

Christmas wishes

Breakup of family changes holiday traditions

IEVA AUGSTUMS is a freshman news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.

Last year I went to the mall and sat on the lap of a man dressed in a red suit who called himself Santa Claus. A childhood tradition indeed. A little strange for a 17-year-old.

I told Santa my only wish: I wanted to be part of a family with a mother and father who loved each other.

I didn't receive my wish. My parents divorced four months later. But I did realize a tradition cannot stay a tradition forever, even if it is a family tradition.

Traditions change and fade away when all of the components are not there.

They become memories of holidays past.

When this happens, you have to move on. Create new traditions. New memories.

Before Thanksgiving break my family told me we were not going to celebrate Thanksgiving or Christmas this year. Shocked beyond belief, all I could do was cry.

I was not willing to accept the change and the loss of a family tradition.

I put up a fight. I endured the heart-aching blows.

Your father is taking the house.

Your brother and I are moving into an apartment as of Jan. 1.

No tree.

No stockings.

You need to start packing up your things.

Very quickly I realized I was fighting a fight I could not win.

A friend told me opportunities arise out of chaos. I didn't want to believe him at first.

I'm now glad I listened.

Arriving at home the night before

Thanksgiving, I went

to bed thinking my

mother, brother and I

were going to celebrate

the holiday.

We have to. It's family

tradition.

I woke up on

Thanksgiving day. No tradi-

tion.

Then I remembered last

year's holiday, visiting Santa at

the mall, and how opportunities

can arise out of chaos.

About a half-hour before my

brother and I were going to a tradi-

tional Thanksgiving dinner at

the house of a friend of the fami-

ly's - who just happened to be in

your traditional Norman Rockwell

family - I received a phone call.

A friend wishing me a happy

Thanksgiving, wanting to make sure

I was doing all right and that I wasn't

going to spend the holiday alone.

As simple as it may be, it was that

phone call that made me realize that

the untraditional things in life do mean

more than the traditional.

Opportunity does arise out of

chaos.

I kept his words in mind as I

remembered the things in this world I

was thankful for. The usual food,

water and shelter, of course. But

also for caring friends and a loving

family.

Now with one holiday down,

only one to go.

Many more traditions to over-

come.

Many new ones to create.

My brother will be spending

Christmas in Chicago with

family. Given the opportunity

to go, I declined.

My reason: No one should

spend any holiday alone.

The friend who called on

Thanksgiving realized this. And

I made the decision to follow in

his footsteps. So, Merry Christmas,

Mom.

“I don't care if we have a vase full of greenery for a tree, if we eat Christmas dinner on paper plates.”

It's going to be an untraditional holiday. I don't care if we have a vase full of greenery for a tree, if we eat Christmas dinner on paper plates, or if we bring in the New Year unpacking boxes.

I have learned over the years to love many traditions. Traditions that will last a lifetime - whether they are experienced or just distant memories.

And there is one tradition that will be celebrated and not changed this holiday season.

The tradition of love.

Hey, what can I say? I'm a sucker for family traditions. Some traditions just cannot become memories.

And in the words of a fat man dressed in a red suit, some traditions are not even worth trying to change.

Childhood traditions still prevail, even for an 18-year-old.

I have the picture to prove it.

Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus

AMANDA SCHINDLER is a freshman news-editorial major and a Daily Nebraskan staff reporter.

“Church knew that we all want to believe in Santa. ...”

One hundred years ago, Francis P. Church held in his hands the hopes of a little girl.

He held a letter, written in her 8-year-old handwriting, that asked a question the world had been pondering for centuries:

Is there a Santa Claus?

Not an unusual question for an 8-year-old by any means, yet very hard to answer.

And Church, editor of the New York Sun, knew he had to respond. He did so with words that would be repeated for generations afterward:

“Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus.”

And the world listened.

That particular editorial was so popular, in fact, that the Sun reprinted it every year for the next 52 years.

Fifty-two years?

Most people know after they hit the age of 10 that Santa Claus doesn't exist (earlier still if they have older siblings). So why would a 20-year veteran of a distinguished newspaper say that there is? Why would a man who covered the Civil War for the New York Times write an editorial about the existence of a magical elf?

And why would people enjoy reading it so much?

Every year people spend enormous amounts of money on Christmas gifts, countless hours decorating their houses, and more than one weekend baking and storing enough goodies to feed a small African nation.

And they do this because they don't believe in Santa Claus?

Church knew better.

He wrote the editorial because he realized the gravity

of little Virginia O'Hanlon's question. He knew that the spirit of all Christmas lovers, as well as Virginia's, depended upon his reply. Church knew that we all want to believe in Santa Claus.

He wrote what Virginia needed to hear that year - what we all need to hear every year. That Santa, and the elves, and the reindeer and the North Pole all exist. Maybe not because we can see or touch them, but because we can believe in them.

Why else would parents ask on Christmas morning, “What did Santa bring you,” instead of saying, “You'd better appreciate that; I paid good money for it.”

Why else would they pay strange men to pad themselves, put on a red suit and come into their homes to hold their children?

Whether we like it or not, our Christmas traditions reflect what we truly believe about Santa Claus. And as immature as it sounds, there is nothing wrong with that.

Santa embodies the spirit of hope and joy we succumb to during the holidays. He's our way of explaining the wonderfully strange feelings that well up when we light up the tree, hum “Deck the Halls,” and watch those corny claymation Christmas specials.

Believing in Santa Claus is believing in ourselves, and accepting the fact that sometimes in life, being “mature” does not mean being happy.

Those of us who play the Scrooge during Christmas don't appreciate the simple joy and unquestionable spirit the season affords us. Christmas is an excuse to be a kid again, a time to be as cheesy as possible and still retain some dignity.

And Scrooges, I'm sorry to say, find the dumbest excuses for their attitudes.

No Santa Claus because your family is dysfunctional? Please. I'm a cross of drunken German and unstable Bohemian blood. Don't talk to me about dysfunctional.

And maybe you've had some bad Christmases in the past - who hasn't? I spent one Christmas in France watching soccer and singing “Silver Bells” to a box of chocolates. The song didn't last long, I'll tell you that much.

No one has an excuse to hate Christmas, because Christmas is about love. It's about having enough courage to believe in something without having seen it with your own two eyes.

The fact is, people believe in things they can't see every day - religion, romance, hope, compassion, loyalty. We need these things to sustain us when the realities of life are too hard to bear.

Church knew hard times. He knew what death and suffering were.

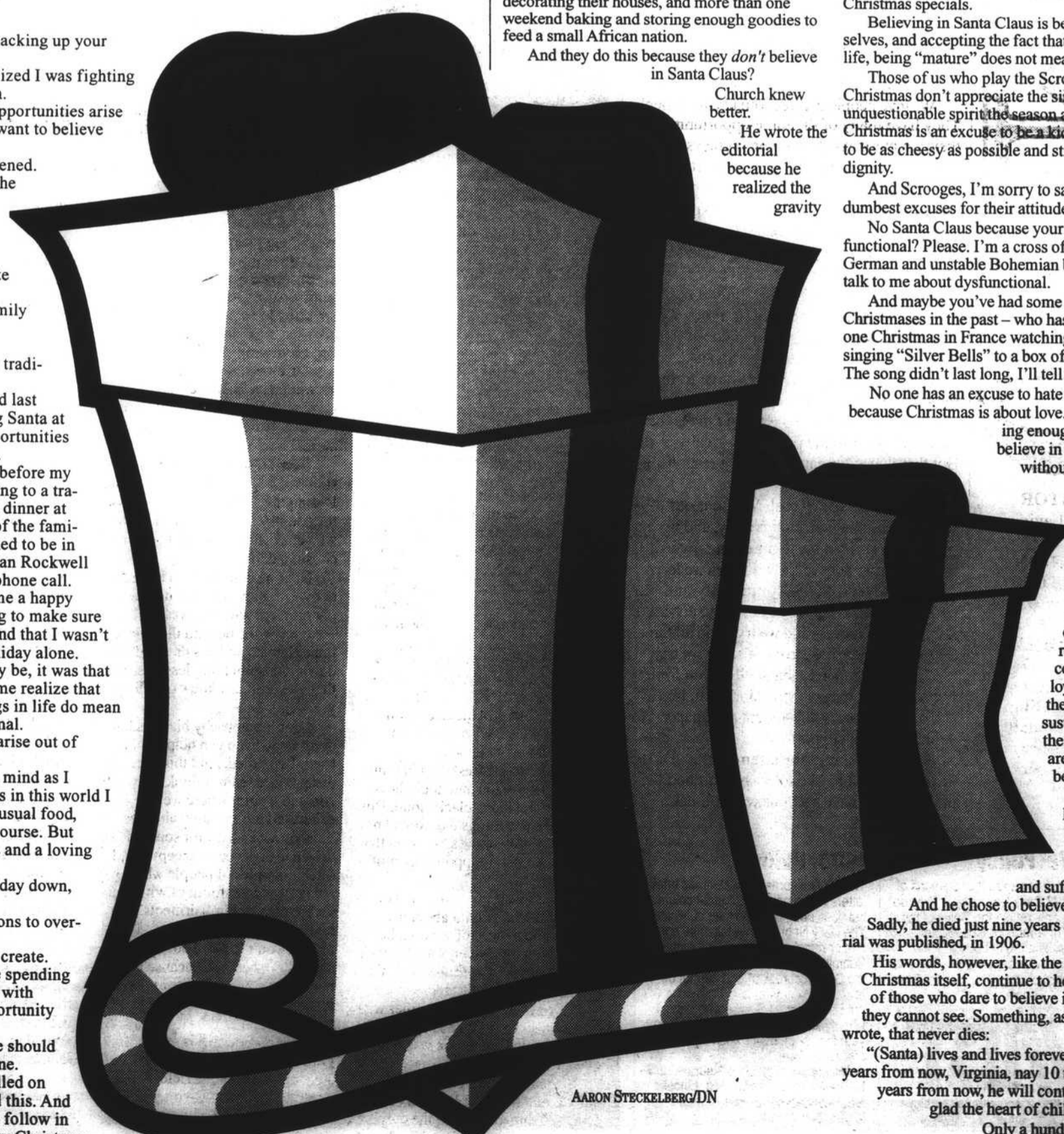
And he chose to believe.

Sadly, he died just nine years after his editorial was published, in 1906.

His words, however, like the spirit of Christmas itself, continue to heighten the joy of those who dare to believe in something they cannot see. Something, as Church wrote, that never dies:

“(Santa) lives and lives forever. A thousand years from now, Virginia, nay 10 times 10,000 years from now, he will continue to make glad the heart of childhood.”

Only a hundred years, Church, and glad indeed.



AARON STECKELBERG/DN