



New Kind of Giving

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It was a cold and snowy Christmas Eve night. I was sitting alone in my bedroom, feeling proud that I had purchased everyone in my family a wonderful Christmas gift. All of the presents were wrapped and ready. Not bad for an eleven year old! But then it hit me – when I looked at the line-up of packages, I realized I had forgotten to buy something for my Dad. My Dad! He would never forget me. How could I have forgotten him? And yet, I had.

I didn't know what to do. The stores were closed and my family was in for the night. Wracking my brain I came upon an idea: I would write him a poem, the subject of which would be my terrible oversight. It would be a poem about forgetting to get him a present. The poem would be his present! And so I began scratching away on a piece of paper, writing down my explanation in school girl rhymes until I had filled the entire sheet with love and apologies. I had done my best to salvage the situation. But what my Dad would make of it? I bet you can guess what happened.

He loved it. In fact, it is the only gift I ever gave him that he really remembers. It is the only gift that I remember too. In short, it was the best gift ever.

Fast forward a few decades to last month when my son suddenly announced that it was okay if I made him his birthday present. My heart shot over the moon at the invitation and I got to work making a small stuffed toy of one of his favorite animated characters. I gave myself the challenge of only working with materials I happened to have around the house – it put my mind in super creative mode. I loved making this character for my son and as you can guess, he loved receiving this one of a kind present. It was something really special.

Both of these stories are fresh in my mind as we head into the gift giving season. With so much “stuff” in our lives already, what can we give each other that doesn’t come from a store? The list is limitless and begins with ideas of sharing love, time, energy and creativity. Here’s what to do:

Think carefully and thoroughly about the people in your life. What are their joys and their needs? How can you offer them something that comes directly out of your imagination? Once you have identified your gift, make a card with the description of your present. You don’t have to be an artist to offer something special. You can print something off the computer or cut up images from a magazine. Even a few choice words on a beautiful sheet of paper can feel like treasure to the recipient. Consider all the ways that your time, energy and talent can enrich the lives of people you love.

Here are some ideas to inspire you....

Give your spouse a night or weekend off from all family responsibilities.

Help a job hunting friend polish up his resume.

Offer to make dinner twice a month for the single mother and her kids down the street.

Make a regular phone date to lend an ear for the person that is caring for an elderly loved one. Identify others in your life who could benefit from regular support and reach out to them.

Help a homebound friend or relative spend some regular time outdoors enjoying nature. People often need company to take a fresh step in life. Be that company.

Drive a friend to their regular doctor’s appointment.

Make a book of gift certificates for babysitting time for a friend.

Become a gym buddy for the pal who is trying to lose weight (you both win!)

Identify a charity that is important to a friend and make a donation in their name or choose one of the many fine organizations that are working to help women and disadvantaged people start small businesses. Make a donation in the name of someone you love.

Do what I did – write your Dad a poem.

These are just a few ideas and I am sure you have plenty of your own. The sky’s the limit! One thought – if you do decide to dive in to this other way of giving, it would be a good idea to give your friends and loved ones a heads up about it. That way they will have a sense of what to expect. They might even become inspired and join you. Last year a friend told me someone had asked her what she wanted for Christmas. Her answer? “Lasagna.” She got it!