

The Art of Giving

Written by Katherine Tandy Brown

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'Tis the season once again for holiday cheer, scrumptious kitchen aromas, flickering menorahs, evergreen trees loaded with twinkling lights and candy canes, families coming together, African objects of art for Kwanzaa, hot chocolate with marshmallows melted on top, carols sung in chilly evening air that captures one's breath, and... *presents*.

Yes, 'tis indeed the time for giving. Presents for one and all: friends and family, employees, and service personal who have delivered your mail, cut – and colored perhaps? – your hair, taught your children, kept those – ugh! – Palmetto bugs at bay in your house, fixed your car enough to add a few more miles to the old clunker, rid your abode of dust bunnies, delivered your Amazon Prime same-day orders (amazing, that one!), trimmed your tea olives, or walked your dog. Well, you know who they are. The list of recipients for both those with big hearts and others with seasonal guilt grows longer each year. Would that the bank account expanded accordingly. If yours does, go for it. Give, give, give to your heart's delight. And feel free to add my name to your list.

However, if your investments aren't multiplying like bunnies, dust or otherwise – and even if they are – this season doesn't have to be about the size and cost of presents. Don't get me wrong. I'm all for supporting local businesses and I love shopping in downtown Beaufort's eclectic array of stores. But if your funds are limited or you want to start a different tradition of giving, following are a few suggestions.

Perhaps you've read the O. Henry Short story, "Gift of the Magi," about a young couple without much money who want to buy secret Christmas gifts for one another. It's a classic tale of giving something you find dear to someone who is dear to you. If by chance you haven't read it, this season is a good time to do that. Maybe out loud. And with your kids in earshot.

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A year or so ago, a close friend from high school days with whom I've maintained contact all these years, and her husband, traveled to the Lowcountry for a short stay in my cottage. Not long enough, as the old saying goes, to smell like fish! For me, their company was the ultimate gift and warmed my heart deeply enough to reciprocate. But not with a visit.

At breakfast one day, I brought warm bran muffins to the table on a cute tray that she complimented. Turns out it was one my godfather had designed for Neiman-Marcus years ago. A fascinating fellow, he produced and directed plays on Broadway and movies for Paramount on the West Coast. Occasionally, he'd roar into our small Kentucky town in his vibrant-red MG convertible for a visit with the homefolks and would take my sister and me for a spin, leaving us both wide-eyed. When he "retired," he became a successful artist, and his work appeared on canvas, clothing, umbrellas, sheets, tiles... and trays. I own a variety of those items sporting his whimsical designs, but only one tray, which after but a little thought, I gave to my friend just as they were leaving. She was knocked out by the gesture and often mentions how much she likes the tray. Whenever I think of giving it to her, I smile. A gift from the heart has that effect. And it cost me nothing monetarily.

Another idea that assures you'll glean more bang for your buck is simply giving of your time to certain folks on your holiday list. Consider this idea for people you care about and want to spend time with, and also for those you'd really like to see but never seem to be able to squeeze onto your calendar.

Have an art aficionado on your list? If so, the Lowcountry has a variety of options. You and your giftee can take a drive to Charleston for a peek into the Gibbes Museum of Art. That present is far larger than you think, for according to this museum, open since 1905, "When we open ourselves to art, we open ourselves to the world...." Or to the Telfair in Savannah, with three museums for your learning and viewing pleasure.

And as long as you're in a big city, make a day of it and stay for lunch.

If an out-of-town jaunt isn't in your time frame, head downtown with your friend(s) for your own private art stroll. Beaufort's display spaces are filled with creations by talented artists, from the welcoming Charles Street Gallery, to watching artists at work at upstairs Atelier and the award-winning Thibault Gallery, among the raft of artsy options on Bay Street, with plenty of

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lunch choices.

Take a stroll along the river at Waterfront Park and stop for a latte or ice cream. Update your area history knowledge at the Santa Elena History Center, where new discoveries are literally changing history books, and the Parris Island Museum, where admission is free, for more on that particular archaeological project, as well as info on the U.S. Marine Corps.

You get the idea. Time spent with a friend is totally win-win. The recipient receives the gift *and* time with you, while you have fun, too.

And lastly, think about gifting a consumable. Something that won't add to anyone's clutter they may be trying to pare down. Preferably, a yummy edible.

On a trip to Spain, each of my fellow travelers was served a gloppy chocolate dessert, which all were diving into. A waiter noticed I was the only one not partaking, and asked why. When I confessed to not being a chocolate fan, he said, "I'll bring you the world's most wonderful dessert."

Which he did – a juicy, fresh Seville orange. A total culinary delight.

How about gifting a bag of oranges in the middle of winter, a box of fresh dates or a bag of South Carolina pecans? Better yet, goodies from your kitchen: a pot of homemade vegetable soup, sweet potato pie or my mom's favorite gift-to-give, handmade, decorated Christmas cookies. You can present them on festive paper plates or in pretty tins for freezing. If they last that long!

Whatever you decide this season, treat your heart to giving what's comfortable as a gift to yourself.