

THE JOY OF THE JINGLE

by Sally Burgess, Forefront Families LLC

At this time of year we see an ever-increasing amount of tinsel trees and traffic. The malls are offering bargains that are hard to pass up and TV and mail-out advertising tempts us for months prior to Christmas to lengthen our Christmas wish lists. It seems to be getting crazier each year.

I recently heard an interesting piece of news. Apparently, those caught up in Black Friday madness have started a trend of taking their purchases back even before they give them away. How could this be? Well, the theory is that people often get swept up in the moment during sales and the associated hype, but in the cool light of day, common sense or guilt prevail, (along with a hefty credit card bill) and they realize their eyes were way bigger than their budgets.

The current economic situation has also drastically curbed spending. I knit high-end sweaters and have noticed that in the last two to three years, our craft show sales have been cut in half. People are being much more cautious and this is due to the lack of expendable income available in many homes.

Hard times can be a very good thing. When we first came to the States we were shocked at the amount of money people spent on Christmas gifts each year. It seemed that people were governed by others' expectations, and in particular, children. Kids seemed to believe they could make a list as long as their arm and get everything they wished for. Not so in the current circumstances where parents now find themselves having to say no to their kids' gift demands. 'No' is a good thing. Kids should never think they could have anything they want. They get a very warped sense of entitlement that way.

Many times in these newspaper stories we have talked about the joy that can be had in doing stuff and giving stuff, rather than just getting stuff. The pure joy of giving is actually more fun than receiving.

How do we teach our kids that the 'joy of the jingle' is not always related to the jingle of Santa's sleigh bringing gifts to them? It is in the giving of their own time, effort and sometimes money to others? The secret is in the parental attitude of selflessness that then rubs off on their children. We, at Forefront Families, believe that successful families are God-centered, parent-directed, family-oriented and outwardly focused. Being outwardly focused is thinking beyond our selves, and our wants, and looking to the needs of others. 'What is best for others' is a far more healthy thought process than 'what is best for me'.

Our kids can become inspired to be cheerful givers beyond the home in a number of ways. By joining organizations like Boy Scouts or Girl Guides they learn to be team players. Inviting a less fortunate family or a lonely person over

to your home during the Christmas season is a good idea. By sharing your home and your friendship like this your hospitality will rub off on your children. Having your kids make presents to give to others is fun and, where money is short, creating little promise cards offering to do chores for others is also a nice idea. It teaches kids to give of themselves. Time and love are far more precious commodities than anything else.

A generous spirit needs to be cultivated within families. It doesn't just happen. We learn first to be kind and giving to one another, and when we know what it feels like to be at the receiving end, we become more aware of how others might feel when we offer them the same.

The legendary St. Nicholas was a very generous man who wanted to bring joy to needy children in the area where he lived. Our kids need heroes with that sense of responsibility and care towards others so that they can learn how to make a difference around them.

Just remember above all that we set aside this season to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus. It's not all about Santa. Jesus came to earth as a gift from the Father to allow us to be restored in our relationship with Him. How amazing that if we accept the precious gift God offers through Jesus we can spend forever with Him. Peace and joy to you during Christmas and a very Happy New Year.

If you have any comments or questions on this subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at sally@forefrontfamilies.org. We invite you to also check out our website at www.forefrontfamilies.org and our blog site at www.forefrontfamilies.blogspot.com for further assistance.