



# The Best Gift You Can Give

**EXPERIENCES ARE EVERYTHING** BY ELISHA YOUNG

**G**rowing up, the holidays were hard for my family. After the holiday break, I would always return to my Chicago private school — that I attended on a partial scholarship — with feelings of jealousy and sadness as I looked over and discussed all of the high dollar and numerous gifts my classmates received as gifts.

My family struggled financially, and the gifts that my brother, sister and I received were limited at best.

As time went on, I eventually started my own family and married a great guy who grew up in a similar household. We welcomed our first (and only) child, Atlas, in the spring of 2012. For his first few holidays, we tried to overcome those childhood feelings by going absolutely overboard in the gift department.

In addition to the multiple gifts we would purchase, several family members added to the overabundance. As the year would progress, I realized that the majority of the presents opened became quickly discarded to live out their days as lonely toys in a box in the corner. I knew I wanted to provide our little one with magical, memorable holidays — but this was clearly not the way.

After many discussions with my husband, and brainstorming until my head hurt, I finally landed on the idea of giving experiences as gifts. I loved the idea of how gifting family time would be incredibly special to Atlas,

and how it was something we could enjoy the whole year, rather than just two weeks in December.

At first, we started out purchasing things like a family zoo membership, movie gift cards and little cards that detailed our family vacation. I felt great about providing these immersive experiences and loved how it drew us together for family time, but I could not shake off that feeling that I was potentially withholding something from my little one. I kept asking myself: One day will he feel the same way I did as a child on Christmas morning?

Last year, a few weeks before Christmas, I had the epiphany I needed. I decided to create a scrapbook for Atlas, so he would have something tangible to understand exactly what we were gifting him.

I'll admit that I am a bit "extra" when it comes to crafting, so I poured my heart and soul into making a scrapbook that was ready to go, just waiting for photos to be added. Some of the experiences I planned to a "T," and others I left more vague, so he could dictate most of the planning.

Atlas opened his gift with sheer excitement, a huge smile lighting up his face when he saw the family photo on the cover. He excitedly turned the pages, and unfolded 12 unique activities he could do with Mom and Dad over the next year — snow tubing at Hoodoo, a concert of his choice, a trip to the hot springs, a trip to Lassen National Park — and so much more. Each page was decorated, and just waiting to have photos inserted from our adventures as they happened.

As Atlas turned the pages, and his excitement level grew, I knew I had made the right choice. I knew that he would treasure these scrapbooks for years to come, and that the format made it easy for a little guy to truly understand the magnitude of the gift he was receiving.

My heart swelled with joy thinking of how fun it would be planning the rest of these details out, the memories we would create, and the lack of abandoned toys that would befall my house this year.

Thanks to a very large extended family, Atlas still ends up with toys and other miscellaneous objects to clutter the house after the holidays. His dad and I also still tend to buy him one or two things as well. Like they say, old habits die hard. This year I am getting him something to go with the scrapbook — a Polaroid camera so he can take his own photos for the 2019 scrapbook. That being said, I would also be absolutely OK if all he received under the tree was experiences, adventures and activities of any nature.

When you gift an experience, it is so much more than just an object — it is a gift of your love and your time. That is the most precious gift you can give anyone in your life. With so many options, and so many clever ways you can present these experiences — your options are limitless, and you can surely find the perfect present for anyone in your life. It took me a long time to realize this, but the most treasured gift you can give anyone in your life is a memory they carry with them until the end of their days. ■