

Stocking stuffers

Small (but innovative) gifts for less than \$10

By Steve Hurtado
special writer

IDON'T know about you, but when I was a child I thought my first Christmas stocking on one of the knolls of the TV set.

Now that I'm an adult, my perspective has changed. It's not easy filling a stocking. Growth could have worn out to mention finding a nice bunch of my belly, expensive items.

But it doesn't have to be so hard. Variety and specialty stores are full of innovative gifts that don't cost a fortune. With a little ingenuity, you'll discover — as I did — that it's as much fun to stuff as it is to receive.

Here's a hint: In your hunt for stocking stuffers, don't overlook airport, hardware and office supply stores and museum or art gallery gift shops.

NO MATTER WHAT the age of the child, you'll be able to stuff several stockings just by paying a visit to a big department store. Think of the possibilities: tiny plush animals, wind-up toys, miniature cars, sacks of marbles, yo-yos, finger puppets, action figures and more.

Want something different? Consider these:

Any small-size book, particularly a set of them — such as the Beatrix Potter series or cassette tapes of stories — complete with read-along books.

Name plates for bedroom doors or miniature name plates for bicycles or lockers.

An assortment of small holiday-themed tin toys filled with pieces of a crossword puzzle.

Crayons are always acceptable and a variety that the scent of crayons is one of the most widely recognized in America. For an update on this old favorite, give crayons in the new fluorescent colors or a box of soap crayons for bath-time fun.

IT'S TRUE The older the child, the better it is to please him or her with more expensive gifts. But it's not impossible. Try these:

Thanks to contemporary technology, a variety of watches can be had for a few dollars. Look for fun and different ones — for example, a musical piano watch. It resembles a mini piano and has a 12-button keyboard, an LCD display shows the time and date.

Disposable cameras take excellent pictures; new versions come with a flash or a wide-angle lens. They cost little more than a roll of film — in fact, they're basically a roll of quality color film in a sturdy package complete with a lens. When the roll is used up, you turn the film into the developer — camera and all.

If your teen is at an age where a phone receiver seems to be part of his

identity, give him a lucky cord to attach to the beloved device. (This is the spiral cord we're talking about; designs range from striped to spotted to neon.) Ask for these in shops that specialize in high-tech gadgets and/or phone accessories.

Small powered pocket calculators are items that once were expensive and can now be found in many drug stores for less than \$10. Even if your teen already has a pocket calculator, he or she might like a cute new one to keep at school.

Your son or nephew will feel grown up with a multipurpose camper's knife that includes a blade, fork, spoon and bottle cap opener.

YOUR DAUGHTER will go all giddy when you give her a fancy package of herbal bath salts or a small bottle of exotic bubble bath.

The best gift keeps the recipient busy after it is opened. Check a craft or hobby store for an easy-to-assemble project or an art store for an assortment of fabric paints (to go with a plain white T-shirt or two).

Here's your chance to do something special for your spouse or a friend. It doesn't have to be a stocking; you can fill a basket or bowl with great little gifts that also are conversation starters.

You might want to pick a theme: an adult kitchen gadgets, flavored coffees, assorted nuts, exotic jams and jellies, beautiful soaps, bath hardware items, scented candles, hair accessories and more.

Many gift shops stock unusual refrigerator magnets; pick an amusing assortment, such as those that resemble a real foot in miniature. (Look for magnets, slices of pizza.)

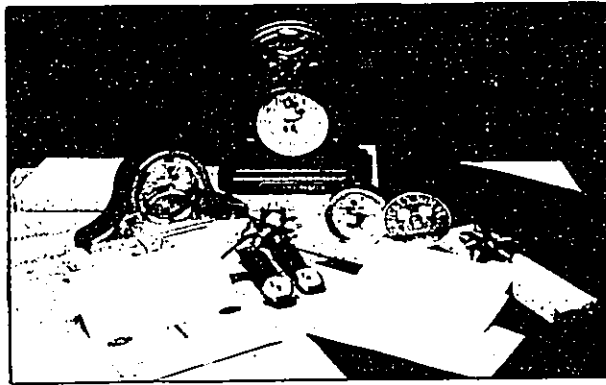
For your seamstress friend, visit a variety store for small necessities. In each, a quality pair of scissors and a small, clean-stitch sewing machine. These are like and resemble staples they're good for hemming clothing and drapery, mending zippers and doing on-the-spot repairs.

BRING BACK childhood memories. Fill the stocking with brands of candy, chewing gum and other treats that date from the '80s.

Everyone should have several pairs of absolutely crazy socks. The louder the color and pattern, the better.

How about an assortment of Christmas ornaments that range from antique reproductions to zany?

Collect items for travelers that double as pocketbook stuffers: a small lint brush, a twin-frame photo carrier, pill boxes, manicure and sewing kits, key chains, money clips, coin purses and a tiny flashlight (there's a new one that doesn't need batteries; you generate your own electricity by squeezing the grip lever).



BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

M-I-C-K-E-Y . . .

Because we love you, Mickey, here's a host of special watchful gift suggestions — everything from an alarm clock to a instant-setting date calendar — all by Seiko. All at Tapper's Jewelry, 12 Mile and Northwestern, Southfield.

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