

December 21, 2007

It's in The Bag

Celebrating Christmas with Recyclable Wrapping 12-21-07

Christmas brings lots of fun and also lots of challenges. With six children and five grandchildren along with my family of origin and friends and staff to shop for, it gets pretty interesting, especially when you consider that I have made a commitment to environmental responsibility. How do I reduce in the midst of a time historically dedicated to abundance? I could, I suppose, remind my family and myself that we don't need more stuff. I could give them a DVD of George Carlin's routine about all the "stuff" we own and all the "stuff" we move from place to place. Or, I could tell them this is not a time of abundance as much as it is a time of blessings and that we should count ours. Or, if I think about it, maybe I can combine all my goals.

I don't know how I will handle next year's holiday season but I have arrived at an acceptable solution to this year's challenges. Some of the challenges facing each and every one of us, whether or not you are aware of it, are as follows: Our landfills are being filled with things and substances that don't belong there. Some are hazardous. Give those things to your recycling center or transfer station to handle responsibly. Some are not hazardous but are recyclable, so these items should be recycled. Other throw-aways are organic and compost-able, such as all our vegetable and fruit peels and our grass clippings. One way or another, please allow those things to go back to the earth where they can be used rather than buried. Toss them outside in the woods, start composting or give to a composting collection site such as Colchester Farm in Plympton. (More on that in a future article.)

So, what was my personal solution to the "Give lots of stuff vs. reduce, reuse, recycle" dilemma? Since my children do not receive or read this paper, I am going to confide in you. I came up with a theme that accommodates the three R's. Thematic celebrations: that's the ticket!

I usually give everyone a hint as to the theme when they walk in the door. When they arrive, I am wearing a tee shirt with iron-on wording. I guess written words on a tee shirt results in more than a hint. I guess it is closer to a screaming advertisement but one that requires some thinking and arouses curiosity.

A few years ago, when I gave my children a family cookbook, my shirt said, "Let's Get Cooking!" This year, my shirt will say, "It's in the bag." And that was my solution. Everyone needs and/or can use some kind of bag or container. We use lunch bags, tool bags, traveling bags and computer bags, to name a few.

Among the more challenging ones, were those "manly bags". Even my two-year-old grandson, Colin, wants a bag. All little kids like bags, especially their mother's pocket book. Pocket books open and close. That alone is fascinating to toddlers. What kind of bag will be acceptable to the father, though? That is the question. Father and son versions of a black canvas tool bag were the answer. Big guy can keep his tools in his bag and little guy can keep his Matchbox cars in his.

Everyone is receiving a container of some kind, be it pocketbook, tool bag, cooler, suitcase or lunch bag. The bag becomes the container for smaller gifts and I am

wrapping only a few gifts for under the tree. This has worked out very well. I will have very little rubbish to bring to the transfer station and I can recycle the small amount of paper I am using.

I will leave next year's solution for another time. For now, it's a wrap.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Halifax Board of Health and sits on the Board of Health in Plympton. Halifax has a recycling center and is working toward increasing the recycling, per orders of DEP. Plympton has a transfer station and is working toward many goals, including improving the efficiency and sustainability of the station and having a DEP approved site.

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