

They laid on the old frayed quilt and stared at the blue-black sky blanketed with glittering stars. A muffled silence enveloped the night, the distant echo of waves crashing on the ocean a soothing melody. Along the fence, a possum, pouch bulging, paused briefly to stare at them.

"Make a wish," someone whispered.

"Wishes aren't real."

The night seemed to hold its breath, pregnant with anticipation and then, as if in response, a shooting star streaked across the sky, leaving a trail of shimmering light in its wake. They stared in disbelief, eyes wide with wonder.

"You sure?"

"Not anymore."



Author's Note:

True events inspire today's piece. On the island, we often laid out back and stargazed. Sometimes we threw a quilt on the ground, sometimes we threw spare mattresses down, and on rare occasions we actually used camp chairs. Often, while laying there, strange conversations arose, like the time our youngest told us the gruesome story of The Twenty-One Santas. I advise you never to ask about it. It was truly a horrible story that elicited laughter from some, movie ratings from another, and gasps of horror from me.

Twenty-Twenty was an epic year for stargazing. One night, while staring at the sky and listening to whatever chaos was unfolding from our mouths, a bird swooped low as though it had never witnessed us outside before. I screamed. After all, masked lapwings are not exactly the friendliest birds. Everyone gawked at me, which is when we spotted the possum on the fence staring, too. We could, indeed, hear the ocean from our home, although it was

often background music we only noticed when we traveled inland and detected its absence.

We witnessed meteor showers, falling stars, orbiting satellites, and traveling planes in our nightly visits to the backyard. Sometimes we relived old camping memories, which indulged us with gorgeous views of the [Milky Way](#).

Since returning to the mountains, we've yet to take the time to stargaze. My children have asked about various constellations, all unfamiliar to them, accustomed as they are to seeing the [Southern Cross](#) to guide them. There've been moments of laughter when one amongst us points to the [big or little dipper](#) and asks what it is.

As strange as it sounds to at the sky and not recognize what one sees, it's a feeling I am well acquainted with. Fifteen years on the island, and I confess I felt lost most nights when I stared at the bejeweled night sky, asking my kids to guide my eyes to find what seemed normal to them. Maybe this summer, we'll make time to indulge in this favorite pastime, and chances are my neighbors will be alerted when I scream as bats swoop past me.

*The Reluctant Author* 