



Healthy matters to keep in mind.

Life Balance

December 2013

Certain Gifts You Just Can't Buy. But They Last a Lifetime.

Aahh, the joys of the holidays: Bulging credit card balances. Riotous traffic lines at the crowded malls. Parking space hassles. Finding the right gift for each person on your list, even if you're clueless about their tastes, or don't even like them personally.

Setting the Example

Ever since Santa made his appearance, the holidays have centered around shopping. Up until recent history, though, the holidays were more about buying gifts for the children, and leaving cookies and milk for the jolly old man as a thank you note. Today,

it's more about overexerting ourselves and stretching our wallets trying to satisfy all our obligations with store-bought goodies on that one day a year. And what about our children? What are they learning? Why, to do the same, of course.

The Gift of Time: Priceless

So, this year rather than run around aimlessly, why not stop, gather with your kids and brainstorm about what kindness you can bestow upon your loved ones? You'll find that being thoughtful and giving of your time won't cost you much at all, but will be greatly appreciated as a token of your love and generosity.

For example, how about teaching grandma to use a computer so she can communicate with you more often? What about teaching baby sister to knit, bake cupcakes or dance? How about giving your favorite aunt a foot massage, or washing your uncle's car? How about

preparing meals for your aged neighbor or doing laundry for your son in college? What about painting the bathroom for your mom or treating your dad to a movie?

These and other such gifts say "I think enough of you to spend my time doing something that will make you happy." If you'd like to make it official, package these offerings as gift certificates and tuck them into your holiday cards. Better yet, make the cards yourself and have the children personalize them. That's even more priceless.

Learn and Discover

Make time to get closer to your family and create new memories they will treasure. Take them on a walk around your neighborhood to gather tree seeds, leaves, barks and sticks you can use to make potpourri by adding cloves, vanilla sticks and the rinds of oranges. Package it all for an aromatic homemade gift.

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Or learn how to make candles, soaps, or bake cookies or brownies and give them as gifts. You won't just be creating a gift from scratch but, more importantly, you'll be sharing a wonderful learning experience with your loved ones. That, in and of itself, is a gift you cannot put a price tag on.

Just Get Together

If your family is getting together for dinner at your place this year, it means you'll be planning the menu, shopping for groceries, and cooking the meal. It could also mean you'll want to renovate the house, buy new pots and pans, a new dining table or furniture for the guest bedroom. Depending on the time you have and your budget, this exercise alone can send you over the edge.

Contemplate Simple Pleasures

Again, stop for a moment, gather your family and think about what this event really means to you and yours. Is it about upstaging your sister-in-law or is it about spending some quality time with your guests and loved ones? Just remember that the most memorable moments are the ones that make people feel good.

If you are having guests over for the holidays, think about what would make them feel special and oblige them, within reason, of course. Do they like to help? Awesome! Let them. Give them something they love to do and don't micromanage them. They'll feel even better about helping. But what if what they were tasked to do doesn't come out perfectly? Don't worry; enjoy the experience and have fun with it. A good laugh is also memorable and helps everyone feel at ease.

If you're hosting out-of-town guests, think about taking them to places where everyone can have a good time without spending a bundle. A stroll on the beach, a hike in the mountains, a free concert, or a drive around neighborhoods with beautifully decorated homes can prove extremely enjoyable and provide quality time to reconnect.

Give from the Heart

Holiday times can include friends, extended family and neighbors as well. Use your imagination, for 'tis the time for wonder. You may want to engage everyone in an act of charity and cook a meal for a family or individual in need. Organize a neighborhood toy or canned food drive. There are many local organizations that will be happy to distribute the goods. Get your children and their friends to donate some



of their toys to a children's hospital, and accompany you to present them. Open your heart and explore old-fashioned kindness. Your children will learn a valuable lesson or two, and will cherish the memories.

Simple, inexpensive pleasures are sure to brighten your festivities and make everyone feel relaxed and happy while teaching your children the spirit of compassion. Best of all, you won't get billed for it in January.

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