

Gifts That Last a Lifetime

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I posed this question to a friend: "If your house caught on fire, and you, your family and pets escaped safely, what would be the *one thing* you would wish you could have retrieved that is special to you?" Keep reading to find out what my friend and others have identified as "priceless and lasting gifts" that you can create for your family.

Family Quilt

Quilt designs can take many different forms. These special coverings can be made to preserve a memory, a person or a time gone by and often represent our character, interests or loved ones. Design options are endless, including childhood favorites, family heirloom fabrics, favorite quotes or even photos! Talk to or collaborate with your family members and friends and get their input on designing the squares for the quilt.

You may use almost any fabric color or type, including sentimental materials like pieces of a loved one's wedding dress, baby blanket, school apparel, tie or favorite sweater. Use paint (no watercolors), permanent markers, sashing strips, laminated photos or thread to design each square, and let your imagination lead you!

Here are a few thematic ideas for quilts, and don't forget to personalize them with titles and dates:

T-shirts from all sporting or other activities (dance, camps, clubs, etc.) from childhood to college

Baby clothes and/or blankets, bibs, etc. for each child

Material from favorite dresses (e.g., church, prom, etc.)

Patchwork that represents each family members' hobbies or interests

Pictures from birthdays or school years

A "Not-So-Traditional" Memory Book

I often asked my mother questions about her childhood, tales of my great-grandmother, the best Christmas she remembers as a child, and other memories that I would never know if it weren't for her taking the time to share them. Her stories were always good, so we decided she should write them down and place them in a special book.

Our book is made of plastic pockets into which you can simply slide handwritten pages. She uses regular stationery with a simple design. Oftentimes, I get to choose the topic that I'd like to know more about. One of my favorite stories is how, when I was a child, my mother and I would catch the bus to the shore and buy freshly steamed whole crabs. On the way home, we would have the entire bus smelling of crabs, a Washington, D.C., favorite!

While my mother is the author of our memory book, *any* member of a family can contribute to a memory book. Grandparents, siblings and other relatives could begin collecting memories. How interesting it would be to see everyone's different "perspective" of some of the same events. You could find out what everyone thinks *really* happened last Christmas when the turkey went missing!

To get you started, below is a list of questions you can ask the family member of your choice. Replace "mother, grandfather, etc." with other relatives' titles and let the memories flow:

Who was your first boyfriend/girlfriend, and have you ever bumped into him/her again?

Where did you meet your grandfather, and what made you like him?

What was the best gift you ever received when you were little?
What was your favorite game, and how was it played?
What is your happiest memory, and why did it mean so much?
What is your saddest memory, and why did it affect you so deeply?
Where did Uncle Joe take you on your first date? What was the best date you ever had?
What was your most embarrassing moment?

Experiences

While you can't hold on to them physically, memorable *experiences* are often some of the most treasured gifts that can last a lifetime. Here are a few ideas that you and your family might consider in 2014:

Game Night
Movie Night
Reading Hour
Backyard Vacations
Short Family Videos/Plays
Talent Shows
Gratitude Sharing at Dinnertime
Campfires with S'mores and Hotdogs
Reunions
And an old-time favorite...Everyone sitting down and having dinner together!

Happy Holidays, everyone!