

## Giving

One of my favourite gifts ever received came on my forty-seventh birthday. My twenty year old son (yes – 20), took a stack of blue post-it notes, drew happy faces on each individual one, and posted them everywhere in the house he thought I might one day look.

I found them in drawers, inside closets, books, even the refrigerator. One smiled up at me, perched on my mountain bike in the garage, another inside my helmet. For weeks, no, months, I kept finding little blue happy face post-its and each and every time it made me grin from ear to ear.

Whether it was his intention or not, he successfully gave me the gift of love.

My favourite gift to give is praise. I love nothing more than heaping a pile of kind words, whether spoken or written on anyone that's deserving, and my list of those deserving is massive.

I give words of praise and thanks to retailers, friends, and strangers. Anyone actually, that does, says or even thinks something good or kind can usually count on a gift of praise from me.

What I am not so good at is giving purchased gifts. Shopping has never been a favourite activity and picking out items written on lists is a tough chore for me.

With the holiday season upon us, giving gifts is paramount. Luckily, there are multitudes of ways we can give. There is the traditional method of heading to the retail stores, laying down cash or the credit card and buying items for those on our list.

Then there are the 'gifts in kind' where donations are made on behalf of a special someone, helping aid the world in a humanitarian way.

I love giving the humanitarian gifts, and not just because I can buy them online, saving me from having to visit a store. Last year my environmental-studying son was given a well in Africa that aided an entire community. And my nephew received a milk-providing goat in Nepal.

My mother is a wonderful artist and at the young age of eighty-three still sits behind the easel a few times a week. Last Christmas, knowing how much I love mountain biking, she created a most beautiful painting that depicted me riding on a snowy day in the spectacular trails I love so dearly.

She, quite successfully, gave me the gift of her amazing talent.

Similarly, a friend of mine once received an 'hour of time' from a handyman friend and to this day she says it was the best gift ever. It was scribbled out on a scrap piece of paper, and inserted into a card. The 'coupon' simply said, 'an hour of my time to fix whatever is broken in your house.'

She carefully and thoughtfully contemplated how she would use the coupon, but before she could come up with a dramatic and exciting idea, her washing machine quit working and she had to cash-in on his offer.

She still tells me that dreaming up ideas to use the coupon was more fun than she ever expected, and the giver simply gave it because cash was tight and he had no money or time for shopping.

You would think with all this talk about gift-giving, that my lesson today would be about the different types, and the reasons we must appreciate all of them. Although that is true, the lesson actually goes much deeper.

True giving, at the most profound and fulfilling level comes when we do it with absolutely no expectation for anything in return, and THIS is the lesson for today.

Giving from the heart, whether it is your time, your services, talents or purchased items becomes truly a gift of love, respect and honour, when you have absolutely no expectation to receive anything for it.

Not a return gift. Not a card. Not a thank you. Not even an acknowledgement.

When you leave all expectations at the door. When you step away from 'wanting something' and let the receiver do with it what they will, then, you will have mastered the lesson of giving.

Giving is not about the money spent or not spent. If it was, only the rich would learn giving lessons. Giving is not about the talents you may or may not have. It's not even about your time, your services, or your lists.

Giving is not about YOU!

It's about the receiver. It's about doing something you feel will make their heart sing, their body heal or their spirit soar. Giving is the transfer of something from your hand or heart to the hand or heart of another. It's a one-way road.

Giving is about the receiver, not about receiving. These are two very different entities, each with its own lessons to learn and skills to master. The art of receiving is for another day, another lesson.

So, during this holiday season, I encourage you to give. Give your time, your services, your talents, your words. You may even give your love. Whether your

gifts have monetary, spiritual, or sentimental value, give. Expect nothing in return. I promise the lessons learned and the contentment felt from mastering this will be greater than you could possibly ever have imagined.

Enjoy the journey my friends,

Louise

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