

A WONDERFUL, AWFUL IDEA!



I showed Jack the magical catalog after school today. We were sitting in the closet in my bedroom, which is also our winter fort, eating gingerbread cookies my dad just made.

"This Junior Secret Agent Spy Kit is chido," he said as he bit off his gingerbread man's head. (Chido means "cool" in Spanish, which is the other language Jack speaks.)

"Hey! You're eating something brown!" I noticed. "Lemme see the catalog. Yeah, but that spy kit is nothing. Check out this 9½-foot Remote Controlled Bald Eagle!"

"Whoa. It costs \$500."

"Ha. That's peanuts. Like, the World's Largest Scrabble Game is \$12,000! This catalog has made me realize there are so many things out there to want! Which reminds me. Hand me that pad of paper, wouldja? I need to make my Christmas list."

Paper in hand, I chewed on my pencil for a few minutes as I daydreamed about all the present possibilities. According to family tradition, I would

get one "special" gift. If I put more than one big thing on my list, I'd risk not getting what I wanted most. But I wasn't sure which big thing I wanted most.



"This list-making businesses is tricky," I said finally. "It requires strategy. First, there's total gift count to consider. Timothy got a million cool little presents for his birthday on Sunday. That's pretty great. But then there's also the 'special' gift to consider. If I ask for something too big, I won't get it, or if I do, I probably won't get much other stuff. And the minute I turn in my list, it's all over. I've gotta nail it the first time."

Jack shrugged. "I just want a goethite geode* from the rock shop."

"Really? You don't want an Advanced Acrobatic Robot? Says here it can do backflips and play air-guitar solos! Plus, you get to have 2 Christmases—one at your Mom-house and one at your Dad-house! You're lucky...You can get whatever you want!"

WORLD'S
LARGEST
AIR GUITAR
COLLECTION
SOLD
SEPARATELY.



"Nah. That catalog stuff is *loco* expensive."

I considered for a couple seconds before tiptoeing into what I said next, because it's touchy territory for 10-year-olds like me and Jack. "But you know who doesn't pay attention to price tags?" I suggested carefully. "The big guy with the white beard and the reindeer. So...we could always keep that option open." There. I'd said aloud what every red-blooded kid thinks at one time or another. I kept writing on the pad of paper, but I swiveled my eyeballs to look at Jack, to see how he'd react to the Santa card.

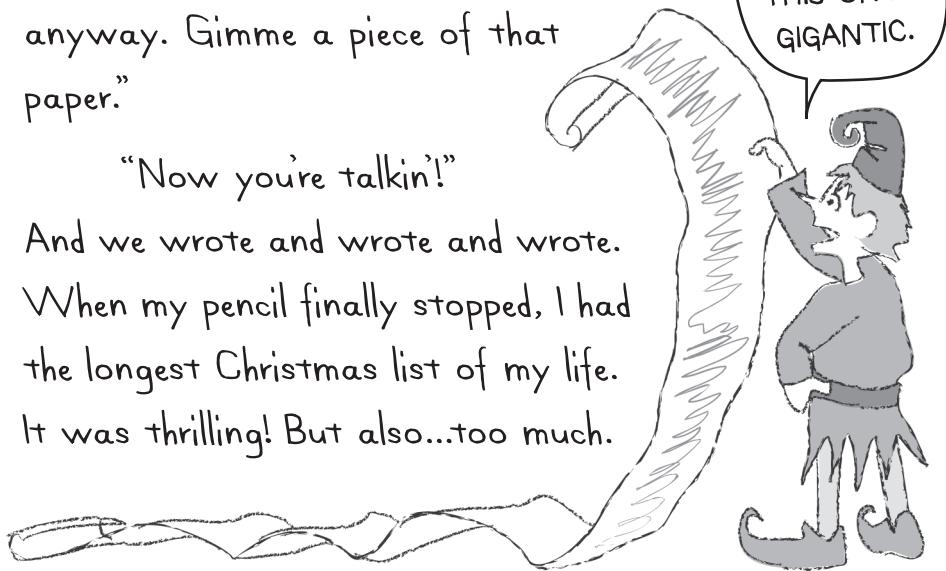
"True," he nodded thoughtfully. "I'm gonna make a list too. It can't hurt, anyway. Gimme a piece of that paper."

"Now you're talkin'!"

And we wrote and wrote and wrote.

When my pencil finally stopped, I had the longest Christmas list of my life. It was thrilling! But also...too much.

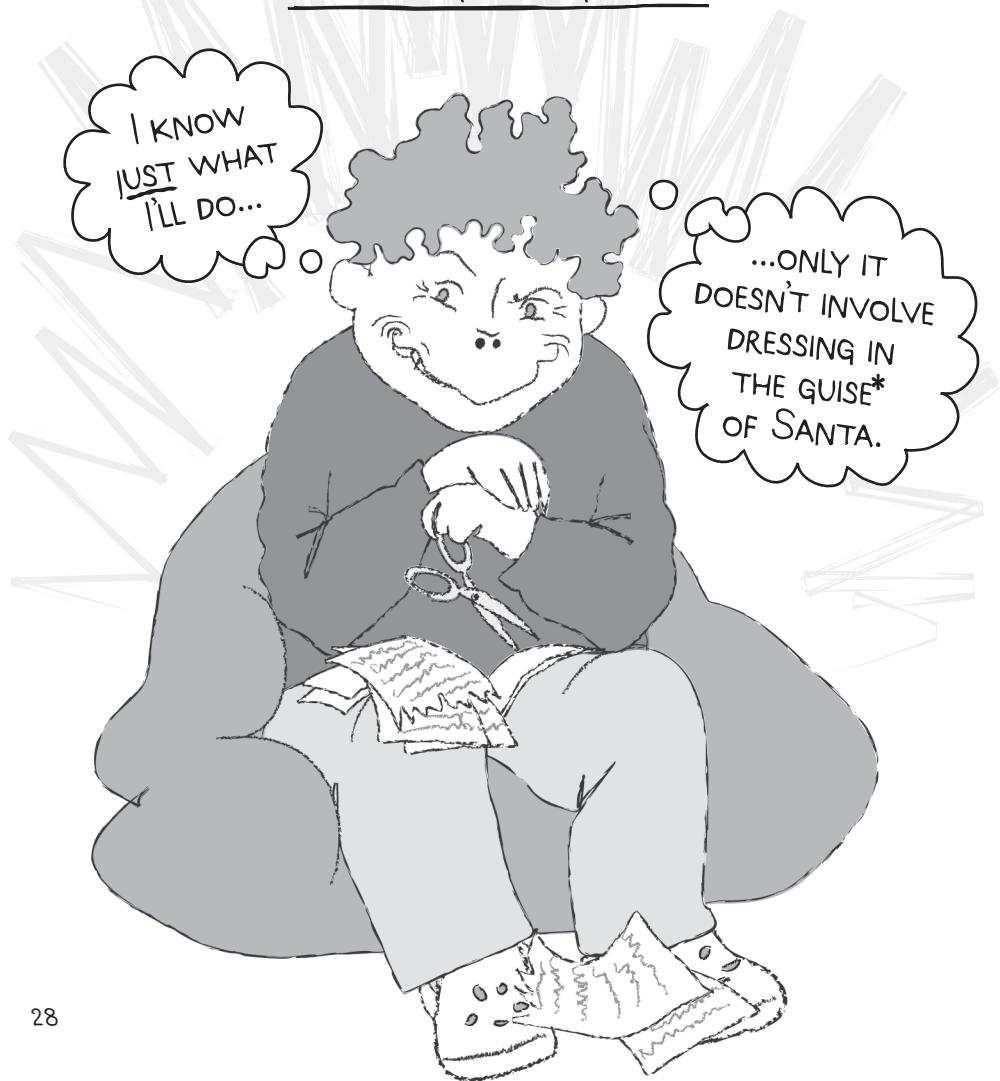
I'M AN
EXPERT ON
LISTS, AND
THIS ONE IS
GIGANTIC.



"I can't give this to Mom," I sighed. "She'll freak out."

"Just give her part of it," said Jack. "Tear off the top."

So I did. But I was still staring longingly at all the incredible stuff on the rest of the list when I had an idea. A wonderful, awful idea.



“What if I sent parts of the list to my relatives?” I said. “Like, I could cut it up into pieces and mail them to my Minnesota grandparents, and my aunt and uncle who live on the farm, and my Uncle Vinnie in Pennsylvania, etcetera...and I could end up with gifts galore!* Glorious* Gifts Galore—that’s what I’ll call the plan. Triple GI!!” And I reached for the scissors.

“Hm,” said Jack as I cut. “Sounds kinda complicated.”

But I was too busy running to get my mom’s address book and writing little notes and addressing envelopes and stickering stamps to ask him what he meant by that. When I was done letter-making and it was time for Jack to go home, I had a tidy little stack of Christmas cheer all ready for the mailman.

