

Generosity and Giving

MOVING BEYOND THE “STUFF” THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

By K. Meagan Ledendecker



I've been stressed out about the holidays. The season all too often becomes about “stuff” – presents, decorations, more presents. For years I've been wanting to wean our children away from their focus on getting presents and instead refocus on the spirit of togetherness, generosity, peace, and goodwill.

My husband had the idea of giving gifts that were really experiences: a trip to New York City to visit a museum of choice, certificates for favorite excursions, cash and a coupon for an outing to the arcade, a day trip with a friend to the trampoline park.

Recently, when we all together as a family, I brought up the concern about having too many material possessions. My older children were open to the idea of shifting our holiday focus.

When I asked what, besides the gifts, they really like about the holidays, they thought quietly for a few moments. Then the memories started to emerge. They remembered making gingerbread cookies with Grandmom. They told about how much they enjoyed taking a walk together as a family, exploring a quiet dirt road while Granddad took pictures. We laughed about ordering take-out Chinese and the days-worth of leftovers.

Then we started brainstorming about what we'd like to establish as part of our holiday tradition. One of my daughters asked about going on a hike we often drive by but haven't taken as a whole family. We thought about how family game nights could enliven the winter season.

We have enough things in our lives. Even though our five-year-old isn't perhaps ready to give up the idea of getting material presents, the rest of us are.

Likely our children won't remember a particular toy they unwrapped in 2017, but they will remember what we did and how they felt.

As our discussion about the holidays continued, we began thinking about activities that could involve giving and service to others. We decided, as a family, to explore ways to “give back” this holiday season.

Already my stress level has eased. All sorts of studies detail the mental and physical health benefits when we give to others. The term “helper's high” refers to the chemicals released in our brains when we engage in giving behaviors. Perhaps just planning a different kind of giving this year has brought less stress and more joy.

What better gift than that?

~ K. Meagan Ledendecker is the cofounder and Director of Education of The Montessori School of the Berkshires. This season, rather than spending time searching for presents, Meagan looks forward to having some joyful experiences with her children and extended family. www.berkshiremontessori.org

