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WEEKEND BREAK



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Christmas customs

The Hunt girls with presents they picked out for each other at Purple Cow Toys in 2010.

Thinking and buying for others during the holidays

By ED HUNT

I used to do all my shopping on Christmas Eve.

You can do that when you are young and single and the adrenaline of last minute shopping leaves no room for indecision. I loved the catharsis of frantic buying and wrapping after a month of jingle bells infused procrastination. I loved the desperation of other last minute shoppers and the half empty shelves. Limited options fuel creativity.

It is not that I didn't love Christmas shopping. I do.

In fact, one of my favorite things back in those days was shopping for presents for children I'd never meet.

My sister worked for children's services and each year her office had a list of children who were probably facing a hard Christmas season. Her office would pool donations and we'd go out shopping for girls and boys who had wishes for presents both practical — new underwear and socks — to the toys they saw on TV.

Still, I liked waiting until Christmas Eve for my own shopping. I liked being out in the stores on my own, searching for inspiration and so pressed by deadline that anything that spoke to me had to go into my cart.

I had to let the practice die years ago when family spread out across the

country required me to factor in shipping times and travel in the snowy Columbia Gorge.

Thinking of others

When my daughters were born, I returned to a tradition that my dad had started. Each year he would take each of us children out on a Christmas shopping date.

This was years ago in the 1970s — long before Pinterest wish lists on the internet. With my dad traveling a lot for work, the shopping date was a way for each of us to get a little one-on-one time with dad.

It worked like this: he'd set aside a night for each of us three kids. We would get to pick the restaurant — usually McDonalds, since that was considered a treat back then — and then we'd head to the mall. I don't remember which New Jersey mall, but I know my dad liked the one with a giant Alexander Calder mobile hanging in the open area.

These Christmas dates not only gave dad and us kids a little time together, but it was also an invention of strategic shopping genius. The rule was that we were shopping for other people and couldn't buy anything for ourselves. So each kid would pick out a present for the sisters and brothers and for mom.

Meanwhile, dad would be watching to see what made our eyes light up while shopping and that would help him know what to put under the tree.

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Grace finds a treasure at Cargo while Christmas shopping in Astoria.

