

My dear friend David!

How delighted I was to receive your letter! I'd just made a little cup of cocoa and was settling in with Simani's 'Christmas Fancy' album when the mail arrived. It's cold at the Pole, I assure you, but your letter warmed my heart as well as any cocoa ever could.

I'll tell you something I've learned in my many years, David - friendships endure. Yes, long years have passed since we last wrote to each other, but you'll find as you get older that friendship is a truly resilient thing. In a world where belief in all things magical is steadily declining, it did my soul good to hear from you. In fact, I made my way down to the storage rooms where old letters are kept, and dug out a few of yours. Oh my word, how badly you wanted 'The Game of Life' back in '85! I used to play it fairly often with Mrs Claus, you know. But then she started hectoring me to make a newer version that had an alternative to the 'Retirement' space because apparently, "some people just don't know when to throw in the towel." I responded by telling her that I could certainly update the game, and I could even add a detour around the "Stop and Get Married" space...

We play Scrabble now. Great game, Scrabble.

But I digress. Let us chat a little about your letter.

I'll say this - it's been many a long year since I received a Christmas wish list that was quite so... daunting, shall we say? No offense intended, of course. You touched on quite a few areas that are near and dear to my heart, but even still my friend, that was a Big Ask List.

I've read a little bit of your work, David, so I know one thing to be true about you - you know that magic is real. But, here's something that you may not know; something I've known to be true about magic for a long time now... It's everywhere! It's not just the stuff of fantasy and fairy tales, not just the wonder of illusion and sleight of hand, and certainly not the notion of charms and spells. It is real, and it is accessible to each and every one of us, every single day. But we have to let ourselves see it.

Now, let me address your wish list.

I'll start with mental health. David, I know that in your profession, you see for yourself the power of listening - 'true' listening. When someone struggles, that magical gift of empathy is life-changing. Being with the person, being present, and being connected - that's real magic. I saw a few Jack Johnson albums in your collection a couple of years back. I like that lyric where he says, "She gives me presents, with her presence alone." We all have that ability, and that responsibility, to let people know we're there for them and that we'll stick by them through thick and thin. They are simple but powerful things, those connections. Maybe it's the old romantic in me, David, but I lay aside my phone every time Mrs Claus walks into the room. Every single time. The little twinkle in her eye tells me how much she appreciates the gesture. That twinkle, David... that's where the magic lies.

How many of us know what it means to be truly hungry? Oh Son, for years beyond reckoning I've seen hunger, and it never gets any easier to witness. It is so difficult at times to endure those who (especially this time of year) succumb to greed and materialism, those who must have the 'latest and greatest' thing, those who must have 'more', when all over the world, there are millions who are literally dying due to a lack of sustenance. But everywhere, including your beautiful little province, I see those who work their magic. I see Jody Williams and the wonderful crew at Bridges To Hope, the beautiful folks at Food First NL, the incredible individuals at the Food Sharing Association, my friends at the Gathering Place, the list goes on and on. So many of us hold such power in our hands - the power to give, if we are able, to help stop the suffering. I see the Food Drives at your schools, companies, and community events. I see those who show our children that there is no greater gift than generosity. Giving what we can, from the heart - that's where the magic lies.

You noted as well the local businesses. Let me say again, David, yours is truly a beautiful province, but the beauty of the people and the beauty of what they create is awe-inspiring. Yours are a people who have historically worked to build something from nothing, to earn a living by callused hands and the sweat of their brow. Some have created and sustained enterprises for which they've sacrificed almost everything. And the results, the services and the products, are magic. David, to see someone clack together two 14 inch needles and produce a pair of gloves that look like works of art, that's something special. And the woodworkers, the filmmakers, the bakeries, the musicians, the producers of local jams and jellies and clothing, the art, technologies, vegetables, books, bistros... it's a credit to your resolve. And it's right there, in your community. Listen, I've been lost in the Amazon enough times to know that there's an easier way. A better way. Buy from local businesses. That's where the magic lies.

On the front lines of our lives, we have some truly amazing people. And yes, as you said, the commitment they've shown over the last couple of years is truly inspirational. But David, it's not just the last couple of years; it's all the time. Doctors and nurses and medical professionals of every variety have always worked their magic. Those that care for and teach our children, those that make sure food is transported to every little town and outpost, those that work days that are oftentimes unbearably long, in service to others - these people are givers, David. Too often, rather than receiving gratitude, they end up on the receiving end of our anger and frustration. It also bothers me sometimes to hear this time of year referred to as 'The Season of Giving'. True, there is magic in giving to others, but Son, it's a Life of Giving - not a Season - that we should aspire to achieve. Come March, you won't find ol' Nick lying on a beach in Maui, patting himself on the back for a successful season. More likely, you'll find me tucked in the back of a soup kitchen somewhere. With a pair of jeans, a plaid shirt and a Yankees cap, this old fellow can easily blend into those places where help is needed; where the need is greatest. That's where the magic lies.

And lastly, let me touch on the concern you noted about the hatred, the anger and divisiveness in our world. My boy, that's a big one. I could simply say, "Do unto others..." or some such overused adage about kindness, but let me tell you the best way to combat this; watch, listen to and learn from those greatest teachers of all... the children. I have elves everywhere Son, even in your own

little elementary school. Do you know what they saw there recently? They saw two little girls, one from St. John's and one from Ukraine. One spoke English and one spoke Ukrainian. Neither knew a single word of the other's language, but they walked together through the hallway, holding hands, after delivering a message to the office. They stopped and sat side by side on a bench for a minute as the local girl spoke into an iPad. It translated her words to Ukrainian. The other listened, then spoke a response into the device and it was translated into English. They continued the exchange of thoughts, then leaned into each other and burst into giggles at their shared joke. Honestly Son, I don't know a better example of true magic. These girls, from two different parts of the world, easily erased any and every dividing line between them with high pitched laughter. They know that smiles are universal. They know that their similarities far exceed their differences. They understand compassion and kindness. They know that's where the magic lies.

I'll finish here. Forgive an old man his rambling thoughts Son, but I've seen a lot and learned some lessons through my storied career. David, I turn 1751 this year - I actually had to Google it to be sure. It seems a ridiculous age, but it's true. This game of Life has been good to me, and in return, I've tried to do all the good that was possible of a human... and of a spirit. For isn't that what life really is, David - undying spirit? A spirit of love and generosity, of acceptance and understanding, of compassion and gratitude. I live on, my spirit lives on, because year after year there is a spirit of goodwill that endures. As long as we believe in the goodness of others, and the goodness within ourselves, we can accomplish anything. As long as we believe in love and magic, as I always have, our stories of hope will continue to be forever written.

Merry Christmas dear friend.

Nicholas

