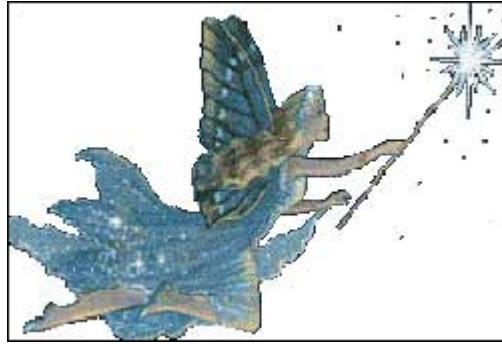


My Tryst with The Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus

By Renu Mehta

I am a great believer in the Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus. These two have brought a lot of joy and sparkle into my life.



I remember I must have been about 8 years old living in New Delhi, India. It was summer time and we used to drag our foldable beds outside on the open verandah under the stars to get away from the stifling heat. On one such hot summer night, one of my teeth came loose. It was then that I heard the story of the Tooth Fairy from my mother about how she (meaning the Fairy) would exchange my tooth for a gift or money in the night. I didn't believe my mother. I thought she was telling me a story. Yet, I remember with cynicism, I put my tooth in a mug filled with water and put it under my bed.

The next morning, when I woke up, the bloodied tooth had gone and, lo and behold, in its stead lay a shiny new coin. I was dumbstruck and completely amazed. Full of excitement, I conjured up the tooth fairy in my imagination all dressed in white, with wings, coming to my bedside while I was asleep. The next few days flew by in a haze as I related the story a hundred times to my friends, uncles, aunts and cousins and anyone else who would listen. To date, I have not forgotten the joy and happiness the coin brought me. Not to forget the glory amongst my friends who listened with rapt attention and thought how lucky I was to have been visited by the Tooth fairy - the kind we only read about in storybooks. (At that time, the Tooth Fairy concept was not very well known in India, so it was even more mysterious and exciting).

I have tried to put the same wonder in my children's eyes. My two daughters Mansi and Sakshi (now 17 and 18 years old) have received umpteen gifts from the Tooth Fairy and Santa Claus over the years.

In 1991, around the time, they were 6 and 7 years old, they heard from one of their friends that Santa Claus was just a myth and it was their parents who bought the gifts. The girls decided to check this out by quietly writing a gift list to Santa Claus and hiding it. By sheer chance, I came across the note hidden in a cupboard full of toys that I had decided to tidy up that day. (I considered finding the note my little miracle that year). The list included a Christmas tree and some gifts. The first request was very difficult because we were living in a country at that time where it was almost impossible to get a Christmas tree. But



after combing the stores, we finally managed to locate a small plastic Christmas tree

We put up the tree on Christmas Eve that year and laid all their presents underneath the tree, after the girls went to sleep. When they woke up and found the tree and their presents, their faith in the 'jolly old man in red' was fully restored that day. It made it all worthwhile to see the surprise and happiness shining in their eyes. After that day, they never ever questioned the existence of Santa Claus, until of course they grew up and found out the truth.

My son, Rohan, was born a year later in 1992, but this time round, I had my two daughters to help me carry on the tradition year after year. I think I am guilty of the same excitement and happiness that every Christmas season brings. And what a treasure of memories that Santa has created for our family.

When Rohan was seven years old, we were travelling to India and naturally there was no gift for him. But, although he was disappointed, he continued to believe in the generous spirit of Santa.

"I guess Santa has my gift waiting in Canada that I will find when I return", Rohan said. And sure enough, when we returned to Toronto, there was his gift under the same plastic tree that we had bought so many years ago, that still occupies pride of place in our home during every festive season.

Every year, two months before Christmas, the list to Santa Claus is pondered over, revised and finally prepared by Rohan. There is an endless debate whether he should ask for this or that, as Santa has to accommodate lots of children. Every year, the milk (that I have to drink, ugh) and the cookies are laid out religiously for Santa and his reindeers, and every year Santa brings the requested gift along with a letter telling Rohan not only how good he has been, but also how he should improve.

Now he is ten years old now and perhaps this is the last year that Santa will bring him a gift. I am not even sure whether he knows the truth even now.

"You know Mom", he tells me confidentially, " all my friends say there is no Santa. I pretend to agree with them, but I know he does exist and I will get a gift for him this year".

I know for sure that Rohan will find out soon that it was all a myth all these years. There is a lot of debate by non-believers that we should not lie to our kids. But I beg to differ on the word 'lying'. I would prefer to call it a 'little subterfuge' that puts the sparkle in my son's eyes and gives him such great joy. Certainly, my girls enjoyed it while it lasted. So when Rohan finds out the truth, I am sure he will remember only the excitement and the happiness that the Tooth Fairy and Santa brought him. Just like the memory of the coin I received when I was 8-years old still brings a smile to my face.

By the way, I am neither a Catholic nor a Christian. I am just a human being who loves

the spirit of Christmas.

Happy Holidays!

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