

Disappointed gift-getter says 'tis better to give

I have concluded that the debate regarding whether it's better to give than receive depends entirely on who's giving what to whom.

Personally, I prefer to give . . . primarily because I've been the recipient of many gifts where it was the thought that counted.

I don't mean to be snide or snobby here. I have simply developed an aversion to gifts that are preceded with "Oh, it's something you'd never buy for yourself."

Usually, they are right—I'd never buy some of the things I've been given.

Of course, the same thing has probably passed through the minds of people who received gifts I gave. And if it was all added up I would guess that I've given as many rotten presents as I've gotten.

When you are a kid you really aren't aware that you don't like

something. The important facet of Christmas was that Santa Claus did, in fact, come, and left a present instead of coal.

That was always a relief to me on Christmas morning, to find out that I made it through the year without really miffing the old guy up north.

As I grew older, however, I realized that a lot of what Santa Claus brought wasn't exactly what I had in mind.

I could never remember asking for 12 new pairs of cotton Carter underwear or a snowsuit, though I was sure I had expressed a strong desire for the latest Tiny Tears doll.

For a while, I thought Santa didn't like the cookies, and then I figured it out.

With that revelation—who Santa Claus really was—came a more suspecting mind, along with less than award-winning "Oh I love it" performances.

The first time I remember really hating a present was the year my dear old sweet aunt gave me a purse.

There's nothing wrong with getting a purse, I've gotten many and I've given many (sometimes the ones I got), but this purse was not to be believed.

I think I was about 8 years old—if not, it was at least a period in my life when having the "in" thing was crucial.

This purse was not in—then, now or ever.

It was instead, a very strange shade of orange, shaped like a box and just as hard, and bedecked with the finest brown plastic handle.

Inside its orange plastic frame was black fabric with a little pocket. "That's for your comb," said my aunt. And there was naturally a mirror glued onto the top.

It was about the ugliest thing I'd ever seen in what was then my young life. The passing years haven't changed its status.

Out of respect for my aunt, my mother made me carry that purse, even when my friends were ever so chic with their marshmallow flip flops. Not only was I mortified, but I also had bruises on my leg since the purse was constantly banging against my body.

Since then, I have learned, I hope, how to be gracious, no matter what was under the pretty wrapping. I have expressed delight over articles that would make even the tackiest cringe, and I have proudly displayed said articles, when and if the giver visited.

With my family, I have taken the more direct approach.

My mother has been informed that I no longer wear pajamas with feet in them or undershirts (Though I think she bought them more out of habit than not knowing).

My sister has been told that I don't want any more leftovers from her beginning pottery class. It's embarrassing when friends ask if my 5-year-old nephew made that piece and I have to say, "No, it was done by my 30-year-old sister." She has also given me a

drawerful of sterling silver initiated brushes. I have told her not to give me anymore, unless she can find one that has my initials on it.

Over the years, my other sister has been pretty good. Only once have I had to mention that though I liked the dress she gave me and though I appreciated it was a bargain, I never have been a size six.

Before I cast any more stones, I should reveal some of the rotten presents I have bestowed upon friends and family.

I remember the year when one magazine invited me to "Make Great Gifts From Old Glasses." I scoured my mother's cupboards, gathering up all the glasses that were never used, or so I thought.

Then, according to directions, I pasted on ribbon after ribbon.

As I recall, they had to be just about the tackiest things I have ever made. At the time, however, I was delighted with my transformation of plain everyday drinking glasses into plain everyday drinking glasses with ribbons pasted on them.

I never did figure out what they were supposed to be, and my family drank out of paper cups for about a week—the length of time it took my mother to soak off the well-glued ribbons.

My friends have also been the recipients of less-than-welcome presents.

One year, I decided to give a girlfriend and her husband a joint present, one they could both use. I decided on an entertainment book, the kind filled with coupons allowing two people to get almost anything for the price of one.

It was a bomb—but then how was I to know they were getting a divorce?

Someone once said that the safest way to give a Christmas present is to make sure everything is returnable or don't give anything at all, except cash.

I don't agree with either. It's not the dollar value or the object itself that makes a present fun. It is, instead, the love that goes with it.

And you know, I did love that orange purse.

—CHRISTINE WALDEN



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