Changing the Gift-Giving Paradigm

My personal desire for a very simple life without clutter aside, I cringe when I think about the masses upon masses of pure plastic junk that is produced in our country year after year after (gift giving) year and despite the fact that I've made it a pre-holiday tradition to express to family members and close friends that I would love to enjoy a simple holiday gathering without the {near insane} hassle of obligatory buying for everyone, we still manage to drive home every year with a car-load of 'goods.'

A few years ago, I accompanied a friend to their family's holiday gathering. Since I wasn't really close to any attending family members, gift exchange was nowhere near the front of my mind. Mid-way through the festivities, people began breaking out beautifully decorated packages~ I was so happy and content to sit back and simply watch. My friend's aunt (who I adore and who was also hosting the party) quickly noticed my non-participating stance and, wanting me to feel 'a part' of the exchange, grabbed a nearby snoring Santa statue and~ to my {slightly amused} horror~ presented it to me as a gift. Naturally, I graciously accepted 'snoring Santa'…and, to this day, my friend and I still occasionally indulge in a hearty laugh over the whole ordeal. 'Snoring Santa' found a new home with the quickness.;)

Gift-giving. Rarely do we engage in an activity that solicits such a tangle of thoughts and values.

Of course, 'snoring Santa' hasn't been the only gift that I've rerouted under-the-radar. There have been countless gifts from countless holiday gatherings that have failed to make it inside our home. Many (if not most) find a new home almost instantly. My personal desire for a very simple life without

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How important, really, is gift giving? And, HOW MUCH do we really need?? One of my favorite memories as a child was listening to my mom read The Little House on the Prairie book series by Laura Ingalls Wilder. I was drawn to a simple way of living even then and vividly recall Laura's description of their family's Christmas. In general, after a long trip to the nearest town, 'Pa' would typically have enough left over, after buying needed supplies, to bring each child a stick of candy…and there was one Christmas, in particular, where they were snowed in for months—receiving makeshift gifts and finally enjoying their Christmas meal months later. It was all accepted with a spirit of appreciation for what they did have and the time that they were able to spend together. I adore this variety of rustic gratitude…{much so.}

Now, instead of waking up on Christmas morning to a new pair of socks or a bag of rock candy, children fully expect to be greeted by a slew (a fairly LARGE slew) of bags and boxes.

{sigh.}

On one hand, obligatory gift buying and giving long ago crossed a boundary into a consumer-centered, wasteful holiday tradition that is in desperate need of a lil' shape-shifting.

The desire to delight your child, grandchild, niece or nephew with the latest and greatest game or toy runs right up against the {very likely} scenario of the toy in consideration being poorly made in another country, lacking in long-term play

value, and being composed of umpteen plastic parts (most of which will be eaten by the vacuum or end up in the nearest landfill by the following month).

On the other hand, it is such a pleasure to make or buy a special gift and give it to someone you love with the purest desire to do so.

Either way, even if the act of wildly exchanging gifts is unlikely to change any year soon within your 'circle of giving,' there is one strategy that can cut through the conflicts of gift giving and make for much less of a burden~ both for recipients who might not share your unique tastes, and for our planet! This particular purposeful focus hums to the subtle tune of simplicity and freedom from choking consumerism…and~ just as diggable~ makes shopping more enjoyable…in one word:

Consumables!!!

A consumable gift is one that will be used up, one that is not 'stash-able' until the next yard sale or thrift shop drop-off…it is not a material thing, a 'keepsake,' decoration, trinket; it is not on the fast and savvy track to adding to the clutter section of one's sacred space. A consumable is anexperiential gift. It is something that will be enjoyed by the recipient…yet, will have an end;). Something to eat, something to read, something to bake, somewhere to go……

Let's begin with the little ones. I know from experience that a huge plastic art set lacks the play miles that come along with a simple pad of drawing paper and a nice set of colored pencils. Likewise, instead of a huge ensemble of toy pots, pans, pretend food and packaging, go for a baking mix or a certificate for a mom & daughter cooking class. Books are always a perfect gift for a child~ they can be read over and over, supporting quality family together time and, when no longer enjoyed, can easily be donated to the local library or

thrift store.

Edibles are a no-brainer. The holiday gift industry is well aware of the ‘for everyone appeal’ of themed packaged food. However, before dishing out for a box of stale crackers, spread and salty meat~ consider creating your own bag of fresh and natural eats…or even a food share at a local farm or farmer’s market.

For your parents? Forget passing along more ‘crafty pieces’ for their already full house. Give them tickets to a play, movie or a certificate for dinner at a local restaurant. Candles, note cards & stamps, soap, lotion, supplies for a project they’ve wanted to complete are all good ideas…or maybe a membership to a fitness center or ‘food/wine/fruit/chocolate of the month’ club.

For a close friend or lover~ get creative! Plan an entire night or outing, include a massage, yoga session or other stress-relieving engagement—or simply orchestrate a relaxing evening at home.

Package up homemade trail mix, fresh fruit or an assortment of teas for colleagues and friends.

Again, think experience! The possibilities are endless and it’s typically much more satisfying (for all involved, really) to piece together unique, useful offerings than it is to pack the trunk full of highly commercialized, ‘one size fits all’ gift bombs.

Cheers to preserving both our planet and our sanity…one [small, consumable] gift at a time .