

Gifts That Aren't in the Store

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My father-in-law returns just about every Christmas gift we give him. Even gift cards - a go-to gift for many beat-up shoppers - are out of the question. He never uses them. Or he loses them.



Helping parents with paperwork is a great gift. (AOA Photo)

Like other families, we get exhausted from rummaging at the local mall, or hunting for a website that includes shipping. But that's what one has to do around the holidays while juggling kids, work and parents, isn't it? Not necessarily.

I don't know about you, but I feel uninspired by that red-and-gray, cable-knit sweater at the Gap. In fact, this whole gift-rush thing is just enough to smother the spirit of the season.

So when thinking about gifts this year, my husband and I finally realized the items on my father-in-law's wish list aren't in a department store. All he wants for Christmas is help around the house or time together. It shows when my husband plays tennis with him, and when we make a surprise visit with our son.

If you've got a hard-to-please loved one on your list, consider giving something special that will bring together your family and community. Here are seven ideas developed with some help from Laurel Kennedy, president of the boomer think-tank **Age Lessons**. None of these will break the bank, and not even my father-in-law would dare to lose them:

- 1. History 101.** Our parents won't be around forever. So get out the digital recorder and talk to your parents about how they feel about their grandchildren. Ask them to pontificate about what's important in life, or what advice they have for the kids as they grow up. Save that tape to give to your child along with a photo when they graduate from high school, get married, or just about any time you think they need to hear their grandparent's voice.
- 2. Coupon Clipping.** Make a coupon book that can be redeemed for a home-cooked meal, a batch of cookies, help with projects around the house, an afternoon of golf, a movie matinee, or just about anything you think your mom or dad might enjoy. Coupons are great for neighbors, too, especially those who might need some help with kids, pets, yard work or grocery shopping.
- 3. Sweet Charity.** Making donations on behalf of loved ones is a great way to support charities in need. Think about groups that would have some meaning to the recipient. Perhaps a friend who lost a loved one to cancer would be moved by your donation to the American Cancer Society.
- 4. Musical Memories.** Remember that favorite song your mom sang to you as a child? Why not give her a recording of the song and stir some memories?
- 5. Treasured Objects.** Pass along a favorite piece of jewelry, a childhood toy or an old framed picture to your child. Being on the receiving end of someone's treasure is a special gift that kids will value for many years.
- 6. Join the Locavores.** Ask local growers at the farmer's market about gift certificates. In the process, you'll be expanding the ranks of "locavores" who eat foods harvested within a 100-mile radius. This gift reminds us that food choices are important politically, environmentally, nutritionally and economically. By supporting local farmers and eating healthfully, you're promoting healthy living and a spirit of sustainability, values that are important to boomers and the greater world at large.
- 7. Community Enrichment.** Talk to local schools about volunteering. Many schools facing significant budget crunches are cutting out programs on the arts or music, offering talented boomers a great opportunity to pass on their talents to another generation. Aside from schools, lots of groups are in need of support from those who have extra time and critical skills to help run organizations.