

Ships at Sea

Text & photos by Carol Godwin, Cycle Mania

Literally hundreds of container ships, each carrying up to 24,000 containers, are sitting idle at ports around the world, an unprecedented logjam in the world's supply chain. Stores are out of lunchmeat, aluminum, chicken feed and that amazing toy your child wants for Christmas. You want a new bike, and don't really like the colors a shop happens to have in stock but you will be waiting months for the perfect color to come in. You want a stove for your house, the same story. You want that special pasta you need to make the required traditional salad, maybe you can find it in a friend's pantry, but maybe not. Americans have grown to expect being able to get exactly what they want and feel entitled to be able to get it now. We are starting to get used to the delays in every area and having to substitute one product for another and wait for the desired product to show up or decide you really don't need that thing after all.

Dire warnings about Christmas being ruined and frantic shoppers, highlight the slightly skewed way we often approach the holidays. The mid-winter holiday season in most cultures is a celebration of life, a celebration that we, as people, families and communities have made it through another year. Mid-winter is, in nature, often the most difficult part of the year when food stores may be beginning to show signs of declining, temperatures are low and shorter days bring on increased feelings of restlessness and depression. Holidays are a way to give us something to look forward to in the middle of winter and give us a way to share time and resources with others. Let's take a lesson from this year and re-evaluate what's really important.

Does little Suzi really need that exact feed-me, change-my-diaper doll? Or would taking the time to get a pattern and cloth to make a doll with her be way more fun for her and an amazing memory she can take with her when she becomes a mother herself? Johnny wants a new bike, but none are available so would he be happy with a picture and a promise of a new bike this spring and some new grips or a bell for the old one he has now, plus a day out at the bike park with you? You

can't find that exact holiday cake you always have? Baking something new with your kids and starting a brand new tradition.

I've seen families at the store, with kids in tow, being instructed to pick out whatever gifts they want to be given over the holidays. To me, this is missing the point of gift giving. The best gift is a gift the giver has thought about and using their knowledge of the person they are giving that gift to and gives a gift from the heart. With shortages and delays, I think the best gifts of all are the gifts of time. Instead of using time to wait in lines, getting irritated over other shoppers, yelling at the kids and feeling overwhelmed and under-appreciated, what if we take a step back and do a more old fashioned Christmas this year. How can we give the gift of time?

-Explore nature. Take a child for a walk in the woods without constraints. If that child wants to watch ants for 10 minutes, get down and watch ants with them. Notice the intricate details of an ant's body. How much it can carry and wonder, with that child, how it knows where it is going. Gather colorful leaves and press them in the pages of a big book or appreciate rocks. Paint some rocks with your kids and leave them in special spots for them to find later or draw a treasure map for your kids to follow.

Take a night out with your family. Go see the holiday production of the Nutcracker or other musical event, with dessert and a Christmas light-viewing drive afterwards. Usually it is the parents and families of participants who attend these productions, but why not take a chance to see if you or another family member might just love the story, costumes and music, and appreciate the amount of practice and rehearsal it takes to pull off these shows.

-Give a "yes day" coupon. Designate one day for the recipient to choose whatever they want to do* for that day, and be happy to do it. Give with your heart and no complaining allowed! Show your enthusiasm for whatever it is the recipient really wants to do and maybe you will find something new to share and enjoy with a family member. *Ok, not whatever, but within reason lol!

-Take a class. Local art stores have classes from painting to pottery and stained glass. Gyms have a variety of workshops and classes to try out. If you have a

cyclist in the family, sign them up for a skills clinic. Take a kids to one of the many youth hunter camps available and learn alongside them. Take a ski or snowboarding clinic. So much world out there to experience, so look through the eyes of a family member and be willing to experience something new with them.

-Do hobbies or crafts. Most kids and kids-at-heart really do enjoy letting their creative side out. Make a pine wreath for the door, decorate the porch or yard, make a painting for grandma or let your kids help you work on the truck. Gather needed supplies and be ready to begin together during a time you can fully participate. Having a positive attitude and an attainable goal in mind will help get even older kids to participate.

Enter an event. Sign the family up for a future event and have them begin looking forward to, and prepping for the event. Maybe a spring triathlon, Mountain biking race series, fund raising walk or obedience/agility classes with the dog. Having a concrete date and guaranteed entry spot is a great motivator for people to start working towards that goal.

Volunteer. Most kids would love to be able to go walk a dog at the shelter, feed the cats or serve a dinner to homeless people, but these things usually require adult supervision. Give a kid a coupon that lets them volunteer where they want to with your promise that you will take them there and be there for them to be able to participate. If you have an elderly neighbor or friend who is getting overwhelmed, offer to rake the yard, take their dog on a walk, shovel snow or stack wood. If you know a teacher, volunteer to help clean up the classroom or organize supplies. Most teachers would love to have a parent volunteer to help after the pre-Christmas-break craziness week and before school restarts in January.

Substitute: If you can't get lunchmeat, buy a turkey breast and ask the butcher to slice it. If you can't get that special pasta, get another kind and make it work. If you can't get that amazing red bike you always wanted, get a black one and accessorize with red. If you can't get that perfect toy, get something different and let your kids know that Santa picked out this other one especially for them because it's better in these multiple ways. If you can't visit grandma this year, send

a video production of the family doing something awesome. If you can't afford to buy it, make it, and treasure the time it took to make that thing for/with your child.

Like ships at sea, families often drift apart with all the distractions life forces upon us. Kids are busy with school, parents are busy with work, grandparents are trying to fit in someplace and friends have their own worries. Lets take this season to reconnect with each other and leave the worries about unstocked shelves, backordered items, delayed shipments and the rest for another season. Those container ships will be unloaded, the feed-me doll or special video game will show up eventually and we'll all have lunch meat again. Let's hope that by the time that happens, we will have realized that there are other ways to do things and we will find happiness in sharing the season with each other. Let's all load the family into the same ship and sail free to explore new experiences this year.

Happy holidays everyone! Hope to see you out there experiencing one of the amazing outdoor opportunities the White Mountains has to offer.