

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

By Jade Angelica

It was the Christmas season.

As I walked down the long corridor admiring the festive holiday decorations, I noticed Virginia. She appeared restless and agitated. As I passed by her chair on my way to the craft room, Virginia leaned forward and reached out to me with her small, delicate hand.

Almost whispering, she said, “Can you come here? I have to ask you something.”

Moving close to her and taking her reaching hand into my own, I bent down and looked into her eyes. “OK,” I said.

With grave sincerity, she asked, “Is Santa real?”

From the urgency of her expression and the firmness of her grip, I knew the answer to this question was deeply important to Virginia. I also knew, instinctively, that in this moment, the answer to her question was YES.

“Yes,” I said, returning her firm grip. “Yes, Santa is real.”

She relaxed her grip ever so slightly and replied, “I thought so. But they are trying to tell me there isn’t one.”

“Who’s telling you this?” I asked.

“Well, I don’t want to say,” she replied. “I don’t want to get anyone in trouble.”

“Oh, no. You mustn’t tell then,” I said, reinforcing her choice to protect the doubters.

Still clearly upset by the quandary, Virginia leaned closer to me and asked, “But what should I do now?”

Taking both of her hands into mine and looking deeply into her eyes, time stopped for me. It was a moment of true connection with Virginia when I replied, “You just keep believing. You just keep believing.”

“Yes.” She took a breath. “Yes. I’ll do that.”

“Just keep believing.” I repeated this over and over like a mantra.

“Thank you,” Virginia said, her sweet smile revealing a row of missing front teeth. “I feel so much better.”

She let go of my hand and sat back in her chair with a sigh of relief, peaceful at last.

Virginia is not the real name of the 100-year-old woman who asked me if Santa is real. I didn’t know her name when we spoke. It’s possible that she didn’t know her name either. Virginia lives in a care home on the same floor as my mother. Both women suffer with Alzheimer’s Disease.

Receiving a question about Santa’s existence from a woman who is 100 years old caught me by surprise, and at first I wasn’t sure about how to respond. Very quickly, however, I remembered the importance of being present in this moment with persons with Alzheimer’s and the healing implications of meeting persons with Alzheimer’s in their current reality – which for Virginia might have been Christmastime, 1915.



Photo by Gesine Kuhlmann

As I reflected on my conversation with Virginia, I realise it was both an endearing and a profound experience for me. After I left her and walked on toward the craft room to work on a project with my mother, I noticed that I felt better, too... more peaceful, more joyful.

I also felt inspired. From the intensity of Virginia’s question, she could have been asking me if there is a God. Given the course of Alzheimer’s Disease, every person afflicted with Alzheimer’s and their families and friends touched by this illness might have wondered about this from time to time. Or, out of her history and the circumstances of Virginia’s life – or any of our lives – we might sometimes wonder if there is really a reason to hope – or if there is justice or love, or if there will ever be peace in the world. We all might have doubts.

Everything about this encounter was a surprise for me: the question of Santa’s existence posed by a woman 100 years old; knowing with certainty that “Yes” was the healing answer; and the power of my own words to bring comfort to Virginia in a time of confusion. Mine was a faithful reply: *In the face of doubt and fear and resistance, just keep on believing in all things good.*

After my mother went to bed, I looked for Virginia to say good night, but I couldn’t find her anywhere. I’m hoping she slept peacefully that night, still believing in the Good Giver of Gifts.

I did.

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