

The Perfect Gift

By Patti Teel
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Many people feel that holiday gift giving has become a burden, rather than a labor of love. In order to relieve what they've come to consider a burden, some people have eliminated it all together. While there's no denying that overspending and excessive buying can be problematic, giving the perfect gift to someone you care about can be an opportunity to express your appreciation, affection, and love.

This is especially clear to me this Christmas because I no longer have the pleasure of giving gifts to my mother--her light joined the heavens last February. I've come to realize just how much I used to enjoy planning and shopping for Christmas gifts to delight her. Shopping for Mom was not difficult--she loved Christmas and never lost her appreciation for all kinds of pretty things. It was such a pleasure to give her special little gifts; clothing, jewelry, music boxes and all kinds of chatskies would light up her beautiful face.

But last Christmas, she was the one who surprised me with the perfect gift.

I didn't think I'd get a present from Mom at all. Parkinson's disease had ravaged her small frame and it was difficult for her to get up and out of her chair, let alone to leave the house to go shopping. In addition, Lewy Body dementia often left her disoriented and confused. And hardest of all for me to accept, there were times when she didn't realize that I was her daughter.

My brother, who lived in the same city as Mom, did her Christmas shopping and a few days before Christmas my kids received a package containing Borders gift certificates. The package didn't include a gift for me and I tried not to admit that I was disappointed. I told myself not to be such a baby and that Mom was beyond the point of being able to give Christmas gifts.

Then, on Christmas Eve, I received notification of a package that could be retrieved at the local post office. I couldn't seem to douse the small flicker of hope that Mom had remembered me and somehow managed to have a present sent.

When I retrieved the package, I was excited to see that it had come from Mom. I barely made it to the car before eagerly ripping it open. Inside the small box, I immediately recognized the precious gift. It was the delicate gold necklace that my mother's mother had given to her. I'd admired it since I was a young girl. My tears immediately began to flow as I realized that Mom had managed to send me the one gift that would let me know that deep inside, she still knew me. She was the only person who would have ever known how much this necklace meant to me. A year earlier, while visiting her, I'd once again asked to look at it--but Mom could no longer find it. And yet, she not only managed to find it, my brother later told me that she had been insistent that he send it to me. I wear the necklace every day and feel that it connects me to my Mom's gentle spirit. To me, her Christmas gift was nothing short of a miracle.

Not every gift will be as poignant as the one I received last Christmas. But whether a gift takes the form of a card, time spent together, handicrafts, an heirloom, or a store-bought present, with thoughtful consideration of your recipient; gifts are an opportunity to express your affection and love.

Enjoy giving and receiving the many gifts of love this holiday season.

TIME OUT WITH PATTI TEEL

DREAM THE DREAM AND STEP INTO IT

Ways to help our children take joy in giving as well as receiving:

Make Your Home a Sanctuary -- Children have a natural goodness and from a very early age, they enjoy giving pleasure to others. But if your kids watch television, realize that they are being targeted by savvy commercials which were designed to bring out their 'gimmies.' Make "quiet time" a part of your family's evening routine. Limit total screen time, including computer games, video games and TV. Instead, tell or read inspiring holiday stories, and listen to or sing holiday music.

Engage in Activity-Based Celebrations -- Throughout the holidays, engage children in simple holiday rituals such as making cards, decorations, cookies, or gifts. Consider letting each child select one activity for the whole family to do over the holidays.

Instill Compassion and Encourage Generosity -- Perform simple rituals that positively re-focus children's minds and energy on others such as lighting a candle for someone or saying a prayer for those in need. Have your children draw pictures for someone, help bake and deliver food, donate some of their clothes, toys or books, or visit an elderly person who needs companionship.

Dubbed "The Dream Maker" by People magazine, Patti Teel is a former teacher and the creator of an award winning relaxation audio series for children. Her book, *The Floppy Sleep Game*, gives parents techniques to help their children relax, deal with stress and fall asleep. She is a popular speaker and presents innovative workshops for parents, children, and health professionals. Get R&R tips and sign up for her newsletter at www.pattiteel.com. You can listen to her online radio show at www.timeoutwithpattiteel.com.