

Customs: It is the love and the time that will be remembered

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The result was dad ended up with a good idea of what to get each of us three children, and we spent an evening before Christmas thinking about what the best gifts would be for other members of our family.

We didn't make Christmas lists, or sit on Santa's lap. We spent a night with our dad asking us "What would Mindy like? What would Chuck like?" We were thinking of others. This was implanted in our minds at a young age — that giving was a centerpiece of the holiday season.

Local traditions

Traditions evolve over time. Otherwise, there would be no need to write about them.

I started the girls out young. My daughter Lindsay was 2, I think, my younger daughter Grace was in the backpack as we headed out the door telling her older sister that we would be shopping for her.

Instead of a New Jersey mall, we shopped in downtown Astoria which even in the rainy dark of December had bright lights and shining decorated shop windows full of cheer.

The storefronts have changed a lot over the last 20 years, but Finn Ware, Gimre's and Erickson's Floral remain must shop destinations each season. We idle in Lucy's books and always stop at Holly McHone to pet her standard poodle and look at jewelry for my wife Amy.

Purple Cow Toys remains the centerpiece of the shopping date — the can't miss destination even though my daughters are in high school and college now. There remain nieces and nephews to think about and games for the family. Owners Katie Murray and Bill Colwill always recognized us as we came in and are quick to catch a wink or a nod to put something behind the counter for clandestine wrapping or to pickup later.

Local shop owners are invaluable helpers when you are trying to solve the mystery of that hard-to-buy-for person on your list.

Making the time

Other things change. Dinner in those early years was often at The Rio — we still miss our home away from home. These days we are more likely to be at any of the wonderful restaurants downtown. Last year it was Tora Sushi (Lindsay) and La Cabaña

de Raya (Grace). It is always the girls who get to pick. As the girls have gotten older, their tastes have changed and there is always a chance to try something new.

It is funny how this tradition started out because dad was working and busy and needed a mechanism to spend more time with family. As they grow older, it feels like the kids are busier than I am, that their schedules are harder than mine to find time to be together one-on-one.

So far, at least, we always make time.

Shopping evolves

As it becomes easier to shop online, to click on wish lists and have presents wrapped and delivered to the door, the act of holiday shopping too has changed. Malls are becoming empty shells or getting reinvented into different types of social spaces. The small town areas that suffered with the proliferation of the malls in the 1980s and '90s are finding new life as a new generation discovers the value in the social aspect of getting off the couch and going shopping together.

As a recent Marketplace report detailed, Americans in their teens and 20s — so called Generation Z — were the most likely to go shopping on Black Friday this year.

"This is the first generation of true digital natives, so it really stands out to us how much they embrace the store," Katherine Cullen, director of Industry and Consumer Insights with the National Retail Federation told Marketplace.

Set a date

I know that holiday shopping is a stress point for many. It combines a tension of limited financial resources with the crunch of a busy calendar as well as the fear of rejection of those you love. It has the potential to be a nightmare if you let it.

Yet physical gifts are for the most part transitory — they are destined in time to end up in garage sales and thrift shops or dusty attics as years go by.

It is the love and the time that will be remembered.

All the more reason to set a date with the ones you love for lunch or dinner and a little holiday shopping downtown.

Ed Hunt is a writer and registered nurse as well as the author of "The Huckleberry Hajj," a collection of essays available on Amazon.com. He lives in Grays River, Washington.



Gimre's is a must visit on the Hunt's Christmas shopping tour.

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A dinner date with Lindsay at Tora Sushi a few years ago.



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