

By Wayne Halm

The Situation

Every year my family gets together at my Mom's house on Christmas Eve. Like many families we get pulled in different directions on Christmas day so we exchange our presents and well wishes the night before. We are a large family and this is a noisy evening.

Sometime ago we decided that adults would "draw names" to ease the shopping burden. That works well for us, but it still leaves me 20+ (and growing) Christmas presents to buy for the little ones. The chances of me having the time and the ability to select over 20 appropriate presents for young folks are slim at best. Fortunately I've found a solution.

The Basic Idea

My solution to the present problem is to give them all exactly the same thing - year after year. Instead of shopping I put my effort into creative wrapping and making a story to go with it. I know it seems like a "cop out" but it really isn't. Over the years the little ones have come to know what they are going to get and look forward to the story and the presentation. It's the only quiet time of the evening - kids have actually told adults to be quiet.

They sometimes argue about the sequence, but all of the little ones remember each of the packaging and stories from years past. What more could you hope for?

Execution

The little ones that directly concern me range in age from 4 to 24. It would be a problem getting the all the same thing if not for that modern universal need of young folks - money. I give all of them \$10, usually in the form of a roll of quarters. They all seem happy with it and it gets the contents out of the way of the wrapping and the story.

On Christmas Eve when it's my turn to give out presents, I take my bag of presents to the center of the room. I tell the story slowly and loudly, and I tell it directly to the little ones. Then open the bag and hand out the gifts.

Some of the gifts and stories I have given are described on the following pages. Start from there and make up your own. As you can see it doesn't take much to start a family tradition.

(Yes, the little ones do repeat the opening paragraph of each story along with me - it's ritual and ritual makes tradition.)

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The Hawaiian Happiness Lei

The Wrapping -- I wrapped rolls of quarters in green wrapping paper, then taped them onto a string. About two inches of space was left open between rolls. Then I tore apart some plastic Christmas Wreaths to get the leaves, these I taped to the rolls of quarters to disguise them. When finished the thing resembled a vine covered with leaves, sort of like a Meile Lei worn by men in Hawaii.

The Story -- This year I didn't know what to get for presents. I looked through all of the stores, but nothing seemed right. I was beginning to worry that I wouldn't have anything good for you.

Then last week I was talking to my old girlfriend Princess Leilani in Hawaii. She understood my problem and said that she knew the perfect present. She shipped me one. (At this point I removed the Lei from the bag and draped it around my neck.)

This is a Hawaiian Happiness Lei. It is made from secret plants and woven with love. Hawaiian Happiness Leis are special. Legend has it that everyone who gets a piece of one will be happy. Some of you will get a piece of this one tonight.

(At that point I pulled a pair of scissors out of my pocket and called the first name.)

Remembered Results -- When the first neice cut off her piece of the Lei and realized what she was holding she commented, "It really works, I'm happy".

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The Magic Wand

The Wrapping -- I rolled sheets of 8 ½ by 11 paper into tubes 11 inches long and taped down the exposed seams. The tubes were sized so that a roll of quarters exactly fit inside and would slide from end to end. Then I cut circular plugs exactly the size of a quarter from a piece of construction styrofoam. With a roll of quarters in each tube I taped the plugs into the open ends. When finished they looked a little like pieces of broomstick, but I called them Magic Wands.

The Story -- This year I didn't know what to get for presents. I looked through all of the stores, but nothing seemed right. I was beginning to worry that I wouldn't have anything good for you.

Then last week I was talking to one of my old teachers, Professor Dumbledore at Hogwarts. He told me that every youngster needs a Magic Wand. That struck me as the perfect gift. None of you have one yet do you? I didn't think so.

I called the Wand Shop but there was a problem. The Ministry of Magic forbids the sale of Magic Wands to unlicensed Wizards. None of you have your licenses yet do you? I didn't think so.

I promised that you would be careful with them and use them only for good magic, but the answer was still no. However I was able to get some "Demonstrator Wands". These wands possess only one bit of magic, they make their owners happy. Some of you will get one tonight.

(At that point I began calling name and handing out wands.)

Remembered Results -- As my nephew was walking back to this seat with his wand he said "Oh yeah, I can feel the magic in this thing".

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The North Pole Snowflake

The Wrapping - I took a 4X8 foot sheet of styrofoam construction insulation and carved it into snowflakes. Each snowflake was about 12 inches across and half an inch thick. When each snowflake was finished I put a slit in one side and stuffed a \$10 bill into the slit. The carving took a bit of practice and a razor sharp knife, but it was a pleasant way to spend an afternoon. Actually my snowflakes resembled six pointed stars more than snowflakes, but I called them North Pole Snowflakes and that was enough.

The Story - This year I didn't know what to get for presents. I looked through all of the stores, but nothing seemed right. I was beginning to worry that I wouldn't have anything good for you.

Then last week I was talking to my old golfing buddy Santa Claus. I asked him to check the letters each of you sent him and tell me what was next on your lists after the stuff he had gotten you. But he didn't have letters from any of you. I was getting into a panic. Then he told me "Give them North Pole Snowflakes."

I protested that snowflakes would be kind of light as a present.

He replied, "Not at all, you see each North Pole Snowflake contains a bit of happiness for the receiver."

I still wasn't convinced and told him that it wasn't all that cold in the South of Louisiana and snowflakes would melt.

He assured me, "The North Pole Snowflakes going to good boys and girls will not melt. Don't worry, the snowflakes know who has been good - and who has been bad."

So Santa Claus sent me some, they arrived yesterday. And tonight some of you are going to get one.

(At that point I began calling name and handing out snowflakes.)

Remembered Results -- At least one North pole Snowflake is still pinned to a niece's wall - two years later.

A Joke Involved -- In the present bag along with the snowflakes I placed a zip lock freezer bag half full of water. About three quarters of the way through the name calling I called the name of one of the adults - this break in format got everyone's attention. As he approached I reached into the bag, said "I'm sorry" and pulled out the bag of water. The little one's rolled with laughter, they knew his snowflake had melted.

The Hawaiian Christmas Viper (Christmas 2002)

The Wrapping - I took a three foot length of tape and laid it, sticky side up, on a work table. On the tape I placed quarters (40 of them) side by side - then put another piece of tape, sticky side down, on top of them. This formed sort of a ribbon of quarters. From a piece of construction Styrofoam I carved a simple snake head about an inch wide and maybe three inches long - the back of the head tapered down to about the thickness of a quarter. The snake head looked like a crude cartoon but when I drew some eyes and a smiling mouth on it looked cute. I taped the snake head to the end of the ribbon of quarters. Then wrapped Christmas paper around the ribbon and the very back of the snake head - (most of the snake head stuck out of the wrapping). The result resembled a belt with a snake head buckle - but I called it a Hawaiian Christmas Viper, and the little one's knew it wasn't a belt.

The Story - This year I didn't know what to get for presents. I looked through all of the stores, but nothing seemed right. I was beginning to worry that I wouldn't have anything good for you.

Then last week I was talking to my old girlfriend Princess Leilani in Hawaii. She suggested that I give Hawaiian Christmas Vipers.

I said, "Hawaiian Christmas Vipers? Lei, there aren't any snakes in Hawaii".

She said, "Of course there are - we just keep them secret".

I said, "Secret snakes - great. But I can't go around handing out poisonous reptiles".

She said, "Hawaiian Christmas Vipers aren't full of poison, they're full of happiness. They are perfect, I'll send you some little ones - you tell them who they belong to - and they will grow, big or little depending on how good the owner has been.

So she sent me a bunch of them. They were cute little things, I picked up each one and told it who it belonged to - and they began to grow. At least some of them did. Tonight we will see just how big they got.

(At that point I began calling name and handing out vipers.)

A Joke Involved -- Of course all of the vipers were exactly the same length. Except for two. For an agreeable brother-in-law I made a very short one. (The little ones teased him about being bad.) And for my mother, their Grandmother, I made one about twenty feet long - as she just kept pulling this out of the box the little one's eyes just kept getting bigger and the laughter grew.

A Setup Idea - If anyone is considering using this gift idea next Christmas maybe the following would be helpful. Take a bag of marbles and tape a Christmas name tag to each. Then at some family event, announce that these are Hawaiian Christmas Viper eggs and that the eggs will hatch and grow depending on the behavior of the person on the name tag - then have each little one write his name on a tag. Use the same tags at Christmas. (Of course if you do this, you are committed.)

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