

12-7-12 Healthy Holiday Happiness

At this time of year, there's extra pressure on parents to show their love by giving the best gifts ever. It can be truly rewarding to see that smile, hear the squeal of delight, as the child sees the gift and just then, you know, with a sense of relief, you chose well. For so many parents, though, this is an extremely stressful time if they cannot afford to buy what they wish they could and what the children are hoping for. The recession has necessitated extreme adjustments for so many. Some of us already had practice in living with a tight budget and are more experienced, perhaps, in gift giving with creativity when strapped for cash. That comes in handy, indeed!

If you can truly afford (Do I need to add, without going into debt?) the latest technology, the up to the minute form of entertainment, the latest fashions, then go for it if that will truly bring some lasting enjoyment. If you are considering (or are accustomed) to living beyond your means, I urge you to rein in the impulse and consider expressing your love truthfully and authentically without creating unaffordable debt. Does love really cost anything at all?

There's no shame in poverty but there are lots of worries and stress in connection with debt! It's just not worth it! Hmm...“worth”; that's the key concept, isn't it? Where can we find true value? There is worth in giving of oneself. We can offer services, assistance and time together. That doesn't cost anything but it is worth a lot. We can make gifts of food, crafts, photos and family recipes. Cuttings of plants make a great gift, reminding you each day of the friend who made it and gave it.

We can sometimes even find great gifts; actually find them, for free! I even used one for a decorator! One of my friends has a way of decorating that is enjoyed and admired by everyone visiting her home. One year I noticed that she had some touches of blue here and there and, so, when I was at the dump and noticed this beautiful porcelain dish cover (no dish, just the cover) placed over to the side of the dumpster for people like me, I thought of her. I held it up and thought it might look nice on the wall or on a door, the way some people display decorative plates. It is true that I had a tiny bit of doubt and insecurity when I presented it but it immediately disappeared when I saw how much she loved it. She loved it even more when she heard where I acquired it! She has displayed it in so many ways and places over the years, that it has become a game. She'll ask, “Where is the blue and white dish cover? See if you can find it!” One time, it was taking me so long, that she finally gave me a hint. She had displayed it sideways in a little niche/cubby above her desk. It just fit the space and looked beautiful. It was a lovely non-utilitarian touch in her otherwise serious workspace. It had become the gift that kept on giving! It doesn't get much better than that!

I keep that free dump-find of the blue and white dish cover in mind as a reference point when feeling pressured for living up to society's expectations. If we aren't sure what we are

living up to or what the point of it all is, what kind of life is that? A gift from the heart keeps on giving, though.

This year, my heart is saying, “to you from me and them” and “remember when?” I’ll give my children some reminders of their childhood Christmases. I know they don’t want a bunch of stuff. We don’t have to cling to everything, but a small reminder to bring back memories can be grand. Speaking of grand, grandchildren enjoy hearing stories of their parents’ childhoods. Just the fact that their parents were once children is funny and entertaining! Some photos to accompany those childhood items will trigger lots of stories and conversations. Those interactions are a treasure.

I will also purchase gifts within my budget by shopping at thrift shops and consignment shops. The thrift stores support charities and the consignment shops represent small businesses. These purchases are rich with history; another life, another time. Sometimes the item is intriguing and sparks enough curiosity worthy of investigation! Where was it made? What do those initials stand for? What is it worth on EBay? Those gifts from unknown others are appreciated for the meaning, the beauty and the stories discovered.

You know your children and your friends. Look at the object, think about the project, and imagine it being offered. If you picture a smile in response, it is a good gift. It is healthy gift of happiness and that is worth so much that a dollar amount can’t even be assigned to it, even if you found it at the dump!

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. Tell her about your thoughtful thrift at 781 293 6768 or cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us