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English 401a

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**A Letter to Santa Claus - Final Draft**

Dear Santa:

I know that there has been a long pause in our correspondence, but I think it is time to renew our pen friendship. Ever since I was born, I have been a huge fan of you, and I am pretty sure that I am not the only person in this world who feels this way. There have been years when I was not the best kid on Earth, I admit; those years I got a little less gifts and a little more coal, but I have always been okay with that since my parents always warned me about the consequences of being bad. I am also aware that you would be the happiest person if you did not have to give any coal to the kids, because it would mean that every kid has been really good that year. We both know that it will never happen, as we both are grownups and we do not believe in fairy tales, but dreaming about it feels really good; and chasing our dreams is what makes us human. Still, in this letter, I will try to convince you to give up the tradition of giving coal to “bad kids”.

Unfortunately, for the first time in my life, I will not be able to spend this Christmas holiday with my family, since I am thousands of miles away from home. However, I am still looking forward to celebrating Christmas as it has always been an important holiday for me. To make a long story short, as a Christmas present for this year, I would like to ask you to consider my proposal. If you disagree with it, just drop me a line and we can discuss this matter in details. You know where to find me, so let’s just get down to brass tacks.

I am sure that you are aware of the figures I am going to use in my letter (in fact, I am sure you are in possession of more precise data), but I would like to show you where my

arguments are coming from. According to *GeoHive*, a website providing geopolitical data, in July 2009 the Earth had a population of 6,790,062,216 people. The authors of the *CIA World Factbook* state that about 1,844,487,084 of them were under the age of 15; i.e. this many kids lived on Earth in July 2009.

Of course, you are the only one in this world that has exact data about the number of good, somewhat good, somewhat bad, and bad children, but without access to your database, I had to use the means the science of mathematical statistics and probability calculus provides me with. According to *Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, behavioral measurements tend to result in normal distribution, so this is what I am going to use to determine the number of kids belonging to the different behavioral equivalence classes determined by the *Santa's Visit Application* form. We all know that every kid is an angel, but there are really few children who do not do anything naughty for a whole year. According to another common proverb, "every kid is a little monster," but with respect to the fact that being naughty is at least as tiring as being good as an angel, we can also accept that the number of children who are able to be naughty for a whole year is, statistically speaking, as little as the number of those who everyone would refer to as "real angels." I assume that most kids are to be considered average (and by average I mean those who are just "kidding around"). On your 1-10 scale, therefore, most kids belong to the 4-7 range. Using our knowledge about normal distribution (density is highest around the mean value), we can assume that the behavior of 80 per cent of the children can be evaluated as average, that is "Kidding around", we can say that 90 per cent of all children deserve to get at least one Christmas present. The remaining 10 per cent belongs to the group that, according to the lore, deserves to be rewarded with coal. Using my previously mentioned data about the number of children, it can be easily calculated that this group has 184,448,708 members.

A good piece of coal weighs about 5-7 dkg (0.11-0.15 lbs). Thus the amount of coal needed to “reward” these children for their behavior every year is slightly more than 9,222 tons. This is a huge amount. One could say that by giving this amount of coal, you contribute to the protection of the environment, because the coal you distribute among children will probably not be burned, thus the emission of carbon-dioxide is reduced. This may or may not be true; there is no available information about what people do with a single piece of coal. However, burning coal is not the only thing that has negative effects on the environment. According to the web site of the *Energy Information Administration*, a significant amount of another greenhouse gas, methane, comes from coal mining. Methane is not only dangerous because of its flammability (which is the main cause of accidents in coal mines around the world), but also because its global warming potential is about 20 times higher than that of carbon-dioxide, according to the article by Dr. Frank Keppler, German scientist and publicist of the online newspaper *EurekAlert*. Stuart Pimm, Professor of Conservation Ecology at Duke University says in the documentary, *The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour*, “We are living in an enormously challenging time. If we don’t change what we’re doing, we are facing losing perhaps a third, maybe a half, of all the variety of life on Earth.” As Wes Jackson, President of the Land Institute identifies the source of this danger in the same documentary, “... the cornerstones of our system are all resting upon nonrenewable, energy-rich carbon [like coal] we call fossil fuels.” To carry out a change in the way we live in order to avoid global catastrophe, everyone has to make sacrifices; everyone has to make a contribution.

Since you are known for your willingness to bring joy to people’s lives and to help humanity, I am almost a hundred per cent sure that a person like you cares about environment very much. The fact that in spite of the availability of modern technology you are still traveling on a sleigh pulled by reindeers instead of burning horrible amount of kerosene confirms this theory of mine. Why would you support the operation of coal mines, then, by being probably

their most famous customer, a good reference for them, if you will? Say no to fossil fuels, and many will follow your example. I think this action would help people realize that they can do something for the environment.

“But what would I give to bad children instead of coal?” you might ask the question. My first idea would be that you should not give them anything. Thus, these children would not have to be visited at all, enabling you to spend more time enjoying the milk, cookies, and other sweet things good children prepare for you. But then, those bad kids might never find out that there could have been presents in their stockings or under the Christmas tree instead of a piece of coal. Their motivation would be gone.

I understand that you cannot accept my arguments until I come up with a solution you might like. Of course, I have something in my mind. All you need is one or two rubber stamps your elves can put a “REJECTED” sign on bad children’s letters with. What you could do with these letters, then, is delivering them to the senders and leaving them in the stockings, or under the tree, instead of the desired presents and the piece or lump of coal.

You could also enjoy the positive effects of this change. If we assume that the weight of a letter size paper is 2 grams, the total weight of the “presents” meant for bad children you would have to carry would decrease by 96-97 per cent. This means that the weight of your bag would weigh more than 8,900 tons less than before the change. You are not going to be younger, and neither are your reindeers. You guys really have to watch out for yourselves. All I am asking from you is to give me the gift of you considering my proposal and to give yourself the gift of reducing the weight you have to carry every year, thus preserving your health and something that is also very important, Nature.

Have a wonderful Christmas!

Áron Hamvas

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### **Afterthought**

Since the first draft of my essay, I have made several smaller changes to it. After reading through my letter several times, I realized that I did not provide my addressee with a real solution. I would have left him with a bad feeling that he does something wrong, and he is the one who should figure out how he should solve the problem. This way, my letter was nothing more than a critique. By providing him with a solution in my second draft, I offered him a good alternative.

In the third, final draft, with the help of my teacher, I amended my letter with describing the positive effects of my solution on Santa's health. Also, I have been able to do a little more research and included another source in which I have found more arguments that support my thesis.