

Q&A with *Heartfelt Letters from Santa* author Veronica Steck

How did this tradition of writing letters to your children from Santa Claus start?

Each Christmas Eve our children would leave cookies and milk with a note to Santa usually telling him how good they have been and to PLEASE leave presents. For many years my family had the children write Santa a letter and my husband and I would write letters to each child as if Santa had responded. We decided to leave a note from Santa with valuable feedback on how he saw their year. We added praise for areas where they had improved, as well as things they needed to work on. We also included statements about things our children did not know we knew. We pointed out their good deeds, as well as when they behaved with humility. We stressed gratitude for the things that they had, instead of for what they didn't. As the children got older we added a bit of humor and a light sprinkle of sarcasm (usually about what was growing under their beds, etc.). I could see that I needed a resource to pull ideas from so that I could remember all the wonderful things our children had done throughout the year. I noticed that sometimes when we were in a hurry we missed things to mention and appreciate about our children. Last Christmas I decided that I must offer this book so that all the parents in the world would have this support that facilitates their encouraging and expressing gratitude to their own children.

What was it like seeing their faces the first time Santa responded to their letters?

They loved reading their individual letters from Santa. They usually read the letters out loud to everyone on Christmas morning. They were as excited to read Santa's letters as they were to see what was left for them under the tree. They were so touched that Santa knew them so well and they really appreciate the encouragement Santa gives them to work hard in school, use their manners, and become more compassionate children. They roared with laughter when Santa pointed out what their closets really look like.

Did you write letters to Santa Claus as a child?

Yes, I did! I loved Christmas as a child and am still a big fan of Santa!

Does your family have any other Christmas traditions?

We have several Christmas traditions that span over a couple of states during our favorite time of year. We typically decorate the tree and our house right after Thanksgiving weekend. We love hanging ornaments that the children have made and ones that we picked out over time as a family. We always make sure while decorating to have Christmas music playing, a fire in the fireplace, hot chocolate, and eggnog. Another tradition is that we take a family photo with our two adorable dogs to send out as a Christmas card to family, friends, and clients. Our dogs have their own tradition and that is to make this endeavor as daunting as possible! Our favorite photos are usually the ones where our dogs are trying to escape from the shot! My family celebrates

Christmas in Missouri and then again when we visit Texas for two weeks each year to be with my family. Christmas is such a joy for all of us and when we visit Texas I relish everything I knew as a child there, which I now share with my own family. We decorate my father's Christmas tree with ornaments we had when we were children and my sister and I recreate some of our favorite childhood recipes from our grandmother. The best is pecan pie. We also help the children make Christmas cookies on Christmas Eve for Santa and of course we have to test them to make sure they are good enough for Santa.

What kind of treats does your family leave for Santa?

We leave homemade gooey cookies and ice cold milk right next to a letter for Santa each Christmas Eve, but I have to believe Santa appreciates any treat a child goes to the trouble to leave.

Christmas must be your favorite holiday. What makes that time of year so special to you?

Christmas is our favorite time of year. We savor the time together as a family. We reminisce about family members no longer with us that made prior Christmases beautiful and meaningful. We continue traditions and stories handed down to us to share with our children. Christmas reminds us that the blessings are not in the form of presents under the tree, but with whom we are able to share this miraculous day with.

One of the key goals of the book is for children to become kinder and more compassionate children. How does your book do that?

I really wanted to make sure to point out areas where the children showed how sweet and loving they had been over the previous year in the hope that they see that are valued and continue to be kind and even more considerate over time. The book also lists statements and encouraging words in areas where the children can develop more skills. By educating the children through uplifting and positive examples, they learn to benefit themselves and others when they behave in a kinder and more compassionate way. We remind our children to count their blessings, instead of their troubles.