

The Truth About Father Christmas

The Idea

I stopped believing in Father Christmas a year before my parents divorced, when I was eight or nine. I remember being too excited to sleep and had to pretend to be asleep when my Mum and Dad came up to bed. My Mum popped her head into my room to check I was asleep. A few moments later she returned and through one slightly opened eye, I saw her place my stocking on the end of my bed. I wasn't upset, the wonder and excitement of what might be in my stocking overrode any disappointment. It only confirmed what I had suspected from hearsay at school: that this magical Christmas legend was just made up for kids by their parents. That said, I don't remember Christmas quite ever being the same again.

By the time I reached my teens, there was very little to get excited about at Christmas, even the 'Christmas day film' was no longer an exciting event. Buying Christmas cards and presents for an extended family felt a soulless obligation rather than an act of generosity from the heart. Trees, lights, crackers and decorations felt like fake distractions and any adult that still got excited by Christmas just annoyed me. I considered them stupid and ignorant for falling for such nostalgic corporate marketing nonsense. I felt like the black sheep of Christmas and preferred to celebrate Christmas Eve and New Years Eve instead, getting stupidly drunk with my friends so that Christmas Day and New Year's Day with 'the family' would be a blurred hung-over affair that I could quickly forget.

My worst Christmas ever came in either 2004 or 2005 after a relatively short, but long overdue relationship ended in a particularly hurtful way. I had a heavy cold and managed to avoid going with my Dad and step-mother to the rest of my step-family for Christmas. Instead I sat in the spare room upstairs (even the living room where I endured many a teenage Christmas, was too uncomfortable for me), in my dressing gown, in the late afternoon (recovering from a hangover) watching *The Sound Of Music*. I got to the scene where Mr Vontrap is arguing with Maria. He has just fired Maria when he suddenly hears his children singing from inside the house. He is taken back and quickly heads inside with disbelief and renewed pride. Maria peers in from the doorway. Through music and song, Mr Vontrap is emotionally connecting with his children for the first time since he lost his wife. Maria looks on with joy and sadness. Joy to see their children reunited with their father, but sadness that she is not an

official part of that love. At that moment I burst into tears. I felt just like Maria and wished I could be apart of a loving family too.

A few years later I fortunately met my wife and started a family of my own. At Christmas my wife turns back in to a seven-year-old girl. She absolutely adores Christmas and with my 'Bah Humbug' attitude, I was in danger of ruining it for her forever. I knew I had to find a way to resolve my issues with Christmas and embrace it on my own terms, but I had no idea how. Fortunately our daughter helped me do that. Seeing Christmas through her innocent, unpolluted eyes, melted all this negativity away and has shown me the true values of Christmas.

One weekend in August 2015, my daughter Lily was watching the musical *Annie* on TV and noticed that it was set at Christmas but that Father Christmas had not visited the orphanage. In order to protect her belief, I rushed to explain that the horrible lady in charge of the orphanage had not allowed the children to write to Father Christmas and so he had no idea that they even existed - That is why he has not visited them! As I finished my sentence a lightening bolt hit me. I had this sudden moment of clarity that excited me so much that I had to go and write it down. I didn't even consciously know what exactly I was going to write, just that I wanted to express this vague concept swirling around in my head before it went. I knew the revelation was very personal to me yet universal and as I started to write, I realised I had so much more to say on the subject of Christmas. My idea was that I wanted to make a film that would keep children believing in Father Christmas for as long as possible despite other less fortunate kids at school telling them otherwise. I wanted to create a story that made even the non-believers re-think their beliefs. I wanted to do it in a truthful way that didn't need to twist or challenge the many facts against Father Christmas' existence. It would be a story about what Christmas should truly be about and would attack the modern materialistic, gluttonous, corporate marketing of Christmas that so many people today accept as normal.

In that fifteen-minute session I managed to write my idea down over a couple of pages and went back to watch *Annie* with my daughter, satisfied I had enough of the idea down to go back to at a more convenient time.

A week later I ended up pitching the idea to the receptionist at work. I got to the end of the premise to find she was nearly in tears. I love that

about pitching. The moment where you realise you have hooked them, thus proving that there is definitively something worth pursuing.

During this pitch I had a second wave of clarity and managed to add some more detail to the story. By the end she was so excited by the idea that she jokingly insisted I write another 2000 words by the time her shift started the next day. So I did!

The only question I have left to answer is: If I was Roald Dahl, how would I punish a family whose celebrates Christmas in its most ugliest form?

Audience

It's a film to keep children and adults believing in Father Christmas even when non-believers spitefully want you to stop. It is also a film about what Christmas should and shouldn't be about.

Synopsis

Twelve days before Christmas, Lily's Grandfather, who has maintained her belief in Father Christmas by dressing up for the last twelve years on Christmas eve, unexpectedly dies. With a dysfunctional family who neglect her, Lily has to endure her worst possible Christmas ever and prepares to confront the harsh reality that Father Christmas is not real. ...but then miracles can happen!