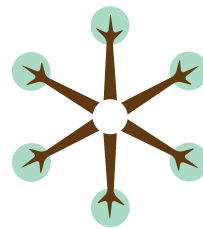


THE
HIP FAMILY'S
GUIDE TO
**HAPPIER
HOLIDAYS**



BY
**LISA
PARKER**

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: pinecones 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.

STORIES

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, co-workers, and family members at www.storycorps.org, for inspiration. Be sure to print out their "great questions list" to get you started.

GIVING & SERVICE

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

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 “helpers’ 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.

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.”

The Box Project makes the matches in October, so there is plenty of time to plan the “magic” and send boxes well ahead of the holidays. Holiday Sponsor applications are accepted from August 1st through September 30th, each year. Put it in your calendar for 2012!

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

THE GIFT OF BEES \$30 • HEIFER.ORG

The set includes bees, the hive, and training in beekeeping -- all given to families from the Dominican Republic to India. Beehives can double fruit and vegetable yields, in addition to providing honey and beeswax.

ADOPT A CHIMPANZEE, \$20 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.

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.

HIP GIFTS FOR EVERYONE

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC GENOME PROJECT, \$99.95

“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.”

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 24 countries. On my wish list: the Mod Felted Coin Purse that can double as a small camera or phone case (the polka dots, please). Hip, useful, and handmade by local producers in Nepal who receive much-needed income from their craft. \$12.00

Add the Kint Fingerless 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.” \$35.00

If you’re shopping for boys, grab the Recycled Tire Cell Phone Case- “Handcrafted by Cambodian women, this flexible case protects your cell phones (including Blackberry and iPhone), iPods, and more. Rugged look, soft to the touch, and provides income for marginalized Cambodian women,” all for \$16.00!

“Arrive at school or work with the Padded Laptop Bag, cleverly made from recycled animal feed bags. Originally used to carry up to 100 pounds of feed, the bag is super sturdy and fully padded to keep your computer protected and safe. With its organized interior compartments, you won’t have to search for your phone, a pen, or a charger again.” \$48.00

GOOD CARDS • CHARITYNAVIGATOR.ORG

“Good Cards are the gift certificates of the philanthropy world. You set the price; recipients pick the charity. Perfect for those relatives, co-workers, and clients you’re stumped on.”

WWW.TISBEST.COM

“Tis Best is committed to fostering the growth of non-material gift giving. 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.”

OXFAMAMERICANUNWRAPPED.COM

“Offers more than 60 charitable donations, including a pair of sheep (\$90) that allow women to generate their own income by making textiles, a small-business fund to help get entrepreneurs started (\$100), and a veterinarian’s field kit (\$35). Products are organized by price, with 37 options under \$50, and recipients receive a card, explaining what the donation will provide.”

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

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?

"LIFE IS NOT MEASURED BY THE NUMBER OF BREATHS WE TAKE, BUT BY THE MOMENTS THAT TAKE OUR BREATH AWAY." - MAYA ANGELOU

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 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.

The "**Hip Family's Guide to Happier Holidays**" launches a conversation about bringing more reverence, care, and connection to our holidays. What are your treasured holiday memories? What is the greatest gift you have received? The greatest gift you have given? Favorite holiday traditions? Please share your thoughts [here](#). Our expanded 2012 book will include the highlights!

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.™ For families just getting started we highly recommend our signature, "Top-Secret Giving Event." Its effectiveness lies in its element of surprise!



Lisa Parker brings 25 years of experience in philanthropy and nonprofit management to serve philanthropic families raising the next generation of savvy givers. For fourteen 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.