

What should I give for Christmas: Heirlooms or fruitcakes?

It's slightly embarrassed to admit that when it comes to Christmas gift-giving, I've become a cliché male, usually waiting until nearly the final hour to make a decision on presents for my wife and daughter.

My task is complicated by the fact that they each already have enough clothes and jewelry to open their own boutique. Cash would seem to be ideal — but for some reason, they don't consider a check to be a sufficient symbol of deep, empathetic love. Go figure...

There was a time when I agonized over what to give parents, siblings and girlfriends. In junior high I spent hours crafting a sign for my dad's law practice — and a pretty professional job it was, too. It still hangs in my newspaper office in Long Beach. A year or two later in the full throes

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of teenage angst, a kindly store clerk convinced me that just a sincere note of love and thanks would be the best possible gift my folks could hope for. And he was right.

Amazing myself, with three weeks still to go before Christmas, this year I do have a perfectly ideal gift in mind for my wife. No, I haven't actually bought it yet. Just as in pre-TSA days when I used to rejoice

in being the last man to dash aboard the airplane before the door closed, I still derive some minor thrill from waiting until close to the last minute to make my purchase.

And for my daughter? I'm still thinking about a check.

My brothers in recent years have been the recipients of fruitcakes made with our mom's favorite recipe. I don't know if they actually like them, but they love me enough to claim they do.

Nearing the Ecclesiastical "time to cast away," Christmas is also starting to present opportunities to part with family heirlooms. Few have any substantial monetary value but all stand as talismans of our progress from Northwest Europe to this distant shore. In some ways, they count less as gifts than as obliga-

WHAT YOUNG DAUGHTER OR NIECE WOULDN'T WANT HER GRANDFATHER'S ANCIENT BISON SKULL OR MY DUSTY 1870 GLASGOW TELESCOPE?

tions — markers of memory that I hope the next generation will safeguard as I have, along with the stories that transform them into more than worn objects. Pewter teapots, rusty spurs, gold-mining scales, mustache cups, hip flasks, Army uniforms, pocket watches and dozens of other things all need to land on new stewards. What young daughter or niece wouldn't want her grandfather's ancient bison skull or my dusty 1870 Glasgow telescope?

And what's the perfect gift for an old newspaper editor with esoteric collecting interests? Odds are slim that my wife will find me a long-coveted ticket for the Ilwaco Railway & Navigation Co. or a local 19th century oyster can label I don't already have. A new pair of indoor/outdoor leather moccasins is always welcome. Or maybe a brother will send me back one of last year's fruitcakes.

I've heard it's the thought that counts.



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