

## heal blog

Friday, December 2, 2016

### Life Lessons from Gift Exchange Holidays

Life Lessons from Gift Exchange Holidays  
by Angela Smith, HEAL Coordinator

I started writing this on November 30th, 2016 in hopes to share with you life lessons I've learned from gift exchange holidays such as Christmas. As a child, I wanted to participate in not just making my own wish list and receiving gifts, but, in giving to my loved ones as well. I would draw pictures, cross-stitch, needlepoint, and crochet gifts for loved ones in hopes to show my love for them by giving a gift as I knew that was the true reason for the gift exchange.

My family is far from perfect, as are most, if not all families. But, we did and continue to carry on certain family traditions. Even when I had no gift for visiting family and friends, I helped bake goodies for everyone with my grandmother and took joy in seeing their satisfaction with the treats we made. And, I believe my family got at least one thing right, they taught me the value of sharing and expressing my love through both words and deeds. Offering someone warmth when they are cold, a smile when they are down, and a helping hand when needed are all gifts I have cherished and shared throughout my life.

I believe there are four categories of genuine gifts. These four categories are needful things, wanted things, joyous things, and things to be treasured/cherished. I believe most gifts should answer a need and be needful/needed things.

A needful/needed thing is something someone needs. In the intangible category it could be anything from a smile to a word of encouragement. In the tangible category it could be anything from a hug to a house. Some needed things are easier to give than others depending on the giver's individual resources. But, in the spirit of peace on earth, this type of giving is best. This year, HEAL HQ is collecting and creating needed things that include books and clothes for local homeless youth. We encourage others to give to and/or

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### About Me



**HEAL**

HEAL is an egalitarian network of activists self-empowered to plan events, create change, and make the world a better place for all life. Our goals include the liberation of humans, nonhuman animals, and the earth! We work in cooperation with like-minded organizations that put compassion in action!

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volunteer for those in need and suggest if you don't know someone in need that you do most of your giving to a charity serving neighbors in need like a shelter, soup kitchen, or food bank. For me, it is difficult to enjoy even small luxuries while people are homeless, starving, exploited and oppressed. So, I do my best to be mindful of this when considering how to best show my reverence and consideration when sharing and spreading good will and good cheer. I have to believe that the spirit of giving is intended to inspire generosity and hope, not greed and envy.

Many a child has rolled his or her eyes at the sight of socks or underwear on Christmas morning. But, the reality is those were things the child needed and therefore truly the best of all the gifts and the ones which likely got the most use. And, everyone knows that for some, the magic of Christmas is about getting what you've wanted all year and not what you need at all.

A wanted thing is something someone wants or for which they have wished. In the intangible category it could be anything from appreciation to an apology. In the tangible category it could be anything from concert tickets to a trip to the moon (or mars if that's your thing). A wanted thing must actually be what the person wants to count as wish fulfillment. So, if someone wants Fair Trade Chocolate and you give them a Hershey Bar, you haven't fulfilled their wish effectively. Getting the wrong thing for someone, even with good intentions, can result in a fuss. It is best not to get someone something they want unless you are certain you are getting the right thing. If you have activist friends, like I do, it is best to find out their favorite charity and make a donation to it in their honor than make the mistake of getting an unwanted thing by mistake. If your friends welcome your good will and good cheer, then all should be pleased regardless.

A joyous thing is a surprise that brings joy. In the intangible category it could be anything from a call from an old friend to a surprise party or invitation. In the tangible category it could be any surprise or gift that brings joy to the recipient. These can be tricky, but, if you know your recipient well a wanted thing can become a joyous thing as well. But, be careful when reaching out to old friends in old address books, there may be a reason they haven't spoken in a while. A good surprise is one that is cherished.

A treasured/cherished thing is something given with love that has meaning or value to the giver or the recipient, sometimes both. In the intangible category it could be anything from time to a recital of an original work (i.e. poem or song). In the tangible category it could be something the giver handmade for the recipient or a wanted thing so desired that it is also a treasured and cherished thing once received. For example, I collect from time to time, original copies of Lord Byron and Emily Dickinson's poetry. This

includes original magazine or journal publications in which theirs are among many contributors. My mother found an original publication while antiquing and that remains a treasured thing of mine. It was from my mother whom I love, something I desired greatly, and something I will forever cherish.

So, the life lessons I've learned from gift exchange holidays are that the best gifts fill a need and that the most cherished gifts involve consideration, love, knowledge, care, and wisdom. I hope that parents and guardians will encourage, welcome, and include children in all holiday preparations including preparing to both give and receive with love, warmth, and kindness to friends, family, neighbors, and anyone in need.

Warning: One of the worst things anyone can do is to give a gift or volunteer with the intention of receiving or gaining something beyond which the joy of giving or participating can provide. When someone gives in order to manipulate or lay claim to some form of repayment or return on their gift or volunteer participation, beyond the satisfaction of giving or participating, they are not a true giver nor a true volunteer. Selfish, self-centered, greedy, exploitative, manipulative people who try to use their feigned kindnesses for personal gain or their own entertainment at watching the chaos they create in the wake of their lies and manipulations do not even understand the meaning of giving or volunteering.

The definition of a gift is: "something voluntarily transferred by one person to another without compensation". Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gift> The definition of a volunteer is: "a person who **voluntarily** undertakes or expresses a willingness to undertake a service". Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/volunteer>. So, a gift is something given freely without compensation and a volunteer is someone who freely and willingly provides a service to their family, community, country, organization or cause. When someone expects a return or repayment for their gift, it is not a gift. When someone expects to be served by their family, community, organization, or cause, they are not a volunteer, but, a recipient of services. Cooperative relationships exist and reciprocity is natural and normal in many situations. But, when one volunteers for an organization or cause or gives a gift, it must be with the understanding that they are undertaking an act of giving and generosity with no expectation of personal gain and any attempts to exploit recipients of their gifts or volunteer time and efforts is unethical and therefore unwelcome.

At HEAL, we welcome truly giving people who are happy to volunteer and work with us to achieve our goals for a better world without institutionalized abuse. However, if you are looking to volunteer with HEAL with some personal agenda or with ulterior motives, know we will figure it out and we will wish you well but ask

that you take your private agenda and unethical practices elsewhere. Volunteer with HEAL because you support us, our agenda, and campaigns. If you are looking to sign up for any other reason, please don't. If you need our help, please ask and we'll do our best. If organizing on your own, see [www.heal-online.org/solidarity.htm](http://www.heal-online.org/solidarity.htm) for information on requesting our help. But, don't sign up to be a volunteer if all you really want is attention and support. It dishonors our mission and distracts from important work we do.

HEAL appreciates all of our volunteers and supporters. We look forward to a successful 2017 and hope those who can join in and support our efforts and campaigns, will continue to do so. If we all put a little more love, thought, and care into our actions, the world will be a better place. Let it be so! Have a great holiday season and wonderful 2017!

Posted by **HEAL** at **5:32 PM**

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