

'Experience' gifts are an alternative to 'stuff'



Sometimes the long-awaited holidays end with a letdown. We look around and see a heap of “stuff” we didn’t ask for, don’t know what to do with and/or don’t really want.

Meanwhile, we’ve overspent on gifts for other people that they also didn’t ask for, and don’t know what to do with or want.

Here’s an idea: Give the gift of ‘experience.’ Here are 12 suggestions from Donna Skeels Cygan, the author of “The

Joy of Financial Security.”

1. Savor the season together. Take a drive to look at holiday decorations, attend a holiday concert, visit a museum with a seasonal exhibit or walk down decorated city streets.

2. Bake up a holiday storm. Spend a morning baking cookies together. After baking, the cookies can be packaged and given as gifts.

3. Give it forward. Together with family or friends, choose a local charity or “adopt” a family that is less fortunate. Spend a half-day shopping for food and/or gifts, then wrap them and deliver them. Or volunteer at a soup kitchen, hospital, nursing home or homeless shelter.

4. Eat with a purpose. Organize a lunch or dinner with a theme such as a “2015 bucket list” dinner: Ask everyone to share their goals for the coming year and then discuss how to help each other achieve them. (And follow through!)

If you don’t want to cook for a group, suggest a potluck of favorite holiday foods, perhaps those from parents or grandparents.

5. Get creative. If you and a friend or family member are both creative, make plans to do an art, craft, or home improvement project together. This could be anything from a winter wreath to coffee mugs at a local pottery studio. And every time you use these items, you’ll be reminded of the fun time you spent creating them.

6. Make good on “We always said we’d ...” Instead of exchanging gifts, do something you and a friend have always said you’d do together — but have never managed to find time for. Note that this event or outing doesn’t have to happen during the holidays.

7. Go to class. Cooking, sewing, self-defense, painting, wine-tasting ... the sky’s the limit on classes you can take together.

8. Become a day tripper. Think museums, landmarks, shopping destinations, unique restaurants, wineries, etc.

9. Make them a member. If a “big” gift is within your budget but you don’t want to spend money on something that will end up gathering dust, buy the other person a membership to a zoo, museum or botanical center, or give them tickets to a theatre or orchestra performance, or sports event.

10. Take care of some chores. Relieving someone of an unwanted chore such as cleaning, painting or yard work is welcome, too. If it’s in your budget, you could “gift” a maid service or purchase a gift certificate to a restaurant.

Families with young children will appreciate the offer of baby-sitting.

11. Mark your calendars. Do you and a friend, despite your best intentions, never quite manage to get together so that you can catch up over a meal? If so, give the gift of time.

“Give your friend a 2015 calendar and tell him or her that you want to fill up one afternoon or evening each month with a shared meal, movie, drink, walk or cup of coffee,” Cygan suggests. “Remember, what gets planned gets done.”

12. Watch together. Invite friends over to watch (or stream) a movie, providing cider, hot chocolate, popcorn or whatever refreshments you’d like.