

Yes, Virginia

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.

Today's Quotes

"... Mesa's roots run deep and this is where he was raised. What better qualifications are there? ..."

— Online comment at GCTelegram.com in response to a story on Garden City Rep. Reynaldo Mesa being named the next president of the Garden City Area Chamber of Commerce.

"It's like a time warp. I've probably walked through this store 20 times — back and forth, back and forth, trying to find things. If I don't have all of the gifts everyone wants by now, they're getting cash."

— Shane McBride of Scott City, from a story in today's edition about last-minute Christmas shopping.

Letters Policy

The Telegram welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must be signed and include the writer's address and phone number. All letters will be confirmed before publication.

Letters are subject to editing for libel and length, and must be 500 words or less.

Thank-you letters should be general in nature. Form letters, poems, consumer complaints or business testimonials will not be printed.

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Unique situations on the farm

By JAY ARMSTRONG

Looking out the window at snowflakes as they blanket my fields, it's hard to believe that no two snowflakes are alike. In fact, each snowflake contains so many water molecules, arranged in so many random patterns, that the mathematical possibility of any two identical flakes appearing in the lifetime of the universe is indistinguishable from zero.

Likewise, no two farms are alike. While one farm might look like the next as you drive by, every farm is unique, with vast differences ranging from topography, soil types, crops grown, machinery used, abilities and disposition of the farmer, and even varying levels of risk tolerance that are acceptable.

Take my family farm, for instance. I farm 2,700 acres of corn, soybeans and wheat in Kansas and my farm is evenly split between upland and bottomland. In other words, in years of drought my upland withers while my bottomland blossoms. In years of wet weather my bottomland drowns out while my upland will flourish. So no matter what extreme Mother Nature throws at me I will suffer losses.

And my story is the story of many thousands of farmers across this country, who grow our nation's food, feed and fuel supply while dealing with Mother Nature's tantrums, year in and year out. And most farmers would agree that the single most important item in our risk management tool kit is crop insurance.

Before federal crop insurance became widely available several decades ago,

farming on land like mine felt like playing Russian roulette. It was nearly impossible to get any kind of coverage for managing risks on my farm where flooding or drought was an occasional occurrence because the private sector just wouldn't offer it. But federal crop insurance took the universality of the public sector and made these important risk management tools available to everyone willing to pay for them.



Crop insurance is the quintessential tool for managing farm risks because it allows each farmer to pay for the plan that makes the most sense for him or her. Just like car insurance, health insurance or homeowner's insurance, crop insurance allows the individual to assess his tolerance for risk and loss, and purchase plans to meet those needs.

Although farmers are charged with raising this nation's food supply, first and foremost, our farm is our business. And if we're poor businessmen, we're going to eventually go under. So to be successful we are no different than any other business; we need to produce; we need to market; and carry insurance for those catastrophies that can devastate a business.

Crop insurance has been an essential component of my marketing plan for the grains I raise because it allows me to market

my crop fully one year in advance. That's because if my crop comes up short at the end of the year because of poor weather — or fails altogether — the insurance indemnity is there to purchase the grain to fulfill my marketing contracts at the end of the year. This allows farmers to not only be better businessmen, but also helps us sleep much better at night.

Crop insurance was designed by Congress to shield taxpayers from costly weather-induced bailouts that became commonplace in past decades, and the policy is working great. In fact, 2011 might be regarded as one of the worst weather years on record, with droughts and wildfires, floods in the South and Midwest, record freezes in Florida and tropical storms in the Northeast. And the net result of this devastation? Crop insurance companies have paid out more than \$6 billion in claims so far. And with roughly 80 percent of eligible acres covered by crop insurance, there is no need for disaster bills.

Just like a pile of unique snowflakes that can make a beautiful snow sculpture, my unique plot of land is capable of providing some of the highest yields and best quality of corn, soybeans and wheat in the world. But it's also capable of complete failure. Farmers pay a lot of money every year for crop insurance because of that distinct possibility, and both we as farmers, and America's consumers and taxpayers, are better for it.

Jay Armstrong farms corn, soybeans and wheat and lives in Muscotah.

Time to retire the comedic acts

It is axiomatic in these political times that The Candidate must submit to comedic humiliation — with grace, humor and the skin of an armadillo. In this upside-down universe, the court jester is the monarch and the would-be king must submit to the jester's pranks.

Most recent to the carnival was Mitt Romney appearing on "Late Show with David Letterman," where the candidate not only has to submit to being the brunt of jokes written by someone else, he has to tell them on himself. All of this is designed of course to appease the masses while humanizing the candidate. The routine has become so predictable that it is ennui inducing. We squirm in our seats as we watch — hope? — the candidate will slip on the peel.

Romney's act, in familiar Letterman fashion, was to recite the top-10 things he'd like to say to America. Sporting a plaid shirt and open-collared blazer, he looked like a Boy Scout in a bordello and was reminiscent of Dustin Hoffman modeling scuba gear at his parents' party in "The Graduate." It wasn't the clothes that didn't



fit; it was the skin.

But Hoffman's character, you'll recall, wasn't the fool. His audience was. His existential angst reflected appropriate discomfort at being objectified by the clownish adults. So, too, might we say the same of Romney. He was dignified in the midst of absurdity.

On cue Romney began: "Isn't it time for a president who looks like a 1970s game show host?" Hohoho. Followed by: "What's up, gangstas — It's the M-I-Double-Tizzle." And so on through one-liners about Canada, the Colts, a new cologne at Macy's called "Mitt-Stified" and, "Newt Gingrich, really?" And finally, "It's a hairpiece." Really?

Not. But stop it, really. No doubt the same thought occurred to Letterman, who was hustling double-time to try to make funny that which really wasn't very. Comedy is all in the delivery, after all, and Romney wasn't

giving any. This was obviously purposeful. A man or woman auditioning for the most serious job in the world doesn't need to be funny; he merely needs to be a good sport. Romney's delivery was so studiously deadpan that it was, in fact, sort of funny. It was also the only way he could play it. What Romney isn't is a comedian, a fact in which voters might find some comfort. They might find less comfort watching their possible future president being forced to play monkey to the organ grinder.

Thus, must we continue this ruse? The insistence that candidates submit to public ridicule tells us little about their nature, but does speak unflatteringly of our own. A light touch is always welcome, and humor is the antidote to darkness, a relatively benign way to channel rage (note what's missing from nations currently in flames). But perhaps this particular gauntlet has exhausted itself. Let the comedians crack the jokes, and do let's retire the dunking cage. The only thing that's all wet is the shtick.

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Create a memorable Christmas

"There's a grief that can't be spoken.
There's a pain goes on and on.

Empty chairs at empty tables
Now my friends are dead and gone."

— Marius, from the musical "Les Miserables"

It's the most wonderful time of the year," Andy Williams reminds us over tinny speakers in crowded shopping malls. It may be wonderful for the majority, but for those whose fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers or children have died in Iraq and Afghanistan there is a void this Christmas, and Christmases to come, that can never be filled. It is the same in every war.

Memories of Christmases past can only add to the pain, especially for those experiencing their first Christmas without a loved one opening presents and eating their fill at the dinner table.

On Monday, I drove past Arlington National Cemetery near the Pentagon. It is fitting that the building where war is made would be in such close proximity to the graves of those who died fighting them. Veterans cemeteries ought to remind civilians, as well as generals, that war should never be entered into lightly, but rather always as a last resort.

Every Christmas, volunteers place wreaths on each of the headstones in Arlington. The tableau could be a Christmas card, except such a card would express sorrow, not joy.

There is a show on Fox News Channel called "The Cost of Freedom." It's about money. The grave markers at Arlington and at veterans cemeteries around the nation are the true cost of freedom, which has always been paid, not with cash, but with blood.

Freedom is not the natural state of humanity, otherwise more of us would be free. Oppression, discrimination, religious fanaticism, hunger, dictatorship, censorship of the press, denial of women's rights — these seem to be the norm. To be free means to rail against such injustice.

Christians believe Jesus came to set us free from sin. Those who have died in our wars fought and gave their lives that we might have our many freedoms, including the religious freedom to hear and accept or reject His message.

Passing Arlington, I recall a line from one of our wonderful patriotic songs, "America, the Beautiful," which says of our war dead, "O beautiful for heroes proved in liberating strife, who more than self their country loved, and mercy more than life!"

In a narcissistic age this may seem odd, even offensive to those whose favorite nouns are "I" and "me." Perhaps that's why so many of us don't know anyone who has served in the military. It's called military "service," after all. Making money serves self. If we haven't served in the armed forces, it is less likely we would know people who are serving, or have served. I served, albeit not on the battlefield, making my contribution as part of Armed Forces Radio in the '60s.

As the ads and emails suggest last-minute gift ideas, here's a suggested gift that will last longer in your heart than any purchase you make for yourself or your family: Find someone who has lost a loved one to war and take them a present. It doesn't have to be expensive. Tell them, "I wanted to bring you a gift in recognition of the gift your loved one gave our country." If you don't know anyone, search online for organizations that assist families whose loved ones paid the ultimate price for our country.

If you do that, I suspect this Christmas will be unforgettable for the person on the receiving end of your compassion. It could also be a transforming event in your own life and a Christmas you will never forget.

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