



# Resisting the Holiday Machine

## *A Family Focuses on Celebrating Their Way*

by Ann Drew Yu

I'm going to be honest. When I think about the upcoming holiday season, a slight feeling of dread washes over me. The holiday machine is ramping up, and I know from experience how easy it is to get sucked in.

I still remember a particular Christmas, several years ago. My son, then age 3, slid down the stairs to discover the stockings stuffed with little gifts and treats. "Santa Claus came," he whispered in awe. He delighted in the bits and baubles for the next hour, and then strolled into the sunroom, ready to get on with his day. He was done with the "gift thing." Here's the kicker—there were still a huge stash of presents under the tree he hadn't noticed. I'd spent all this time and money shopping for stuff that wasn't necessary. He was content without it. How did this happen? The holiday machine had sucked me in, and I'd lost my fool head.

Since then, I've made an effort to keep the gifts (and myself) in check and, instead, grow simple family traditions. It's been pretty successful. Even so, I still feel that dread. I can't help but wonder, how will I fare this year? Will I be able to stay strong against the seductive call to overschedule, overbuy, and overextend? I'm not sure.

So I decided to enlist help. I invited the entire family into the process of planning our holidays. Over supper I asked them, "What would you like Thanksgiving and Christmas to look like? What are the best parts from other years you want to repeat? How many gifts is enough? What charity would you like to do?" Their ideas were great – endearing and fun.

For Thanksgiving, their vision flowed quickly. Play football in the morning as a family with the neighbors, prepare a feast

together with 2 types of pies (very cute), and watch *Miracle on 34th Street*. Nice. I suggested we contribute to the food shelf. They agreed.

Gift giving holidays, like Christmas and Hanukkah, are trickier, however. "What about Christmas?" I asked. "What makes it feel special?" I expected them to say, "Waking to a new flat screen TV," but instead they said, "family bonding." Wow, that was a shocker. Okay, maybe I'm the superficial one in the group.

Other answers included: "Making the gingerbread house (Costco kit), watching the Christmas specials with popcorn, and opening good gifts – a few things we want and a few surprises." (Again, adorable.) Then, we agreed we'd participate in a charity for a women's shelter. Done. Before my very eyes, a thoughtful, manageable list of what really matters to our family took shape. Believe me, I scribbled notes as fast as I could. I don't want to forget a single word.

What about you? What do you want your holidays to look like? It's a fun conversation to have. I've got to tell you, my dread is fading away. Looks like the holiday machine is going to have to chug along without me this year. You see, my family and I – we have a plan.

*Ann Drew Yu, principal of Good Intentions, LLC, helps people create new possibilities for their homes and lives. Visit her at [www.anndrewyu.com](http://www.anndrewyu.com).*

