

Giving Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday?

by BROCK WEIR

Do you remember when you were first bitten by the spirit of giving?

Some of us are fortunate to have had childhoods where compiling our gift lists around the holiday season was almost as fun as receiving gifts. The possibilities seemed endless!

I was lucky enough to have a mother who was ? and is ? a gift-giving enthusiast, while my father was, during my childhood at least, a bit of a tougher sell.

At that age, taking me out to get gifts for the parentals was, of course, the province of the parent who was not on the receiving end of the gift in question and, as they held the purse strings, my selections were sometimes limited by a number of variables outside of my control, including whether or not they happened to be getting along at the time!

I was probably about eight years old when I realized that gift-giving could truly be as creative as compiling a wish list. One of my elder cousins at the time had their first paycheque burning a hole in their pocket and they decided they would be giving their own gifts to the family.

It's still a mystery to me why they thought Don Cherry's latest ? and apparently greatest ? installment in his Rock'em Sock'em Hockey VHS series, was the right gift for me, but I was glad they allowed me to exchange it for something that was a bit more my speed: The Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. Cookbook.

In my defence, it was 1994 and ?Forrest Gump? was all the rage at the time, and it has a pretty rock'em, sock'em recipe for shrimp linguine I still revisit from time to time ? and my cousin learned the value of a gift receipt. A win-win all around!

A few years later I had saved a few bucks, withdrew the \$50 in my bank account that had been accumulating cents of interest since pure, unadulterated nepotism landed me my first gig in my all-too-brief career as a child model for drinking water purification systems, and set out for a GTA mall with a list of who I had to buy for.

As luck would have it, the mall I landed on had a groovy little store that had about two-dozen stores within, featuring work from scores of artisans, producers, and more. Something for everyone, all under one roof!

As a first-time giver, I hit the jackpot.

For my mom, always an enthusiast for antique pine furniture, I found a beautiful hand-made wooden bowl that is still in use; my dad and grandfather, men with nautical inclinations, were on the receiving end of etched glass plaques featuring a variety of watercraft; my brother, who had a cat at the time, a quirky desk organizer in the shape of a feline. The others? I can't remember, but I'm sure what they received was as thoughtfully chosen as possible without having to go to a second store!

Needless to say, the experience didn't turn me into a dyed-in-the-fur mall rat, but the pure joy in the act of giving has remained a constant ? sometimes in spite of another set of variables thrown our way.

I'm not sure about the rest of you, but I've found the very concept of buying a bit more intense this holiday season ? and, alas, we're just getting started.

Perhaps it's because so many of us are feeling more of a pinch this year as the world continues to face economic challenges, but the commodification of the holiday season has felt a bit more in-your-face this time around, particularly in the lead-up to and aftermath

of Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

Now, I'm all for getting a deal, but, to my mind, we were doing just fine when our deal-finding dates were more-or-less firmly set for the Monday after our Canadian Thanksgiving and on Boxing Day.

With every passing year, however, the peculiar American import of Black Friday becomes more of a presence in our lives. Despite one Black Friday years ago when I went to a local grocery store to get a sandwich for lunch and left not with a sandwich but a flatscreen TV ? hey, it was a really good deal! ? I've typically been immune to the Black Friday brouhaha. I have to admit though I almost got reeled in this time around.

Bombarded from all directions, I found myself adding gifts for loved ones into my cart, things that weren't necessarily asked for, but things I thought they might like. While it is the thought that does indeed count, was it the actual thought that they might enjoy it or a false sense of urgency that if they might like it, time was of the essence to get it at what was promised to be the best price in years?

In the midst of all this, we're looking into some sort of vacation in the New Year and when I found myself feeling a bit of anxiety that if we didn't get plane tickets then and there ? to a yet-to-be-determined location ? because such ?deals? likely wouldn't be in the offing again, I finally felt it was best for all to step away from the device, the online shopping cards, the manufactured sense of urgency, and wait until it all passed in order to make good purchases with a clear head.

And despite the fact I am writing this on the morning of Giving Tuesday, a day designated as a ?global generosity movement? that is a boon for so many non-profits around the world, including innumerable organizations here at home that have immediate and pressing needs at the moment, Eugene Levy just popped up on my screen trying to get me to shell out on a new mattress because these Black Friday deals won't last forever.

Let Giving Tuesday have its moment in the spotlight!

I know that Black Friday, even if it is an American import, is a prime opportunity for our homegrown businesses, which need to take advantage of every opportunity they can get in this economic climate, and groundwork for Giving Tuesday was probably laid, at least in part, as a way to atone for some of the more egregious acts of seasonal consumerism, the focus between the two is nowhere near in balance.

By the time you read this on Thursday, I can only hope that Giving Tuesday is not already fading into memory, a casualty of Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals extending clear to Boxing Day.

The needs that have been highlighted in the lead-up to Tuesday, December 2, do not magically vanish on Wednesday, December 3, despite the generosity of our community members.

It's not too late today ? Thirty-Bucks-in-the-Hole Thursday? ? to look up a group or organization that speaks to you, see what their needs are, and really get the most bang for the aforementioned buck by keeping it in the community.

These contributions are always appreciated, no matter what date happens to be on the calendar.

?Donation December? doesn't have quite the same ring to it as ?Giving Tuesday? but it's the real spirit of the season that counts.