

A Jolly Christmas Season

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How about downsizing this Christmas? For some people, this upcoming season is distressfully filled with “oughts, should, musts, and have to’s.” After gift shopping, including stocking stuffers, wrapping, card writing, holiday baking, home decorating - inside and outside, bringing home the tree, party hosting and preparation of the turkey feast, many folk are financially, physically and mentally depleted. Indeed, in North America reports of depression increase 15% around and after Christmas.

The “Ho, ho, ho” fun and celebration of Christmas can become the “Ho-hum” of hours of obligatory purchasing and preparation for one mad eating and gift opening frenzy. Do those rituals we tend to perform year after year enhance our lives? This question is reminiscent of the story about a new bride. Every time she bought a roast of beef she would cut it in half and put the pieces in two small pans. Her husband asked her why she did this. Her response was “My mother told me I should.” The young husband went to his mother-in-law asking the same question about the strange habit of cutting a perfectly good roast in half. His mother-in-law’s answer was “My mother told me I should.” Upon checking with his grandmother-in-law he was told, “Are they still doing that? We raised our family during the depression. We only owned two small roasting pans.” It behooves us to examine our rituals and habits to check if they serve our intentions for this season. Does what we choose to do in a holy way, a family way, a fun way or any way enhance our well-being, connection and joy?

There was a time when Christmas was a delightful festival, an important religious celebration, a time to focus on family, friends and community. Little preparation happened until the eve of it. Unless we’re watchful, this holiday can become a royal “we have it,” “we bought it,” and “we did it” competition. Many of us want to re-establish simpler, seasonal moments of innocent giggles, of warm snuggles, of tender connections and the wonder of a sweet and thoughtful surprise of “Aw, a special little something for me under the tree.”

To begin we can stop doing those preparation tasks we find draining. We can reclaim rituals we loved as a children, change or don’t do the ones we dislike and make up new and meaningful ones. The following are some ideas to reclaim this holiday as the time of joy it was meant to be.

Pure Nonsense:

- Rewrite Christmas rhymes and songs: “All I want for Christmas is a tummy tuck. . .”
- Learn a seasonal joke or two: “Why does Santa Claus go down the chimney on Christmas Eve? Because it soots him.”
- Brainstorm with friends the following question: “What if Santa was born a girl?”
- Place a 1000 piece puzzle on the coffee table for company entertainment.
- Play Christmas Carol Charades or Name that Christmas Carol.

- Play games co-operatively. Play scrabble with all players putting letters on the board together. See if you can beat your previous time filling the board with words.
- Make a snow angel.
- Go tobogganing.

Alternate Rituals

- Say “No. I am not doing that this year,” to one non-satisfying activity.
- Make your own Christmas cards. Treat them like a gift for special people.
- Don’t send Christmas cards. Send Valentines in February.
- Write a special note to support people in your life telling them how they are angels to you.
- As a group design and construct a ginger bread house.
- Give a turkey a break. No, not your brother-in-law. Save a bird. Serve lobster and shrimp.
- Serve Haagen-Daz ice cream for dessert.
- Spend Christmas day helping at a shelter for the homeless.
- Place a serving of Christmas dinner on a tray and take up the street to a shut-in senior. Sing a Christmas Carol before you leave.
- Leave Martha Stewart out of your plans.
- Invite 4 of your friends to dress up like Mrs. Santa Claus and meet at a restaurant for lunch.
- Monopolize and utilize the mistletoe.
- Book an afternoon for one long, delicious nap.
- Go to Mexico.
- Take lunch to your favourite mall Santa Claus. Tell him what a great job he is doing.

Alternate Gifts

- Make and give cookies, preserves and candy.
- Donate to a charity in your loved one’s name.
- Give a video rental certificate and wrap it together with candy and microwave popcorn.
- Make personalized stationary by hand or by computer.
- Make a gift certificate offering to prepare a meal.
- Don’t buy her clothes. Give cash.
- Give away an heirloom or owned treasure enclosed with the object’s story.
- Create a treasure hunt to find a gift.
- Take a child on a shopping trip to choose ONE toy that will be her gift, wrap together, place under the tree and she will feel thrilled to know there is one gift she absolutely wants and will open on Christmas morning.
- Wrap one sock in small packaging and the match in a large box or package. This is a great way to make a big deal out of a pair of socks.
- Buy fun gifts such as a rubber chicken, wind up toy, glow in the dark underwear, silly puppet, giant bug, comic book, joke book, juggling or giggle balls or simple magic trick.

- Give an adult a teddy bear or cuddly doll. Many people 55 years of age and older did not have a love object growing up. It's not too late.

May your heart warm and widen, your tender ones be nearby and your inner Santa make this a jolly and joyful season.

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