

## The Perfect Christmas Gift

I'm not getting you anything for Christmas this year.

You probably won't find this news too distressing unless you've received gifts from me in the past, in which case you'll be glad to know that I don't want you to get me anything, either.

One of the many advantages of being a weak-willed materialistic middle-class hedonist is that every time I want something, I usually buy it. Consequently, almost every present I receive is something I don't think I need.

Since I'm so hard to buy for, the gifts I have received in the past fairly shout with the last-minute desperation of their purchasers. Over the last 25 years or so I have accumulated cartons of well-intentioned presents whose sole function appears to be to prevent me from ever being able to do anything useful with my basement.

It seems like the most frequent contributors to my dusty gift mausoleum (next stop: Goodwill) are men who lack the benefit of female guidance. We must be missing a critical chromosome somewhere. Truly inappropriate (and often unwrapped) presents can only be given by men.

Anyway, I seem to have this weird guilt thing going on which wells up every time I open an utterly useless gift from well-meaning friends and family. I smile graciously, thank them sincerely and mentally calculate how many bags of rice could have been bought for the Crisis Center Food bank instead.

Therefore, at the risk of sounding Scroogish (and exacerbating the economy's downward spiral) I'm not accepting presents any more, and I'm asking you to consider doing the same. Instead, let's take the money we would have spent on those inappropriate, uninspired gifts and donate it to charity. I guarantee that we'll all be better infused with the true Christmas spirit.

This is not as altruistic as it may first appear. It's a happy coincidence that this strategy also eliminates the time and stress that accompanies trying to find the perfect gift (or at least one that appears to have taken more than two seconds of thought) for all the special people in your life. And it's easy.

A few weeks ago I sent out an e-mail to all the usual suspects that essentially said, "I ain't gettin' nobody nothin' this Christmas." I wrote several tax-deductible checks to deserving charities and my shopping was done. So far, no one has objected to this policy other than small children (for whom there are always exceptions).

It's not an original concept, and my family has been doing this on and off for almost 20 years. But unless one of us pre-emptively sends out a reminder in November we all tend to slip back into our mindless gift-giving habits.

I'm sure that every family has its share of shopaholics. But should you decide that you are tired of enhancing your own gift graveyard and those of your loved ones, give the alternatives some thought. And God bless us, every one!