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Make this a magical and meaningful holiday season

By Jennifer Raftis, CPO



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When did the magic of the holidays become surviving the holidays? I enjoy the holiday season because it inspires people to focus on family, friends and our communities. Driving through the neighborhoods and seeing the lights on the houses helps remind me that we live in a special place where the entire community is celebrating all together. The lights, music and festive decor are where the magic begins for me.

For years, my Lamorinda neighborhood would hand out little paper bags with tea lights to be lit on the evening of Dec. 24. Each house would receive bags and candles and we would line them up on the curb in front of our houses. After dark, on Christmas eve, we would drive down the streets and tell the kids the candles were to help light the way for the reindeer. Even though my kids are now grown, I still feel the magic on Dec. 24.

Magical Traditions

A long time ago, I decided to make traditions a priority. My family made dough ornaments, cookies and meals together. For example, on Thanksgiving, everyone was responsible for part of the meal. Having the entire family working together (in a small kitchen) was memory making at its best (good and bad). Nothing is better than surrounding yourself with people you love. Our family also loved driving around the neighborhoods in the evening, admiring the holiday lights with holiday music blaring and steaming cups of hot chocolate in our mugs.

Another fun tradition was planning a caroling party with our neighborhood. We had jingle bells, holiday hats and custom song sheets along with flash lights and very warm coats (it was always freezing). We would start the party with fun appetizers and hot drinks at one of our houses, then carol around the neighborhood for hours and come back for desserts.

There are many memories associated with the holidays, some going back to our own childhoods. One of my dear clients told me of his first memory of shopping during the holidays at Macy's and how scared he was to ride the elevator (memories are memories . good or scary). He also reminded me of how special it would make him feel when his family went to Orchard's nursery in Lafayette to see all of the holiday displays.

How do we focus on the magic and also make our gift giving more meaningful?

The most popular gift I gave my kids last year cost about \$4.50 and trust me, it wasn't about the object. Last year my friend told me about these cute toothbrushes that had rainbow bristles. She sent me the link and I discovered the shop owner was a part of the LGBTQIA+ community and the business itself was 100% women owned. It was so meaningful to my kids that I supported this small business. That was when I realized how meaningful it is to purchase with intention. I definitely had an "I'm proud of me" moment.

Where you shop matters

We live in an instant gratification world and packages showing up on our doorstep is convenient but where the heck is the magic in that? Even though it's annoying that the holiday season starts in October (commercialism), that is when all the warm feelings can begin.

Does anyone remember going into a darling, festively decorated store where the holiday music is playing and you could take your time to walk down the aisles? There is magic in finding that "perfect gift" and you

smile at the thought of seeing the look on their face when they open it - also, the adrenaline from knowing you just "nailed it." It's hard to replicate that experience when you sit at your computer pushing "purchase and send" and your package arrives at your door the next day (often with materials that you cannot recycle).

If we carefully plan our time, we can often shop when it's not so busy and really enjoy the experience

Supporting your local brick and mortar stores is meaningful especially when it's located in your hometown. Shop local and support your community. They need you to survive.

Gift Ideas

- 1) Support your local businesses. Your hometown's business is there for you; help to keep them in business. Typically, the customer service is top notch, returns are easy and you don't have to break down and recycle a huge cardboard box.
- 2) Buy consumables - baked goods, food baskets, wine, tea, coffee, chocolates (local holiday craft markets).
- 3) Support companies that are women or minority owned.
- 4) Search for "companies that use recyclable packaging."
- 5) Frequent companies that give a portion of the proceeds to a charity (many Etsy shops donate to charity).
- 6) Patronize local craft boutiques. You can support local artisans and find unique gift items. Look for local event listings on social media.
- 7) Purchase tickets of any kind for any event - theater, community events, opera, jazz, musicals, plays, concerts, comedy clubs; Sports - baseball, basketball, football, hockey, college games; Museums - Leshner, MOMA, Exploratorium, Asian Museum; Activities - skiing, mini golf, go-karts, paintball, Color Me Mine, laser tag, rock climbing, city tours, Segway tours; Classes - art, cooking, music, dance, photography, tennis/pickleball. (Check out classbento.com for more classes.)

Lastly, give the gift of your time - doing anything together. Hands down, the most valuable gift we can give is our time. The gift of time means "I want to be with you, our relationship is important and I want to create memories together." Keep that in mind when trying to think of the perfect gift for your parents.

Have a magical holiday season!

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