

MY BEST CHRISTMASSES EVER

By Dianne Trussell

NO. 1 'WRAPPING IT UP'

Picture the usual scenario: extended family gathered around plastic Xmas tree covered in K-Mart decos made in China. Kids faced with an Everest of brightly-wrapped parcels go in like Hillary and Tensing with ice picks – clawing open the new generation of wrapping paper – that's more like plastic. The aftermath: the total mass of disembowelled gift wrap, plastic ribbon, unread greeting tags, doll- and truck- shaped hard plastic packing and cardboard containers exceeds the total mass of payload, i.e. actual gifts. Later, off it goes to the garbage. A certain percentage of the toys are dysfunctional by day's end and never played with again.

Sound familiar? One Christmas we decided to break this consumerism, the thoughtless disregard for Earth's beautiful resources, the greed and carelessness and do something different. For a week before The Day, myself and my partner's 9- and 11-year-old daughters went 'shopping' outdoors for seed pods. We salvaged brown wrapping paper and bits of jute string from the bins, and recovered the white butcher paper off deli items bought at the supermarket. We enjoyed the togetherness, the stories, the exercise and the hunting.

We set up an art station in the back yard and on a plastic sheet inside and set to work marbling the papers and painting the pods (and beetroot juice makes good string dye!). By now our respect and admiration for the beauty and elegant design of Earth items was running high and deserved loving consideration and group consultation as to the combinations of colours to apply. The results were wonderful.

On Christmas Day, the recipients of our few special gifts were in awe – they could feel the love, attention and intention emanating from the gorgeous wrapped presents decorated with coloured sprigs of pods and tied with food-dyed string. They carefully untied the bows and delicately opened the (non-sticky taped) marbled wrappings, and kept the papers as artworks and mementoes. We as the givers received the sheer delight of enjoying people's delight, and knowing that we'd put all of ourselves into the creations while being gentle on the planet. It was a memorable experience of the love and giving which Christmas is meant to represent, and has to a large extent lost in the busy modern world of buy, consume, and trash. And not a scrap of plastic went into landfill that year!



NO. 2 'KIDNAPPING THE KIDS'

Who doesn't look forward to all the over-eating, the sitting around with smoking, beer-drinking relatives, the kisses of sweaty, stubbly-faced elders and the all-day inactivity in the heat that often characterizes an Aussie family Christmas? It was the worst thing about Christmas Day for me as a kid and still is as an adult. So one year I decided to bail out in an honourable way. A few days before Christmas I prepared some sheets of fabric for painting and set up a marbling station in the back yard in the shade of a big gum tree. With lots of healthy fruit drinks in the fridge. A respectable time after the opening of presents and before things got too indulgent and slow I 'kidnapped the kids'. The kids were my nephew and two nieces, old enough to be away from parents for half a day, and not yet old enough to be bored by doing stuff with their eccentric auntie. Off we went to my place. The kids had never marbled before and they loved it. They marbled the fabric pieces for making surf shorts and tops for themselves (out with the sewing machines, mums!). They listened and watched attentively as I showed them the finer arts of distributing paint and lifting off the fabric and quickly became very good at it. We had a lovely, harmonious, fun time together away from the alcohol and smoke and unhealthy food, in the fresh air and breezy shade being creative together. The kids spoke of that day for years, long after the Christmas presents were forgotten! ■

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