellus Church has since become history's most reprinted newspaper editorial, appearing in part or whole in dozens of languages in books, movies, and other editorials, and on posters and stamps.

**"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."**

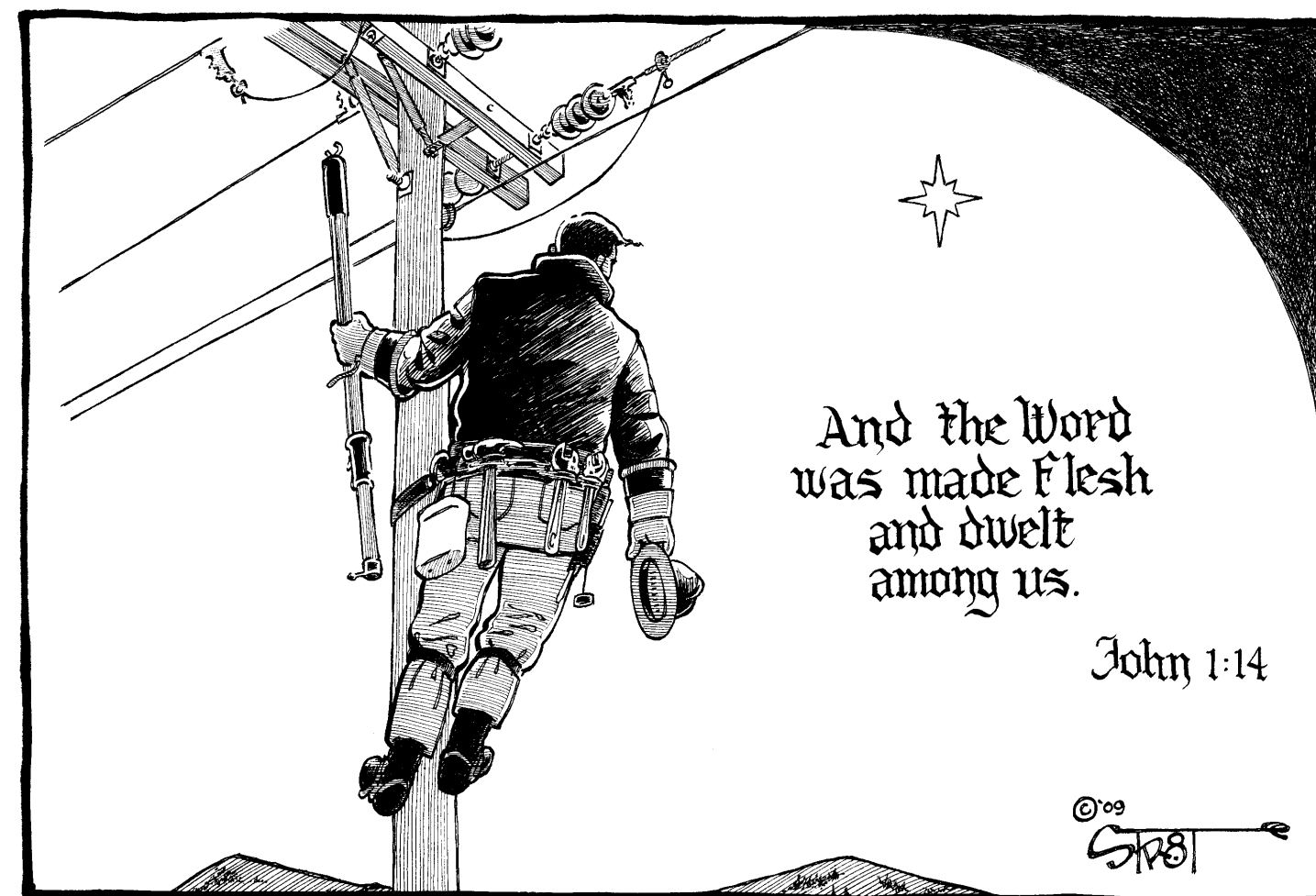
VIRGINIA, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except [what] they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little. In 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 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 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 Santa Claus coming down, what would that prove? Nobody sees Santa Claus, but that 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 may 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, fancy, 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 he lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay, ten times ten thousand years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.



Commonplace Christmas traditions were slowly accepted

Why do we celebrate Christmas on December 25?

Christ's birthday was really thought to be in the springtime, but the idea to celebrate on December 25 originated in the fourth century and the Catholic Church wanted to downplay the festivities of a rival pagan religion that had threatened Christianity's existence.

Christmas was fraught with complicated traditions that were slow to be accepted in America where it was thought to be a pagan worship. It was even banned by law in Massachusetts.

Santa Claus, Christmas trees, mistletoe and Christmas cards were later developments.

Christmas trees came from Germany in the 16th



Bob Karolevitz
Writer At Large

century. It was common for them to decorate the trees both inside and out. Santa Claus or St. Nick came from multiple sources in Europe and a form of Christmas cards originated in England where school boys practiced their writing skills in messages to their parents at Christmastime.

Mistletoe became symbolic of the season because legend has it that among Romans, enemies who met under the mistletoe would

lay down their weapons and embrace – which became the practice of kissing under the mistletoe.

There were many other traditions of the season. Holly became a symbol of Christ's footsteps as he walked the earth. The pointed leaves were said to represent the crown of thorns he wore on the cross and the red berries represented the blood he shed. But this was forgotten in the joys of the holiday.

Candy canes became a tra-

dition in Europe when people decorated their trees with cookies and candies. Straight white candy sticks were one confection used. Legend has it that during the 17th century craftsmen created the sticks in the shape of shepherd's crooks.

Poinsettias became a part of Christmas traditions, too. A native Mexican plant, poinsettias were named after Joel Poinsett, U.S. ambassador to Mexico, who brought the plant to America in 1828.

There will be more traditions to follow when somebody else creates them like Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer and "chestnuts roasting on an open fire."

© 2009 Robert F. Karolevitz

'Together time' is riding shotgun on Christmas vacation

In the early morning hours of Christmas vacation, I would ride shotgun while my father drove our boxy Dodge van, tires crunching through several inches of freshly fallen snow on already frozen highways.

We were on our way to the store – our family-owned paint and hardware business – and this surely counted as "together time."

I was 16 and old enough to help with odd jobs at the store whenever I had off days from school. I ran errands and kept the place tidy by organizing and straightening merchandise. From time to time, I even processed bills.

The store was a main character in our family, one that sustained us in a life-long drama agitated by Dad's heart disease and Mother's depression.

The commerce that took place under that leaky roofed, clothed and kept our brood of six children warm and secure in our century-

MyStory YourStory



Paula Damon
Columnist

old home.

The store seemed to own my Dad, not the other way around. He worked all the time, always returning home late, long after we were in bed.

Like most kids, I had an affinity for my dad. Because he did not say much to me, I got into the habit of making appeals for his attention with my heart, and sometimes in writing.

Moments like this, just Dad and me floating along wintry roads, expanded the definition of our father-daughter relationship.

While riding in silence, I would romanticize what I knew of his youth, including his WWII service in the Navy.

He met Mom before he was deployed to a base in Puerto Rico. They exchanged love letters while he was stationed there for more than a year and were married when the war ended.

My dad was born to sell. During his career, he sold Chevrolet cars, Mary Carter paint, paintbrushes, rollers, adhesive, drop cloths and all the hardware accessories one could imagine.

I was in elementary school when he sold Thomas-built school buses. I rode along then, too, in spanking new buses Dad drove to waiting schools. I remember thinking he was the best salesperson ever with satisfied customers for miles around.

When I think of my dad, I gather those moments on the way to work – just Dad and me, speechless, traveling through sleeping neighborhoods, stopping while traffic lights turned green on empty peaceful street corners.

I treasure those memories like Christmas morning, rich and fulfilled.

A resident of Southeast South Dakota, Paula Damon is a national award-winning columnist. Her columns have won first-place in National Federation of Press Women, South Dakota Press Women and Iowa Press Women Communications Contests. In the 2009 South Dakota Press Women Communications Contest, Paula's columns took three first-place awards. To contact Paula, email pauladamon@iw.net, follow her blog at www.my-story-your-story.blogspot.com and find her on Facebook.

2009© Paula Damon

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR POLICY

The Plain Talk encourages its readers to write letters to the editor, and it asks that a few simple guidelines be followed.

■ Please limit letters to 350 words or less. Letters should deal with a single subject, be of general interest and state a specific point of view. Letters are edited with brevity, clarity and newspaper style in mind.

■ In the sense of fairness and professionalism, the Plain Talk will accept no letters attacking private individuals or businesses.

■ Specific individuals or entities addressed in letters may be given the opportunity to read the letter prior to publication and be allowed to answer the letter in the same issue.

Only signed letters with writer's full name, address and daytime phone number for verification will be accepted. Please mail to: Letters, P.O. Box 357, Vermillion, SD 57069, or e-mail us at david.lias@plaintalk.net.

PLAIN TALK

Since 1884

Official County, City and School District Newspaper
201 W. Cherry, Vermillion, SD 57069

Publication No. USPS 657-720

Editor: David Lias

Published weekly by YANKTON MEDIA, Inc.
Periodicals postage paid at Vermillion, SD 57069.

Subscription rates for the Plain Talk by mail are \$27.56 a year in the city of Vermillion. Subscriptions in Clay, Turner, Union and Yankton counties are \$41.34 per year. Elsewhere in South Dakota, subscriptions are \$44.52, and out-of-state subscriptions are \$42.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Plain Talk, 201 West Cherry Street, Vermillion, SD 57069.

Vermillion Plain Talk Staff

Advertising Director: Michele Schievelbein. Advertising Sales Rep: Jennifer Newton. Composing Staff: Heidi Henson, Kathy Larson, Tara Portillo, and Matt Richardson. Reception Office Manager: Penny Tucker. Distribution & Circulation Manager: David Jeffcoat.

Wishing South Dakotans a Merry Christmas

By Senator John Thune

Christmas is a special time when we are particularly mindful of the importance of our families in our lives. This year, I am joined in wishing all South Dakotans a Merry Christmas by my wife Kimberley and our daughters, who I am happy have travelled home from college for Christmas break.

Christmas gives us the perfect opportunity to reflect on the year that has passed and remember how much our loved ones mean to us. We recognize the importance of friends and family with gifts and celebrations, all while remembering that it is not material success that makes us happy, but the love and friendship of those around us. I hope that Christmas is a season of

GUEST COMMENTARY

joy for all South Dakotans.

Of course, we all are mindful of the fact that this year has been difficult for some of our neighbors. In the years that I have represented South Dakota in the House of Representatives and the Senate, I have traveled across our state frequently and met people in nearly every town. I am always amazed by the generous spirit of our people, and I know that in difficult times those in need can count on others for support. Not all of us have the means to make financial donations to those in need, but all of us have the ability to make someone's day brighter, even with just

a smile and friendly conversation.

Christmas is also a time to remember those South Dakotans who must spend the season far from their loved ones. Many South Dakotans are serving bravely in our Armed Forces, and many families in South Dakota wait and pray for their safe return. I ask all South Dakotans to join in praying for the safety of all our troops who will spend Christmas in dangerous places around the globe.

I hope that in all the bustle surrounding Christmas we remember what makes our lives special, specifically our family and other loved ones. I wish all of those travelling this season safe journeys wherever they go. Again, from my family to yours, I wish you a very blessed and Merry Christmas.