

VILLAGE VIEW

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With Christmas holidays now uppermost in most people's minds, we find ourselves caught up in buying gifts, wrapping presents, sending greeting cards, and worrying about how we'll pay for it all.

There's a variety of ways families manage Christmas expenses. Some limit gift-giving to children still in school, agreeing among themselves that the celebration is truly important only to youngsters and exchanging presents between adults is unnecessary.

To keep costs within bounds, some families put a price limit on each gift, allotting one or two dollars as the maximum.

There are those who see in Christmas an opportunity for conspicuous consumption, who are so influenced by commercial advertising, so bent upon making spectacular gifts, so caught up in the spirit of exchanging impressive objects of value that they put themselves in debt for months to come in the hope of satisfying the every whim of their loved ones.

And there are those who exchange small insignificant gifts, so well-chosen, so lovingly readied for the ceremonies around the tree, that they more than fulfill the hopes and anticipations of their dear ones.

For many of us, this Christmas must be more austere than those of recent seasons; everyone finds shrinking dollars must go for necessities rather than luxuries. And yet, Christmas without gifts seems spiritless, a hollow mockery, a capitulation not to be borne.

The answer to our dilemma may lie in our own imaginations and capacity for creativity. Some of the most delightful and welcome gifts of all may come, not from stores and shops, but from our own hands, our kitchens, our workshops, our otherwise unused minutes and hours.

What can you make that would be appropriate gifts? Much depends on your own skills, of course, but more upon your imagination. Anyone can make things to eat, for example. Fancy breads, candy, preserves and jellies, pies and cakes are welcome presents to the sweet-toothed.

For list-makers, letter-writers or note-takers, the imaginative giver might choose to pick up a supply of left-over paper or note pads from a print shop. These can be personalized or hand-decorated by one with artistic talent.

Fabric gifts offer a wide choice. Knitters, if they start early, can give hand-made scarves, mittens, socks, hats or sweaters. Weavers or those with sewing machines can make placemats, tablecloths, napkins, belts or other accessories to wear, for no more than the cost of the material.

Woodworkers can turn out gaily-painted wooden blocks from scrap lumber for a child; a planter to fit a sunny window might be just the thing for the indoor gardener; a sturdy stool has hundreds of uses in every home; a variety of toys of simple style will please children of all ages. What student can't use another bookcase, an extra shelf? What homemaker wouldn't be happy with a spoonrack, a framed mirror, a storage chest, or salad servers and bowls? The list is limited only by an unperceived need or want.

Metalworkers might design wall decorations, hangers for plants, jewelry, tableware, candlesticks, magazine racks, a set of knobs for cupboard doors or drawpulls to enhance an otherwise unadorned piece of furniture.

Supposing you're not a craftsman, how may you be creative? Gather dried grasses for an attractive bouquet. Pick up vari-colored stones from the beach and arrange them to form a sculpture. Modern glues will hold them in place. Or choose rocks of suggestive shapes and paint them with smiling faces for decorative accents.

Try your hand at candlemaking, using empty plastic household containers with interesting shapes to mold melted and perhaps scented colored wax. In these days of fuel conservation, windowshades are returning to popularity; shade pulls to brighten winter scenes when the sun shines through the windows during the day might be especially appreciated.

Seashells in a shadowbox may be a happy choice; they can also be arranged in a clear glass container for a striking lamp. Or glue shells to a plain hinge-topped wooden box and spray with gilt for a unique jewelry box, or accessory.

Is it easier to buy gifts? Certainly it takes less time, but consider all you pay for in addition to the item itself; you pay part of the wages of dozens of people called middlemen, you pay for packaging, for advertising and promotion, for transportation, for display, for rent, light and heat at the store

where you make your purchase. Is all the additional expense worth the price?

Into each gift made with your own hands go far more precious things than money; into hand-crafted gifts go your time, your thought, your effort and energy and, most important, your love. Each receiver will value your present as much for the part of yourself invested as the gift itself.

A needlepoint seat cushion, a crewelwork pillow cover, a cuddly crocheted bed jacket, a re-caned antique chair hitherto bottomless, a lampbase rewired and topped with a matching hand-painted shade, a laprobe, a collection of foreign stamps for the philatelist; any of these might be appropriate for someone on your Christmas list.

The season to be jolly may be jolliest of all if we need not face a mountain of debt in January. There's still time. Other ways to give special meaning to this holy holiday include the thoughtful gift of time spent with people you hold dear.

Time, that precious commodity we all have too little of, may be the most cherished gift of all. Of time, memories are made. No material thing can compare to the joy of sharing time with those who love us. Give the gift of pleasant hours and companionship. Listen to the child, share with the friend, include the neighbor, attend the aged and infirm. Hear and heed their lonesomeness. Only being with them can it be assuaged.

Whatever gifts you choose to make, this year, give of yourself. The gift without the giver is bare.