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Shattered dreams live again

By Pete Mason

I was five-years-old when I first was confronted with the dreadful possibility there was no Santa Claus. The harsh news came from the son of a local mortician, appropriately enough.

Even at five years of age I instinctively knew that a mortician's son would be privy to dark, depressing information and I was duly impressed by his cynical pronouncement. As a matter of fact I was so impressed that I bopped him. He was completely unimpressed and bopped me back several times.

All in all, it was a pretty bleak day. Not only were the first seeds of doubt concerning Santa's existence planted in my brain, but I also learned that the world is full of injustice and that good guys sometimes finish second. I also learned that I had a glass nose. I even discovered the meaning of irony. The bright red blood on my white, starched shirt perfectly matched the color of the suit worn by the entity for whose existence I was fighting. That's a pretty big load for a five-year-old kid.

I ran home, my red badge of courage still running down my shirt front. My father was impressed with my bravery and my commitment to fight for what I believed. My mother was appalled.

"He's begun fighting," she wailed. "It's only a matter of time, now. First, more fights, then stealing cars, then bank robbery and before you know it he's on the Ten Most Wanted list. I'll never be able to show my face in public again."

My father calmed her down and took me to the bathroom where he cleaned me up and gave me a rousing speech about faith and the cynical mind, about optimism and the true spirit of Christmas. It was sort of a bathroom version of "Yes, Virginia . . .", little of which I understood.

I got the gist of it though. He was telling me that although Santa Claus was not a real person in the hard, physical sense (flying across the sky, silhouetted against the moon; parking his eight tiny reindeer and sleigh on the roof; managing somehow, despite his corpulence, to slide down the



chimney into the fireplace with a humongous bag of toys; filling the stockings) he truly existed in the minds of all who saw Christmas through the eyes of a child, in the proper spirit.

It helped a little but for the next few years I still wondered who the heck was finishing off the milk and cookies we put out on the mantelpiece every Christmas Eve.

By the time I was eight I knew dear old Dad was scarfing up Santa's snack, and I took it upon myself to inform my two younger sisters of this insidious shame.

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