

HUMOR

Holidazed

The search for the perfect gift

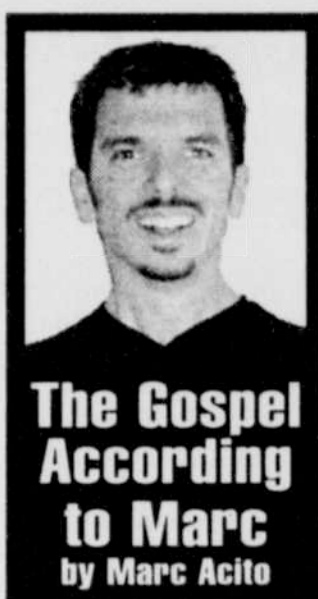
Every year my partner, Floyd, and I rack our brains to come up with gift ideas for the relatives we love (but avoid) and always end up sending food packages at the last minute as if our families were starving refugees in Afghanistan.

We're partial to fudge made by the Brigittine Monks of Amity, partly because we like supporting local vendors but also because we like saying we've bought our gifts from fudge-packing monks.

As our relatives age, however, food has proven a less reliable gift. For instance, Floyd's mother has inexplicably lost her sense of smell, and his stepfather keeps his digestive system in a plastic bag attached to his side, so I don't really feel comfortable making culinary choices for them anymore.

Luckily, last year Floyd bought himself a pair of \$40 earrings at Neiman Marcus, and as a result we now receive a 158-page full-color catalog that's not only the size of a coffee table book, it's the size of a coffee table. The catalog alone must cost more than the earrings—which, incidentally, we returned.

They certainly don't call the place Needless Markup for nothin'. Neiman sells jewelry that costs more than my house and my neighbor's house combined. But who really needs a home when you can have a dazzling 60-karat diamond collar? Then there's the 18-karat diamond-encrusted watch for \$50,000. That's right, FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS, and it only has the numbers 12 and 6 on it. That's \$25,000 per number. I'm thinking that for 50 grand they could've thrown in the other 10 numbers for free.



The Gospel According to Marc
by Marc Acito

Don't get me wrong; I love jewelry. But I love a good bargain more. On a recent visit to Tijuana I bought a gorgeous silver bracelet for 6 bucks.

So I called a friend in the diamond business and asked him how much it would cost to re-create the diamond collar that costs more than my subdevelopment.

He told me he could probably do it for \$400,000. "Only \$400,000?" I exclaimed, "I'll take two!"

With the money I've saved I can now afford to buy a London taxi cab for \$58,900 (because you know how hard it is to get a cab when you need one) as well as a 42-inch plasma TV, just \$8,930. (I'm guessing it's so expensive because it takes a lot of derelict street people donating blood to make a 42-inch plasma TV.)

Neiman makes gift buying even easier by organizing the pages by family member.

For your mother, for instance, it suggests a burberry plaid bag, an ornament for the tree and a pair of lovely carved crucifixes.

Meanwhile, for your mother-in-law, they've actually suggested a restored 1940s slot machine from the Golden Nugget, a corkscrew/bottle opener and a set of martini glasses. Really, what better way is there to engender family harmony

than to tell your mother-in-law she's an alcoholic with a gambling problem? (Next year we're giving her an intervention!)

As the uncle to 14 children, naturally I was interested to see what Neiman had in mind for me, but



apparently I'm miscast in my role because I have no interest in owning 25 hand-rolled Dominican cigars or a baseball signed by Joe DiMaggio.

No, for shopping advice you've got to stick with the gay boys, and so I turn to my friend BoBo, the guru of Retail Therapy. Each year, every member of BoBo's family goes out and buys gifts for themselves and then calls the other family members to thank them for what they've bought. You can spend as much or as little on yourself as you like, and everybody gets exactly what they want. It's a perfect system.

This year I accompanied BoBo to a fancy-

pants boutique for some fancy pants—y'know, the kind of place where eager retail queens pour you glasses of scotch while they pick out \$300 sweaters for you. BoBo got himself \$2,000 in clothes, and I got pleasantly buzzed.

The only people for whom BoBo actually buys gifts are people he'll never know. Every year he "adopts" a family from a battered women's shelter. Most of these women escaped from their abusive husbands with only the clothes on their backs and their children in their arms. It's only because of the generosity of people like BoBo that these families have toys at Christmas, as well as sheets, towels and everything else they need to start a new life.

So while the rest of us are running around trying to figure out what to buy for people who don't really need anything anyway, BoBo's taking care of the people who need the most.

Now there's a man who really knows how to shop.

And that, my friends, is *The Gospel According to Marc*.

MARC ACITO's first novel, *How I Paid for College*, will be published in September 2004. Write him at marc@marcacito.com.

Blackout

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