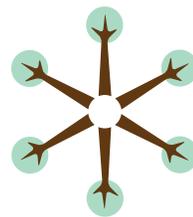


THE
HIP FAMILY'S
GUIDE TO
**HAPPIER
HOLIDAYS**



BY
**LISA
PARKER**

Though this guide has been around for a few years now, the number of requests to share it has grown each Holiday Season. In that time, your once small children and grandchildren have grown older. This expanded edition includes the same great resources for young families along with new insights and opportunities for families with kids of all ages. Take the ideas that delight you and discard the rest so your holiday is made up of fewer things to “get through” and more experiences to savor.

Longing for a less harried, more joyful holiday? Author Bill McKibben limited his family’s holiday spending one year, to \$100. Their family’s quest for a more meaningful holiday is chronicled in his little gem of a book, *The Hundred Dollar Holiday*. The amount was arbitrary, but the idea was to spend minimally and connect maximally; “to honor each other, nature, and the spirit of the season.”

Making Memories

Bill’s idea is one we can all embrace -- in theory. I discovered, as a working mom, that coming up with ways to “honor each other, nature, and the spirit of the season” was more challenging than I anticipated. I like to take the easy road and, truth be told, the easy road led straight to Target. Dish soap, toilet paper, an Easy Bake Oven, remote-control truck, stocking stuffers, and mouthwash, all in one shot! But darn it, I couldn’t get Bill’s book out of my mind.

The single best piece of advice I received as a young mom was that my job was to create memories for my children. Bill’s book reminded me that, unless we were very intentional about it, Target, and keeping up with the proverbial “Joneses,” were going to define our holidays for us. We needed to be more purposeful --more intentional -- about our time and money, and spending them in ways that would enrich us, remind us of our bounty, and bring more joy to our family and communities.

First, I sat down with my family to define more specifically what we were all after. We asked ourselves:

- * What are our favorite memories of holidays past?
- * What would make this holiday special, if we did not get gifts?
- * What holiday tradition do we hope our own children and grandchildren will remember with love, and continue with their own families?

Our answers fell into three buckets: Rituals and Traditions, Giving and Service, and Good Gifting. Over a decade of collecting inspiring stories and ideas for these three buckets, has made the road to making memories much easier to travel. You’ll find here a sampling of a few favorites.

Rituals & Traditions

“Let parents bequeath to their children not riches, but the spirit of reverence.” - Plato

The Waterman Family, of St. Charles, Missouri, gets it right by creating a tradition unique to their family to share with friends --- one rooted in intimacy with each other. Inspired by Eve Bunting’s book, *Night Tree*, they gather friends and family for an annual trek into the woods to decorate a tree for the animals and birds. The festivities kick off at home, with the preparation of natural goodies: pine cones rolled in peanut butter and birdseed, popcorn and cranberry garlands, along with orange and apple slices, to suspend from the tree. Armed with hot chocolate, the group, aged 5 to 75, bundles up and heads out into the night. The evening winds down when they get back home, with holiday cookies and caroling by the fire.

When my son was seven, he came up with a simple but treasured tradition for our family. Our first night of winter vacation is spent entirely by firelight. Candles flicker throughout the house, and we spend the evening by the fire, reading our time-worn holiday favorites. My personal favorite, “Christmas Day in the Morning” tells of a child’s gratitude for his father’s hard work and sacrifice, and the simple but unexpected gesture the boy made to show his profound love for his dad.

Psychologist Marshall Duke of Emory University studies family myths and rituals as well as childhood resilience. He has found that traditions are a very strong thread in the family narrative that provide a deep sense of belonging. He notes that, “the hokier the family’s tradition, the more likely it is to be passed down.” He recalls his family’s Thanksgiving tradition of hiding frozen turkeys and canned pumpkin in the bushes so the grandchildren would have to “hunt for their supper,” like the Pilgrims.

STORIES

*“A family with an old person has a living treasure of gold.”
- Chinese Proverb*

Rituals and traditions give us the opportunity to connect, by sharing our values, and the most enduring of these is the telling of stories. Our stories connect us and serve as the vehicle for passing values on to the next generation. There are stories in our elders’ memories that may not have been told, or that have not been preserved. We honor our elders, and those stories, by preserving them. Use the holidays to record or videotape your family’s favorite holiday stories. It can be as simple as asking, “What is the greatest gift you have ever received? What is the greatest gift you have given?” All ages can participate in this conversation. Or, a young person can interview an older family member. Check out interviews done between friends, coworkers, and family members at www.storycorps.org, for inspiration. Be sure to print out their “great questions list” to get you started.

The icing on the cake? Research now shows that the more kids know about their family’s history the stronger their sense of control over their lives, the higher their self-esteem, and the more successfully they believe their families function.

Giving & Service

Service is nothing but love in work clothes. - Unknown

START CLOSE TO HOME

I’m a fan of mischief and stealth, so I love the story of the Dillingham family who play “Secret Santa” in their community each year by anonymously helping someone in need. After their favorite teacher fell victim to budget cuts, they left a check and notes of encouragement at her door on Christmas Eve.

Ask your kids to think who may be lonely, forgotten, or in need of support during this time, and anonymously reach out – shoveling their snow, leaving a bag of groceries, etc. This especially appeals to the undercover-agent-in-training (adults included).

Added bonus? Science shows that the “helper’s high” is a very real and powerful physiological response. The delightfully unexpected discovery is that it’s contagious! The warmth and well-being produced in the helper occurs just as potently in anyone who witnesses the helpful act. Talk about spreading cheer!

VOLUNTEERING

More of us are incorporating giving and service into our lives, and naturally, many of us are choosing the holidays as the time to do it. However, volunteer opportunities fill quickly (in our town, weeks in advance) and non-profit organizations often don’t have the capacity for organizing large numbers of volunteers. To further complicate matters, most also require volunteers to be fifteen or older (for insurance purposes).

A LITTLE ELF TOLD ME...

If you would like to find organizations that accept young volunteers, check out the websites of private schools in your area. Some have community resources pages listing local organizations that, by virtue of being on the school’s site, have volunteer opportunities appropriate for kids and families. The volunteer center in your community will also help you identify organizations needing assistance over the holidays.

The same little elf pointed out that some nonprofits, like animal shelters, need their volunteers to show up seven days a week - even on holidays. When Jaime Reston moved to San Francisco last winter, she didn’t know anyone well enough yet for an invitation to Christmas dinner so, on a whim, she asked the local dog shelter if she could help out on Christmas. She got to spend the day with some furry friends in need of a little extra love and the shelter was able to surprise one of their most loyal volunteers with the day off.

As a rule, non-profits receive increased support during the holidays, but need it most during the summertime lull. Consider volunteering during the summer months and think about alternative ways you can be of service during the holidays.

PERHAPS THESE SITES WILL INSPIRE YOU:

www.pajamaprogram.org

The Pajama Program serves children living in shelters, without permanent homes, and those living at or below the poverty level. As winter approaches (what they call “the danger season”) your help collecting pajamas is especially valued. The Program accepts new pajamas for children, from birth to age 18, and can use sizes from newborn to adult XXL (many of the older children need adult sizes).

Some of their ideas for Pajama Drives: “Use the book, Polar Express, as your party theme, focus on the kids, serve hot chocolate, and collect pajamas. Or, host a Holiday Open House and spread cheer with friends bringing donations (and maybe even wearing pajamas...)”

www.dosomething.org

“Do Something is the go-to site for adolescents and teens – a teen, giving lounge where a hip kid can figure out: “What’s Your Cause” and how to “Act Now,” whether their cause is global or local. Kids can also post videos of their own volunteer projects, take a quiz of the day, and find out about causes and contests they can enact in their own communities. Their annual Teens for Jeans drive allows kids to collect jeans among their friends, or at their school, then donate them to homeless teens.”

www.globalgiving.com

GlobalGiving enables individuals and companies to find and support high impact, grassroots, social and economic development projects around the world. Donors have direct communication with the extraordinary social entrepreneurs who run these projects, and can receive frequent reports straight from the field.

www.boxproject.org

The Box Project has been matching volunteer sponsors from across the United States with recipient families living in rural poverty in America, since 1962. “Families are from carefully selected areas of rural poverty, including: the Mississippi Delta, and rural communities in Maine, Appalachia (including West Virginia and Kentucky), the Native American reservations of South Dakota, and Florida. Each holiday season, families living in poverty face a painful dilemma: knowing they can’t even come close to a child’s holiday expectations when they can barely keep a roof over their heads. Whether it’s Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, or another winter holiday, each family has traditions and dreams in this season, and you can help keep these alive.”

Good Gifting

“Things” aren’t bad, and our kids aren’t at fault because they live in a culture of excess. And yet, we want them to be aware of the fleeting gratification that comes from accumulating “stuff.” The Giving Season (from Thanksgiving to the New Year) is a great training ground for developing the skills and knowledge to be conscious consumers. Fortunately, there are more environmentally and economically friendly gifts than ever before. Here are just a few:

FUN GIFTS TO GIVE A YOUNG PERSON

Almost universally, a child’s first “cause” is animals. Many wonderful organizations provide animals to rural families in the most remote and impoverished communities, giving them a continuing source of income. Pair any of these with a stuffed animal to give to the little ones in your life...

ADOPT A CHIMPANZEE, \$25 PER MONTH • IDA-AFRICA.ORG

Help a chimpanzee, displaced or orphaned by illegal hunting practices, in Cameroon. You will receive an 8 x 10 photo of “your” chimp, its bio, and periodic updates.

GIVE A KID A “KID,” \$50 • OXFAMAMERICAUNWRAPPED.COM

A hardy goat is an invaluable resource because it gives the gift of sustainability “which means fertilizer and food for families - especially those living in areas that cannot support less durable critters.”

ADOPT A DUCK \$30 • OXFAMAMERICAUNWRAPPED.COM

“These web-footed fowl thrive in wet climates where they can provide families living in poverty with nutritious food to eat or sell at the market, generating funds to help send children to school. Ducks also produce eggs which means the family’s livelihood is secure well into the future.”

GIVE A FLOCK OF CHICKS \$45 • OXFAMAMERICAUNWRAPPED.COM

Who can resist these fuzzy little guys? “Your gift provides rural households with a starter flock: a dozen chicks to produce eggs, generate income, and improve nutrition.”

BUTTERFLY TREES \$25 • [THERAINFORESTSITESITE.GREATERGOOD.COM](http://therainforestsitesite.greatergood.com)

Forests for Monarchs is on a mission to plant one million trees to replace the loss of trees in the Highlands of Michoacán—a popular Monarch Butterfly destination. Though once heavily forested, this area has been cleared and degraded at an alarming rate for the extraction of timber, agricultural conversion, and domestic wood. Restoring forest in and around the Monarch Butterfly wintering habitat is a crucial step in helping to secure the long-term survival of the Monarchs and their unique migration. Without a place to overwinter, the Monarch Butterfly will eventually cease to exist. Just \$25 plants 50 trees, reforesting 0.1 acres of deforested land. A \$50 donation will plant 100 trees, which offsets one day of logging.

GOOD MAIL CHALLENGES \$27 • [WWW.GIVINGFAMILIES.COM](http://www.givingfamilies.com)

If you want to keep the giving going all year round, at the holidays and beyond, Giving Families has you covered. Their mission is “to help parents make memories while making a difference. Arriving by ‘snail mail,’ their ‘Good Mail Challenges’ are designed to help children (ages 3+) change the future of their world through acts of kindness, compassion and generosity. They have taken the guesswork out of giving back for busy families. All of the activities are explained in three easy steps that can be completed anytime, anywhere using materials found in almost every home.” A subscription to the Good Mail Challenges is only \$27 but the reward of nurturing a giver lasts a lifetime.

HIP GIFTS FOR EVERYONE

GLOBALGOODSPARTNERS.ORG

These good folks are dedicated to alleviating poverty and promoting social justice. They source their goods from women-led market initiatives in local communities, in 20 countries. Through product sales and technical assistance grants, resources are channeled back to the community. On my wishlist this year are the Fingerless Alpaca Gloves - “For those cold winter days when we still need to use our fingertips! Cable-knit by women in Bolivia, these lookers come in a variety of colors and styles, from elegant to modest to funky.” \$42

If you are looking for something meaningful and refreshingly “low tech” for the guys on your list, the recycled tire wallet may be just the thing. GGP partner, Friends International, aims to reduce the number of children living or working on the streets

by providing stable jobs and incomes to their parents. “Extreme poverty takes children out of school and forces them into unprotected street labor, where they are at risk for HIV/AIDS, violence, and trafficking and prostitution. Parents who earn a fair living wage can provide for their children and keep them in school. In Cambodia, Friends International directly helps 1,800 children and families in through artisan employment, and supports 20,000 at-risk children through outreach programs.”
Men’s Recycled Tire Wallet \$25

“It’s hip to be eco-friendly! The “Tassel Seed Bead Bracelet is made in El Salvador from locally-sourced San Pedro Tears seeds. Strung with a neon cotton tassel, this fun bracelet brings together natural materials and trendy accents seamlessly.” A unique statement piece especially appropriate for the boho fashion revival. “The purchase of this product provides women artisans in rural, impoverished communities in El Salvador, wages three times the daily average. Also, by using locally sourced materials, such as seeds and plant fiber, Lula Mena is innovating through design, while preserving a significant link to the artisans’ culture.”
Tassel Seed Bead Bracelet \$12.50

OXFAMAMERICAUNWRAPPED.COM • OXFAMAMERICAUNWRAPPED.COM

“Offers more than 60 charitable donations, including a pair of sheep (\$80) that allow women to generate their own income by making textiles, a small-business fund to help get entrepreneurs started (\$100), and a water purifier (\$35), one of the simplest and most dramatic ways to quench thirst and save lives. Products are organized by price, with 37 options under \$50, and recipients receive a card, explaining what the donation will provide.” For the person that can “stomach” a less traditional gift (or any 10 year old boy) ...

Manure \$12

Bear with me here...”This green gift transforms waste into power—agricultural power. Organic manure increases crop yields and is cheaper, greener, and safer than chemical fertilizers.” For the ultimate “gag” gift pair this with the Emergency Toilet.

Emergency Toilet \$50

“Give a potty as a present, and you will help prevent the spread of deadly diseases in crisis situations. This simple but important gift can save lives by creating more sanitary environments for people living in camps after disaster strikes.”

MERCY CORPS • WWW.MERCYCORPS.ORG

Soccer Ball \$40

“Syria’s civil war has been raging for more than 4 years, and a staggering 11.7 million people are on the run from the violence. Over 7 million people are displaced inside the country and more than 4 million refugees have fled for the relative safety of neighboring countries. Though all need the basics like food and shelter, the children still need play. Mercy Corps uses soccer to help youth regain a sense of normalcy and become leaders in their communities when recovering from disasters like the earthquake in Haiti and the conflict in Syria.” Consider making this gift in your loved one’s name and doubling your impact by giving them their own soccer ball from Global Goods Partners above! A no brainer for the soccer fan in the house.

Tea Booth \$25

The perfect gift for the tea lover is one that is “steeped in opportunity”. “Clink-clink. That’s not just the noise of a spoon stirring sugar, it’s the sound of money in the bank. In addition to being an important social asset to a community, a tea booth is a way for entrepreneurs to provide for their families. Mercy Corps carefully nurtures entrepreneurs through business training and mentoring. They extend loans to help them open shop and regularly stop by to see how they’re doing — staying, of course, for a cup of tea.”

HIGHLAND TITLE • WWW.HIGHLANDTITLES.COM

The Scottish land conservation organization, Highland Titles, is selling ‘souvenir plots’ on its estate in Glencoe Wood – granting the legal use of the Scottish title of Laird, Lord or Lady. “But here’s the thing; this isn’t just a goofy gimmick. Centuries of industry and farming have decimated most of Scotland’s forests – in fact, only 1 percent of the native woodland is all that remains. Highland Titles had the royal brainstorm to sell small plots of land to help fund the rescuing of woodlands, tree planting, maintenance and acquisition of land at risk of development – guaranteeing that it cannot be purchased or developed. Plot sizes range from one square foot to 1,000 square feet. Prices start at \$49.99.” The new Lord or Lady will receive their official title of Lord or Lady along with a map of Glencoe Wood and directions to their plot. A Master Title Deed to the land will be included, allowing them to add their official title to bank accounts, drivers licenses or student IDs.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC GENOME PROJECT, \$149

“The Genographic Project is an exciting exploration of your personal genetic background. But it also has a broader mission. If you choose to anonymously contribute your genetic results to the project database, you’ll participate on a global scale—and help further define the vast scope of the human genetic journey.”

RESTORE SIGHT TO A BLIND PERSON, \$50 • SEVA.ORG

“Pay for a 15-minute cataract surgery, and you’ll help one of the world’s 40 million blind people.” Seva is one of the premiere eye-care programs in the developing world. Cool fact: One of their early cash donations came from a young computer geek working on a new design in his garage. Along with his first significant donation, Steve Jobs also donated one of the first Apple computers to Seva and subsequently served on their advisory board.

WWW.TISBEST.COM

“Tis Best is committed to fostering the growth of non-material gift giving. The TisBest Charity Gift Card is a donation gift that works like a conventional gift card, but instead of buying stuff, the recipient “spends” the TisBest Charity Gift Card by directing the funds to their choice out of our 300+ charity partners. The giver (that’s you) knows that a charitable donation can make the world just a little bit better. And the recipient gets to choose which charity gets the money.”

BIDDING FOR GOOD

You can’t escape parenthood without at least one fundraising auction for your school, church, or synagogue. Many have taken their auctions on-line, and Bidding for Good is a portal to them all. Type in the item you are looking for, and Bidding for Good scans auctions around the country to find it. Often you can purchase big-ticket items, like iPads and game systems, for less than the retail cost, while also supporting a good cause. Added bonus? You can put the money you saved into a “Giving Jar” and use the new year to decide how to do the most good with it!

GOOSE-BUMPS GIFTS

Cliché as it is, the best things in life are free. The “perfect gift” for the loved ones on your list will pass the “goose-bumps test.” My friend Jenny says goose bumps are “your soul talking to you.” Ask yourself, “What would give my (kids, brother, grandmother, etc.) goose-bumps?”

A few months before Amy’s father died, she taped him reading some of her favorite childhood books like Goodnight Moon and Runaway Bunny. That CD made a perfect (and free) gift for her littlest niece and nephew. The goose bumps (also free) were for the rest of the family.

BUST BUSY

Studies show what we know to be true: “Doing something nice for someone else is one of the best stress busters around.” - Dr. Christine Carter

Making room for traditions, giving/service, and thoughtful gifting requires saying no to hustle and hassle. This is a tall task for most of us, but the one of greatest import. There is no prize for the busiest mom or dad, but we bustle like there is. Somehow, busy has come to mean “important, powerful, competent,” but as Dr. Christine Carter of the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley points out, “Busy does not mean happy.” According to Dr. Carter, research shows that busy for busy’s sake, actually makes us anxious. Sometimes we are anxious for good reason, but often we are anxious as a result of trying to take on too much, or hyper-focusing on “getting things done.” Dr. Carter advises that the best way to avoid the busy trap is to make rules for yourself, ahead of time. You might limit yourself to hosting one gathering at your home during the holidays, for example, or put a cap on the number of hours spent shopping. Bill McKibben’s rule was a spending limit of a hundred dollars, but the payoff was priceless. What are your busy-busting rules going to be?

The real treats of the season come spontaneously to those with the presence of mind to see them. One Christmas, our parents took us kids (begrudgingly) downtown to hear the Los Angeles Master Chorale perform Handel’s Messiah. When the performance ended, we were as keen to bolt as the rest of the kids that had been dragged there. But as the crowd streamed down two grand staircases towards the exit, one brave soul began singing Silent Night. In a stunning show of spontaneity, the crowd

“Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away.”

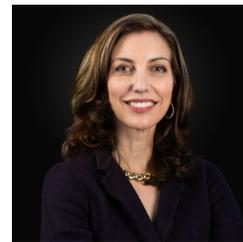
- Maya Angelou

joined in, and for a few minutes it seemed like the earth stopped its spinning, just to listen in. I imagine the first voice belonged to someone who saw the opportunity for joy, wonder, and awe, and seized it, while the rest of us were plotting the fastest route to the car.

“There is a greatness waiting for you. We are busy, we are distracted, we are cynical, but this greatness waits. Through a speech by Dr. King or the story of the Grinch or even a bumper sticker, this greatness finds you in a moment, unlikely or untimely, and suddenly you find yourself connected to humanity in a way that shocks you. And this greatness will hold you up so high and strong that any previous version of yourself seems flimsy.”

- Timberland

Family Circle Advisors brings together the premier practitioners in family philanthropy and youth giving to ensure that families experience the profound power of giving -- together. We facilitate family retreats, create family giving strategies and support families in raising the next generation of passionate givers -- the Generous Generation.™



Lisa Parker brings 28 years of experience in philanthropy and nonprofit management to serve philanthropic families raising the next generation of savvy givers. For 18 years she has been President and Executive Director of the Lawrence Welk Family Foundation, leading the Foundation’s initiative to seed the youth giving movement and creating youth philanthropy programs for the family’s fourth generation. She launched San Francisco based Family Circle Advisors to help other families create meaningful giving experiences that engage and inspire each generation.