

why LESS IS MORE

The positive side of putting a limit on Christmas gifting

As a parent, I don't think we always know just how important traditions are until we inadvertently skip them. One Christmas morning many years ago, for whatever reason, I neglected to make "monkey bread." My then-10-year-old son, Mike, was so disappointed. He couldn't believe that we didn't have the traditional monkey bread (which I didn't realize was a tradition). Let me tell you...he was distraught. His Christmas was ruined. How could it be *Christmas* without that bread? My husband immediately scurried all over town to find a store that was open that had some semblance of a cinnamon bun or donut. Believe me, that was the last year I skipped making a Christmas-morning bread.

When I asked my friends about their family traditions regarding holidays, they had different responses. However, there was the common theme that endorses the idea that the best things in life are not things. Instead, it's the experiences and traditions that make holidays special.

Years ago, my dear friend, Cathy Cipollini (beloved Hillendale Elementary kindergarten teacher) and I were having a conversation about the over-giving of gifts. She commented that she wished she had adopted the following when raising her now-adult son, Mike.

"Recently, I heard that Santa has adopted the 'less is best' philosophy. He now brings only three gifts per child, because the Baby Jesus received three gifts from the Wise Men. (And why would any child need to receive more presents than the Baby Jesus?) Of course, grandparents and other family and friends will always contribute more, but three from Santa seems like a good idea." As usual, Cathy is the voice of reason.

I thought it would be interesting to reach out to some Chadds Ford community members of all ages and see what traditions are important to them.

"The thing I love most about traditions is that we get to see all of our family. Even though presents are fun, I would much rather see my cousins, aunts and uncles. Each year, we have dinner with my mom's side of the family on Christmas Eve and my dad's side

of the family on Christmas Day, so it feels like we get to be with everyone!" -MacKenzie, 9 years old

"Each year, the Elf on the Shelf comes. Our elves hide all over the house and do crazy things. On Christmas Eve, we bake cookies. After we have dinner with our family, we leave the cookies out for Santa. On Christmas morning, we aren't allowed downstairs alone until everyone is awake, and we all go down together." -Mason, 7 years old

"My fondest memories of the holidays and what I still look forward to is seeing my grandmother on Christmas Eve for Mass and then again on Christmas morning. The morning starts with waking up very early and having sticky buns. Then we begin opening presents and hanging out for the day with family. Those are the special traditions that I cherish." -Summer, 21 years old

"Passover is my favorite holiday. I love the history, the food and how those two things are intertwined in the retelling of our freedom from oppression. This is the Passover Seder. The source material for guiding the experience is the *Haggadah* and growing up we used the books that my family had passed down from the late 1950s. It has stains, rips, missing pages, and notes from generations past. It also includes stains and wear for which I can personally take credit. There have been Seders led by other family members in recent years where they have purchased new *Haggadahs* to replace the old ones. For me, this takes away from the experience and tradition that has been passed down. These books were used by my ancestors when they first immigrated to the United States, and they represent both the tradition of the holiday and every sacrifice that they made to provide better lives for my grandparents, my parents and, ultimately, me. Hopefully, we can take them out again for all Seders to come." -Matt, 29 years old

"I like seeing Aunt Sooz, Grandmom, Grandpop, Mimi, and Poppy and lighting the candles and saying the blessings." "I love that every year my entire family (including Brie and Jackson) goes on

a family vacation. This is a new tradition and the kids continually say, 'Remember when we...' I know we are making memories they will never forget."

-Jackson, 8 years old, and Brie, 6 years old, and Aunt Sooz

When considering what to give your children this holiday season, perhaps these ideas might be helpful:

Experiences: Tickets to a local museum, show, movie, kids' venue, day trip to a hiking destination or a place that nurtures their interests/hobbies

Reverse Advent Calendar: Each day of Advent, place one non-perishable food item in a basket. On Christmas Eve, donate the items to a local food bank.

Consider having your children donate a few toys or outgrown clothes to a local organization for families in crisis such as Family Promise, Safe Harbor, and local churches or missions.

For the younger crowd who may really look forward to those gifts from Santa and family, consider gifts that nurture healthy brain and body development and time spent as a family such as:

Games such as:

Scattergories, Outburst Jr. — Enhances vocabulary development
Candyland, Sorry, Checkers, Pictionary, etc. — Nurtures taking turns, patience, humbleness when winning and being a "good loser," problem-solving

Puppets, and Dress-Up Costumes — Enhance creativity and imagination

Perfection, Light Bright, Lacing Cards, Play Dough, Stringing beads, Stampers — Enhances fine motor development

Books or a monthly magazine — Encourages a love of reading
KIWI (<https://www.kiwico.com>) — Subscription for kids of all ages that provides monthly hands-on activities that nurture science and art (STEAM activities in the mail).

May your holidays be blessed with the magic of family, friends and memorable traditions.



Katherine McMullen

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