

Christmas Without the Joy of Shopping

My son received a “12 Days of Christmas” box set when he was four years old: for each day, there was a small box with trinkets inside. He enjoyed it so much that I have continued to give him small gifts within these boxes each year. He is now twenty-three years old. The trinkets have transitioned from toys to small kitchen items, add-ons for his bicycle, and crystals. For twelve days before the holiday, he opens one of the boxes, thus extending the holiday season for us beyond Christmas Day. These are the only gifts I give him for Christmas, except for books, which I purchase at a local bookstore.

Shopping is not a common or enjoyable experience for me in general. I dislike shopping online because I prefer to give my patronage to local businesses and not all of them are/were online, I like to wander through stores and find items, and I spend more time than I'd like on the computer because of my job and don't wish to use it outside of work if not necessary.

I derive great joy from thinking of what to get him, visiting small stores with interesting items, discussing possibilities with the store personnel, supporting local businesses, and remembering what I have given him in past years. Finding items is a bit challenging as the boxes are small, and my son's tastes are particular. I troll many local stores looking for just the right items: things that are meaningful and unique.

In 2020, I choose to stay home during the holiday season to reduce exposure to the virus and to ensure that I wasn't inadvertently passing on the virus to someone else. Instead, I gave my son gift certificates to several stores. He still opened one of the boxes each of the twelve days, but the sense of anticipation and fun he has had in previous years weren't there this year. A gift certificate just isn't the same as a carefully curated item that I chose for him. I missed the fun I have looking for items for his boxes and explaining my gift choices to him.

Although gift-giving is not the important part of the holiday season, and I don't do much in this way, not being able to do the 12 Days of Christmas in the same manner this year took away much of the joy of the holiday season for me. I believe my son appreciated the time and effort I spent in looking for and finding items for him in previous years, which is the true gift, and I hope that I can go back to this tradition in 2021.