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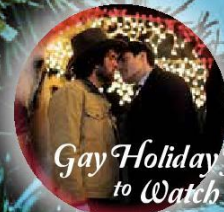
THE HOLIDAY ISSUE



Found Family



Gay Gift Guide



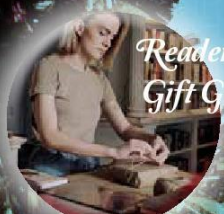
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IS BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER? A look into LGBTQ+ friendships

BY LINDSEY ANDERSON
SGN STAFF WRITER

Photo by Polina Tankilevitch / Pexels

It's the holiday season, and all across the country, people are planning out just how they'll celebrate — and survive — the next couple of months with family. For many, the idea of sharing a hot meal and reminiscing about childhood memories with loved ones is sacred, but for others, the next few months can feel like a special section of hell, especially for LGBTQ+ people who may feel disconnected from the families of their birth.

While holidays are a great way to celebrate families and traditions, it is important to remember this time of year that blood is not what makes a family, and that there can be plenty of love to go around for found families and friend groups looking to share this time of year.

Science proves that LGBTQ+ friendships are special

Being able to travel home and spend time with loved ones who accept and reaffirm one's identity is a luxury often not afforded to LGBTQ+ people. A shocking survey by the Pew Research center found that 39% of Queer adults have faced rejection by their birth families after coming out.

Family is vital to a young person's development, not only emotionally but financially as well. The UCLA Williams Institute found that 40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+, and that this is a factor that contributes to their status as unhoused.

The holidays can make loneliness feel magnified for those who are unable to spend time with loved ones and can even serve as a reminder of what has been lost.

However, for Queer people living in safe spaces like Seattle, opportunities to form pseudo-families or "found families" have given many a place to celebrate in an environment of love and acceptance.

Queer friendship is a magical thing, a phenomenon that social scientists have recently begun studying, to try to understand what it is that makes LGBTQ+ friend groups feel more like found families. In the study "Homophily, Close Friendship, and Life Satisfaction Among Gay, Lesbian, Heterosexual, and Bisexual Men and Women," researcher Brian Gillespie found that "gay men and lesbians, in particular, receive more substantial social support from friends than heterosexual men and women."

In his study, Gillespie theorized that the reason LGBTQ+ friendships are so strong is related to minority stress theory. "Minority stress theory proposes that GLB individuals are likely to experience rejection as a result of their marginalized sexual orientation and must learn to cope and adapt to a potentially 'inhospitable social environment,'" he explained.

Gillespie also found that friendship is vital for LGBTQ+ people in forming their identities and sense of self, and concluded that "sexual minorities may not only want more friends but *need* more friends compared to their heterosexual counterparts."

A rich history of LGBTQ+ friendships

While social experiments may not be required to understand that friendship is

While holidays are a great way to celebrate families and traditions, it is important to remember this time of year that blood is not what makes a family.

important to LGBTQ+ people, that sentiment is confirmed time and time again, both by recoups of personal stories and examinations from research studies.

Historians have also discovered that the phenomenon of Queer friendships date back centuries, although these close relationships were often not seen as Queer at the time. Author Maria Popova described the idea of "romantic friendships" of the last century as "that strange, wonderful, and often messy neverland between the two and the inevitable discombobulation of our neatly organized relationship structures that happens when romantic love and friendship converge."

Although it can be difficult for historians to distinguish which friendships of the past were Queer, because society tended to be more homosocial, the consensus is that such close friendships have always been important to people. Romantic sentiments have been tied to friendship in texts dating as far back as the Bible, in which a verse claims "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself... then Jonathan made a covenant with David

because he loved him as himself."

English literature is riddled with examples of close male friendships, and physical acts of adoration blurring the lines between romantic and platonic. However, as the study of sexology and laws regarding homosexuality became more prominent, acts of affection between same-sex friends became rarer and rarer, especially for male-identifying people. Perhaps it is the rarity of platonic same-sex affection that makes the phenomenon so special and enduring to this day.

Friendship for LGBTQ+ people is as vital as familial bonds. Friends are often the people there to reassure and comfort, and celebrate life's big events with those living far from the ones who raised them. Close friends keep us grounded, the community gives us life, and platonic intimacy is sometimes just what a person needs on cold winter nights.

So, this holiday season, if you don't have a birth family to travel home to, don't be afraid to reach out to your LGBTQ+ friend group for a Friendsgiving feast, and remind those close to you just how much you love them.

An Ace reflection on dating during the holidays

by Georgia Skerritt
SGN Intern

During my most recent visit to the website for the Asexuality Visibility and Education Network (AVEN), I stumbled upon a post from one community member that sums up one of the most common fears people have this time of year: "No one to share the holidays with."

The post was exactly what I expected: this person relies on family for company during this time of year and often feels that they'll be "left behind" if their parents or siblings decide to spend the season with their partners and in-laws. The rest of the thread was filled with others validating and relating to the experience.

Holidays can be hard for everyone for so many different reasons: high travel costs, the stresses of accommodating and hosting guests, balancing work and home life, a rocky relationship with food... the list goes on. For those of us in the Queer community, we may also be dealing with estrangement from friends or family, or celebrating with people we aren't out to yet.

Human beings are wired for social connection, and it's no mystery that this time of year is historically known for moments of love, connection, and celebration. There's also the fact that holiday media (movies in particular) almost always center around a narrative of family, friends, and/or romance, further reinforcing the idea that the holidays are rooted in *love*. I'll admit, I embrace it just as much as the next person — I love the idea of seeing all my favorite people in one place and sharing it with a partner.

At 21, I'm living at home with my parents and sister at the moment and will very happily spend the holidays with them. My sister will probably have a Friendsgiving night if we can manage it, and I have even more to look forward to when other friends come home from college for their winter break. I will by no means be alone this holiday season, and yet this post left me with a familiar pang of anxiety because of one thing that has changed for me in the last



Photo by Keenan Constance / Pexels

year: this is my first holiday season since coming to terms with my asexuality.

I started questioning my relationship with sex in January, and have since learned a lot about the asexuality spectrum and the complexities of attraction, sexual or otherwise. There has been a lot to unpack, a lot to learn, and a lot to unlearn. One thing I have learned a lot about is the erasure of Aromantic and Asexual people living in a society that so heavily enforces romance and sex as pillars of a good life. This social conditioning is part of the reason I struggled for so long to find an identity that made sense to me, and it is something that I am still trying to unlearn.

As I write this article, I would describe myself as Gray-Asexual and Panromantic, meaning that my sexual attraction to others is based on emotional connection, but I am romantically attracted to everyone (though my identity feels like it fluctuates almost

every day). One of the most beautiful and liberating parts of discovering my acesness has been allowing myself certain standards and boundaries while dating.

For a long time, sex was something I did to keep people around, not something I did for myself. Yes, in more serious relationships I enjoy having sex with my partner to make them happy and to feel more connected to them, but it's never been something that motivates me in and of itself.

In many ways, dating on the Ace spectrum can be empowering, because it allows us to put our needs and our boundaries higher up on the priority list without feeling as guilty or ashamed or *broken*. Understanding my own experience has given me more self-compassion, something I wouldn't trade in a heartbeat.

Still, it doesn't make the failed attempts at dating any less disappointing. When I do find someone who I click with, there's

a part of me that tries not to get my hopes up. As sad as I am to admit it, telling people about my acesness has often led to our relationship fizzling out somehow. Yes, prioritizing your needs and boundaries as an Ace person is a courageous and noble act of self-love, but it can still feel like you're letting people down (or like they're letting you down).

This is not to say that dating as an Ace person is a futile pursuit. It's not hopelessly plagued with heartbreak or disappointment. But it does come with a unique set of challenges, and I'd be lying if I said that I'm not more aware of these as the holiday season rolls in. I'm still young, and no one in my age bracket and/or social circle is planning on settling down any time soon, but I am still left wondering what holidays may look like down the road.

The struggle with holiday sobriety is real

by Michael Leach
Special to the SGN

Over the holidays, there is an increased number of holiday work events, family gatherings, and social functions. It is the time of the year to celebrate with family and friends.

While it is a joyous time for most families, it can be challenging for some, what with the combination of stressful relationships, shopping, finances, feelings of grief and loss, and endless family gatherings. Achieving a perfectly sober holiday is a struggle, but not impossible.

Despite relapse triggers or the temptation to overindulge, the holidays do not have to mean jeopardizing recovery or one's choice to abstain from alcohol. Lasting recovery or sobriety does not mean missing out on all the holiday festivities and celebrations; it just means being smart about it.

There are practical ways to help maintain sobriety. Perhaps the best way to avoid relapse or overindulging during the holidays is to have a well-thought-out plan.

Initially, there are some things to consider when attending holiday celebrations, for example:

- Who will be at the party? Is there anyone there who could compromise your sobriety?
- What do I say when someone offers me a drink, and are there nonalcoholic options?
- How will I get home if I feel uncomfortable and need to leave?
- What are the possible relapse triggers? Is there a risk of overindulging?

Knowing what you are getting into with each holiday celebration makes it easier to avoid vulnerable situations. However, you may require some support. Going to these parties with a sober friend or another per-



Photo by cottonbro / Pexels

son who is not drinking alcohol over the holidays is often beneficial.

Other aspects of a support system for someone in recovery could be 12-step meetings, sponsors, a treatment center, or friends and family. A support network is vital when in recovery, especially around the holidays.

As for drinks at parties, "There are endless nonalcoholic options to enjoy, and holiday mocktails are popular because it provides a safer option and a better choice for sober guests," said Marcel Gemme of Addicted.org.

"Nonalcoholic options also eliminate the risk of drinking and driving," he added. According to Washington state's Traffic

Safety Commission, on average, 100 people are arrested between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, and 50% of roadway fatalities are due to impaired driving.

One critical point that many people neglect is to take care of yourself. The acronym HALT (hungry, angry, lonely, tired) is an excellent way to remember basic needs. When people become hungry, they are more susceptible to anxiety and stress. The same occurs when someone becomes angry or lonely. Sleep is often neglected during the holidays; adequate sleep is critical to maintaining sobriety.

Finally, create new traditions and find the holiday spirit. It is essential to look beyond the parties, gifts, and celebrations. Find the

real meaning of the holidays: joy, compassion, and kindness. Discover gratitude in every moment. Write down everything that you are grateful for as a reminder.

While in recovery, gratitude is essential to the process and could help anyone through the holiday season. It is the season of giving and giving thanks. Every day during the holidays is a new reason to celebrate sobriety.

Michael Leach has spent most of his career as a healthcare professional specializing in substance use disorder and addiction recovery. He is a certified clinical medical assistant, and contributor to the healthcare website Recovery Begins.

Foster a pet and save a life at the Seattle Animal Shelter



Photos courtesy of Seattle Animal Shelter

by **Lindsey Anderson**
SGN Staff Writer

To bond with an animal is to understand what unconditional love feels like. A pet does not care who you love or what gender you are, only that you are willing to show them kindness and friendship. Although animals are willing to show unconditional love to the people who take care of them, there are too many currently waiting behind bars for someone to see their worth.

The Seattle Animal Shelter was opened in 1972 to “protect public safety” and “enforce animal-related ordinances” in the city. In the 50 years since, it has also helped to house and adopt out thousands of dogs, cats, and small critters (rabbits, pet mice, guinea pigs) to loving families all over King County.

Too many pets!

Since the start of the pandemic, the shelter has become overwhelmed with animals. This is due in part to state and city ordinances that prevent the shelter from opening back up to its pre-COVID visiting hours. It has also seen an uptick in animal surrenders since the beginning of the pandemic, due to people’s “pandemic pets” not working out the way they had hoped.

While the Seattle Animal Shelter does

not euthanize pets for time or space, there are still very harmful consequences to the animals when it becomes overcrowded.

For dogs, an overfull shelter means much more stress. The noise levels inside the facility can become overwhelming very quickly. Stimulation, paired with the anxiety of being in a new, cold, unfamiliar environment, often leads to behavioral and health issues for these dogs. Many will refuse to eat or develop stomach issues. Others who come into the shelter will behave quickly deteriorate, losing their confidence and years of training.

For cats, the stress of a full and noisy shelter can also mean their behavior becomes altered. Some cats deal with stress by becoming more aggressive and less willing to trust people. Others will act out by “spraying” or refusing to use a litterbox, even if they had previously been trained to do so.

The stress reactions of animals in shelters can make them seem less adoptable to potential new families. A once-friendly pup can look aggressive when they’re stressed out and barking from behind a cage door. A cuddly kitten might only be interested in hiding from those hoping to meet them, and appear antisocial.

For those that do make it out after their behaviors have been altered, the chance of

being returned is great. When an animal returns to the shelter, its behavior often deteriorates even faster. The animals do not understand what has happened to them and why their new family has rejected them yet again. Unlike people, dogs and cats do not have the proper ability to process the situations they are in. They face a return to the shelter with confusion, and can often become depressed.

Hope in the dark

While this cycle can feel hopeless, there is a solution! The Seattle Animal Shelter offers a wonderful foster program, where members of the community can help out by taking a pet out of the shelter and into their home. The foster program allows adoptable animals to get away from the stress of the animal shelter so that they can wait for their forever family in the comfort of a “practice home.” Anybody is welcome to apply.

Foster parents can choose a pet to bring into their home, and work as an advocate in finding its new family. They are responsible for taking care of the foster pet, making sure it gets to its vet appointments, and most importantly, reassuring it that it is loved.

The pets that usually go into foster care first are dogs who have been in the shelter the longest, dogs recovering from an injury

or medical procedure, and puppies who need socialization skills that they cannot get at the animal shelter.

“Fostering is a wonderful experience for you and your family — you can feel good knowing you have helped save a dog’s life. Even better, you’ve created space in the shelter to accommodate other homeless dogs. Foster dogs provide companionship and purpose. Your act of kindness is repaid in rewards that are beyond words,” said Pavi, a Seattle Animal Shelter foster coordinator.

For pet lovers who feel fostering is too big of a commitment, the shelter also offers programs to “check out a dog” for a day or to do an overnight. This allows people interested in going on a day trip, such as a hike or a venture to the beach, to bring a high-energy dog with them. This helps to get the pet out of the shelter for a few hours, burn off some energy, and also gets them noticed by members of the community who might be interested in adoption.

Those interested in applying to become a foster parent for the Seattle Animal Shelter should email SASfosterdogs@gmail.com. For more information on adopting or volunteering with the shelter, check out <https://www.seattle.gov/animal-shelter>.

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BOY MEETS BOY

Gay variations on a Hallmark theme

BY CHIP HAAMMEL
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

Dashing in December – Photo courtesy of Paramount

Picture this: Ambitious, big-city young professional returns to quaint hometown for the holidays; meets-cute with charming, devastatingly beautiful local; endures endearing/hilarious Christmas-related event/farce; faces serious reckoning of life-changing choices. Fairy-tale ending concludes under mistletoe/being whisked away in sleigh ride into snowy, love-fulfilled future, which pans out accompanied by blaring, up-tempo version of “Christmas (Baby Please Come Home).” Roll end credits.

The fact this never happens in real life is part of the attraction of the hometown holiday romance, a particular genre of made-for-TV romantic comedy spearheaded by the Hallmark Channel that has become one of the enduring cultural phenomena of the last 20 years.

Does true love exist? This is the question that has plagued humankind since time immemorial, and launched a successful industry that tugs on people’s heartstrings and services their mortal need to say and hear “I love you.” That the format has evolved from delivering printed ephemera through the post office to streaming video on your smart device is no surprise.

Since its inception in the early aughts, the central character of a “Hallmark movie” has always been a cisgender female. Former teen queens like *Party of Five*’s Lacey Chabert and *Full House*’s Candace Cameron Bure dominate the genre due to the winning combination of nostalgia about their past fame and their general likeable and transferable qualities as contemporary figures. Though the typical storytelling style is inherently gendered and binary (which invites deserved criticism), the beauty of this landscape is that it is a fully contained, sterile, insular space. Within the bubble, these characters are safe from harm. Anything is possible. Especially love.

And this safety is precisely why LGBTQ+ people were an untapped market for this genre. Queering the trope is now the new challenge for networks and filmmakers. Centering the story on a Gay protagonist seemed to be the next logical step. As unrealistic the circumstances may be, and though full representation of all Queer and cultural experiences may never be scripted, it is an opportunity to escape the cinematic realism of recent mainstream Queer storytelling centered around adversity by eliminating well-trodden obstacles completely. No one has to overcome coming out or face a tragic death? Here we can fall in love and live happily ever after? Yes, please.

The Gay brother

Although the Hallmark Channel’s first Christmas movie centering a Gay couple, *The Holiday Sitter* (which debuts on

Does true love exist? This is the question that has plagued humankind since time immemorial, and launched a successful industry that tugs on people’s heartstrings and services their mortal need to say and hear “I love you.”

December 11), will be a historic moment on this canonically conservative channel, it dipped its toes into Gay waters only just a couple years ago with *The Christmas House* (2020). That centered on straight, cisgender Mike (a charming Robert Buckley) returning to his hometown in upstate New York, where his parents Phyllis and Bill (sweetly played by Sharon Lawrence and Treat Williams) and his Gay brother Brandon (a sharply humorous Jonathan Bennett) come together to decorate their childhood home in their family’s trademark fantastic, over-the-top style before the house is sold.

Brandon is a supporting character, whose moments in the film along with husband Jake (a nondescript Brad Harder) revolve around their private journey of adopting a child. While commendable in featuring a

story that many same-sex couples experience, there is no explicit language about the couple’s Gay life, although there is a momentary scene where Brandon and Jake quietly resign themselves to their lament. The effort here is to show no difference between the two brothers and their respective relationships, perhaps softening the edges to endear straight audiences. But the moment between Brandon and Jake is so shrouded in whispers and ellipses that it left me underwhelmed. Here I am in 2022, shouting into the void that was 2020: “Just say Gay!”

The film is poorly drawn compared to its sequel, *The Christmas House 2: Deck Those Halls* (2021), which is much more lighthearted and quippy in pace and dialogue, giving a bit more *Modern Family* and *Schitt’s Creek* vibes. The sequel brings the brothers back together for a home-dec-

orating duel on a reality TV competition. Bennett gets a lot more scenery to chew and brings a nice energy and charisma that elevates Buckley’s performance.

A still underutilized Harder is a bland, supportive partner, but he has some nice moments as the solid pragmatist in contrast to Brandon’s wild antics. But the big moment is between the rival siblings, where queerness is still only obliquely referenced, although there is a tongue-in-cheek button to the scene that allows for forgiveness. One thing the movie does well, though clumsily, is dropping real family issues (like co-parenting, work-life balance, aging, and blended family) among the spirited holiday fun.

Boy meets boy

Although *The Christmas House* series jump-started the Gay Hallmark holiday-movie canon, neither film is very romantic. For this I turned to *The Christmas Setup* (2020) on Lifetime. New York City lawyer Hugo (an amiable Ben Lewis) returns to his hometown of Milwaukee with his bestie Maddie (a delightful Ellen Wong) to celebrate the holiday with his empty-nest mom Kate (a winning Fran Drescher) and embarks upon a whirlwind romance with high school crush Patrick Ryan (a handsome Blake Lee).



The Christmas House 2: Deck Those Halls – Photo courtesy of The Hallmark Channel

I liked how ordinary these two characters are: though one has a skyrocketing big-city career and the other is a retired-young app developer, the two are still the boys they once were in high school. In a bit of tribute to *Sixteen Candles* (hello, Jake Ryan, my high school movie character crush!), Patrick, like Jake, is handsome and confident, popular and aloof, yet much deeper than his good looks. There is a shy awkwardness between them, from both getting to know someone you've pined for and the anxiety of reconciling that to the image you've held in your memory. Though there is not much to this love story with one too many plot points (including a long digression to save an old train station), the tenderness of the courtship was most affecting.

I appreciated the casting of a non-white person as the best friend; Wong shines, bringing a contemporary lightness to the movie without being inauthentic. But the real pro here is Drescher, dashing in and out of scenes with aplomb. Her familiar signature voice may grate to new ears, but Queer kids from the '90s who wished to have a fabulous caretaker like her Fran Fine character from *The Nanny* will feel comforted.

From the title of the movie, you might think it telegraphs Kate as the typical meddling mother. But the elegance of this film is that all her matchmaking skills are done outside the frame. Kate even sets up Maddie with her other son, Air Force member Aiden (a milquetoast Chad Connell), which seems like an afterthought. Although manipulating the marriages of your children can be interpreted as sinister, it brings a bit of innocent, Puck-like energy to these romantic proceedings.

Though what works best is the two leads, real-life Gay couple Lewis and Lee. You feel at ease when the two are on screen together. There's no friction here. Heat? Not so much. Call it a "network note." But casting two Gay actors releases the viewer from having to make a leap of imagination and, overall, it works well.

The Gay cowboy Christmas movie

Yet still, I was searching for some romance. Maybe even a little sex appeal? For this, I looked to *Dashing in December* (2020). An interesting cinematic blend of the Western terrain of Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* and the provincial quirk of Amy Sherman-Palladino's *Gilmore Girls*, *Dashing* brings both the romance and the heat to hit that sweet spot. The spare guitar and tinkling piano score sets the mood for love.

Recently single hotshot financier Wyatt (a chiseled Peter Porte) returns to his child-



The Christmas Setup – Photo courtesy of Lifetime

hood home in Colorado, where his widowed mom Deb (a delicate Andie McDowell) runs the family horse ranch with the help of sweet-natured stable hand Heath (an effortless Juan Pablo di Pace).

Wyatt's high-school girlfriend Blake (a solid Caroline Harris) and his mom both know Wyatt and Heath are Gay but decide not to tell either, at first. Not quite like *Setup*, this plot device allows the men to make their own choices about each other. Though personality differences between the two divide them early on, they are still immediately attracted to each other and, over time, discover they are more similar than they thought. They are both uptight and reserved, cheerful and charming. Decidedly *dashing*. And everyone around them loves them individually, but especially together.

Being released through Paramount gave this production a little more runway to push the envelope. There is more room for character development and dramatic intensity. The courtship is given time to ignite, breathe, and solidify. The scenes flow nicely between intimate, two-character scenes and exuberant, holiday-themed sequences. A Shania Twain needle drop at the local honky-tonk with an impeccably choreographed line dance transported meto another astral plane.

And I got the heat I was looking for when the camera unashamedly swings on Porte's

ample anatomy in tight underwear (from front to back) before Wyatt innocently bumps into Heath, who is also in his underwear. You won't see that on Hallmark.

Beyond the skin, there is a romantic moment when Wyatt unexpectedly is swept off his feet. He is surprised and enchanted, which leads to the sweetly anticipated first kiss. But as the plot unfolds, the uncomfortable power dynamics at play eventually unravel the romance to devastating effect. It's not satisfactorily solved, but it does end happily (of course).

But what stands out about this film is that it feels wholly sophisticated and contemporary: the complicated bonds between all characters, the way the holiday is woven throughout the narrative and art direction, and of course, the sweeping, cinematic landscapes. Although it's a movie with so many cups of hot cocoa, I can report there were absolutely no liquids in them.

Aside from that atrocity, the film's real strength is the casting. Once again, we have two Gay actors in Porte and di Pace. Porte's hunky allure is evenly matched by di Pace's easy sensuality. But it is di Pace's sensitive portrayal in a series of monologues about his family and romantic history that is the film's emotional center. The ranch is a token of what Wyatt left behind, but what has saved Heath's life.

The diversity of the cast brings a modernity to the film; having thoughtful and three-dimensional characters played by people of color like Harris and di Pace breaks the stereotype that only white people can come from these kinds of places, and ultimately, play these kinds of roles.

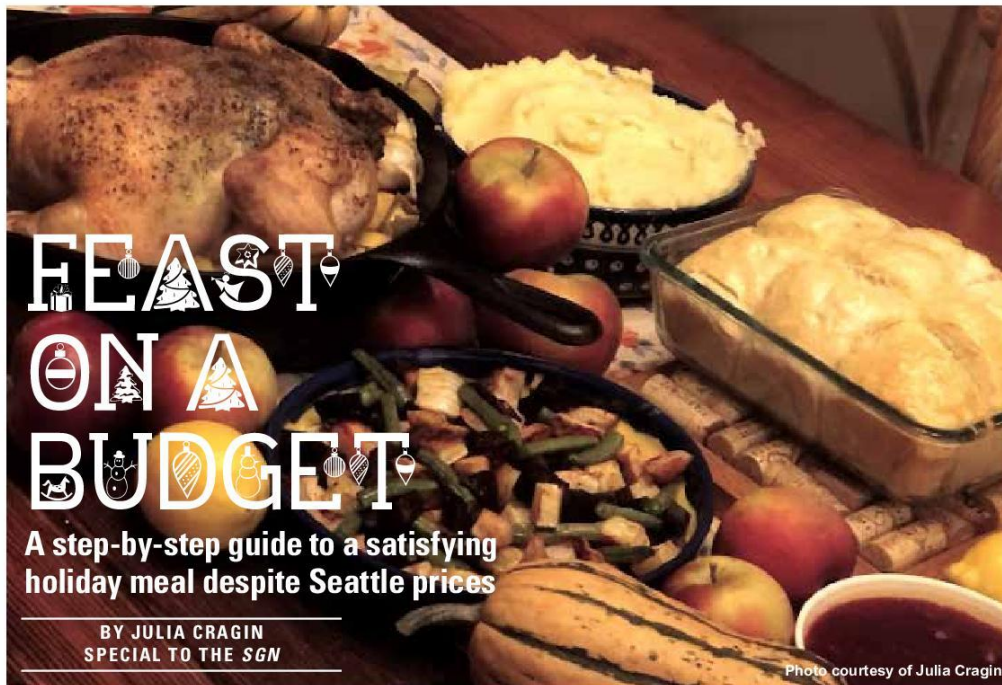
And lastly, Andie McDowell is a Queer icon, obviously through her outrageous cameo in *Magic Mike XXL* but also with *Dashing*, adding another jewel to her crown.

For a Queer viewer of a certain age, the hometown holiday romance is a chance to go back in time and experience a first love, to replay lost youth, now as adults. It's an opportunity to escape into the fantasy. And there's the trick: for so long we were never included in these kinds of stories, and now that these films now gaining traction, it's a joy that Queer people can finally participate in this holiday tradition. Some may cringe watching, but most will dream.

Christmas House and Dashing in December are available on Amazon Prime, as is *Christmas House 2*, which will also be shown on the Hallmark Channel on Nov. 21. *The Christmas Setup* can be seen online on Lifetime, Hulu, and Amazon Prime.



Dashing in December – Photo courtesy of Paramount



FEAST ON A BUDGET

A step-by-step guide to a satisfying holiday meal despite Seattle prices

BY JULIA CRAGIN
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

Photo courtesy of Julia Cragin

With the holidays just around the corner, now is the perfect time to start planning out your spread!

I have been in the kitchen a lot lately and decided it was time to start my preparations, so I made a collection of my favorite holiday-inspired recipes, modified to fit a tighter budget (especially important now, with the rising cost of living across the state). While these dishes may not be as simple as buying a can and heating it up or making a box mix, they will put you more in touch with what you are putting into your body and provide greater nutritional content.

So if you are looking to up your cooking game this season without going broke, give a few of these recipes a try!

Soft and Simple Dinner Rolls Makes 9-12 rolls; Total cost: \$3.05

Bread: what a great example of human ingenuity. Especially when it is soft, chewy, and fresh out of the oven. These rolls are simple to make and get that familiar, super soft texture of store-bought dinner rolls with much more flavor.

- 3.5 cups all-purpose flour - \$1.37
- 1 packet instant yeast - \$0.90
- 1 teaspoon sugar - \$0.03
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt* - \$0.04
- 2 tablespoons salted butter (softened) - \$0.41
- 1 egg - \$0.30
- Water

Preheat your oven to 375°F. In a small dish, combine the yeast, sugar, and 2 tablespoons of warm water and stir. Let sit for about 10 minutes to bloom the yeast (you should see some bubbles).

In a larger bowl, mix the flour and salt. Add the yeast mixture and 1-1/4 cups water and stir to form a sticky ball of dough. Knead a few times to incorporate all the flour.

Grease a clean bowl with about a teaspoon of butter and transfer the dough ball to the bowl. Cover with a damp towel and allow to rise for about 1 hour or until roughly doubled in size.

Butter your hands and split the dough into 9-12 equal portions (depending on how big you want each roll). Keeping your hands well buttered, roll each portion into a ball and place in a buttered 9" x 9" glass baking dish. Cover with a damp towel and let rise another 15-20 minutes.

Beat the egg in a small dish and brush over the tops of the rolls (you probably won't use the whole egg).

Bake at 375°F for 30 minutes or until the tops are golden brown.

* I used Diamond kosher salt. You want to use about half as much if using another salt.

Tart and Tangy Cranberry Sauce Makes about 2 cups; Total cost: \$4.08

Personally, I am not a big fan of the canned cranberry sauce normally seen in grocery stores around the holidays. It lacks what cranberries are abundant in: *tartness!* This recipe brings out that lovely flavor and results in a slightly thinner consistency for easier spreading.

- 2 cups fresh cranberries - \$2.00
- 2/3 cup sugar - \$0.75
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch* - \$0.08
- Zest of 1 lemon** - \$1.25
- Pinch of salt
- Water

Combine the cranberries, water, salt, and sugar in a small saucepan and heat over medium heat until you hear the cranberries popping. Once most cranberries have popped, use a spoon to mash them against the side of the pan.

Reduce the heat to low and whisk in the cornstarch, making sure to break up any clumps. Cook for around 20-30 minutes or until thickened to your desired consistency. Add lemon zest a few minutes before you are ready to serve.

* More cornstarch can be used if you want a thicker sauce.

** Lemon juice can also be added if you want your sauce tarter.

Roasted Veggies You Actually Want to Eat Serves 6-8; Total cost: \$9.60

Sweet potatoes and green beans are both major components in classic holiday casseroles, but I usually find these to be less than appetizing. Usually, the green beans are way overcooked or from a can, meaning they lose their amazing crunchy texture. The sweet potatoes are loaded with added sugar and marshmallows, which I find completely unnecessary. This recipe adds another classic winter veggie, beets. Enjoy the warm, earthy flavors and delectable textures of these nutrient powerhouses!

- 2-3 beets - \$2.99
- 2 sweet potatoes - \$2.29
- 8-12 ounces fresh green beans - \$3.29
- 1/4 sweet yellow onion - \$0.19
- 2 tablespoons olive oil - \$0.33
- 1/2 teaspoon poultry seasoning - \$0.22
- 1-2 cloves of garlic, minced - \$0.25
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt* - \$0.02
- 1/2 teaspoon pepper - \$0.24

Preheat the oven to 415°F. Peel the beets and sweet potatoes and chop them into about half-inch cubes, keeping the veggies separate.

Trim the ends of the green beans. Gather the remainder into a bunch and cut into thirds.

Roughly chop the onion.

On a baking sheet, combine the beets, poultry seasoning, olive oil, salt, and pepper. Toss to thoroughly coat the veggies. Bake for at 415°F for 15 minutes.

Remove the beets from the oven. Add the yellow onion, green beans, garlic, and sweet potatoes and use a spatula to combine.

Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F and bake for 40 minutes or until the veggies are cooked through.

* I used Diamond kosher salt. You want to use about half as much if using other salt.

Just-As-Good-As-Turkey Roast Chicken Serves 6-8; Total cost: \$18.81

A whole chicken is just about as good as it gets when it comes to simplicity and cost efficiency. Not only do you get some delicious meat, but the bones can be used as a base for chicken broth and the drippings for a delicious gravy. This recipe will also produce a sizeable quantity of roasted garlic, which can be added to many other dishes (including my mashed potato recipe).

- 1 whole chicken - \$12.80
- 1 lemon - \$1.25
- 1 Granny Smith apple - \$0.77
- 1 whole head of garlic - \$0.99
- 1/2 sweet yellow onion - \$0.38
- 4 tablespoons salted butter (softened) - \$0.82
- 2 teaspoons poultry seasoning - \$0.88
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt* - \$0.06
- 3/4 teaspoon black pepper - \$0.36
- Optional: 1/2 cup fresh cranberries - \$0.50

Preheat the oven to 415°F. Chop the apples into half-inch cubes and roughly chop the onion. Cut the lemon into 8 large chunks.

Remove any organs in the chicken cavity and set them aside (leave the skin on). Place the chicken in a large cast-iron pan or other oven-safe roasting pan with the breastbone facing upward.

Fill the chicken cavity with the chopped apple, cranberries (optional), lemon, and onion. Any of the mixture that doesn't fit can be arranged in the pan around the chicken.

Cut the garlic head in half crosswise and nestle the halves on each side of the chicken (it will probably start falling apart a bit, but that's completely fine).

Use your hand to pull the chickens skin up enough to get under it (sort of like a pocket). Rub the poultry seasoning, salt, and pepper under the skin.

Rub the butter under the skin, making sure to spread to as many areas on the chicken as possible. Any excess butter can be rubbed on the outside of the skin.

Place chicken in the oven to roast for 50 minutes at 415°F and another 10 minutes at 375°F. The chicken skin should be well browned, and the juices will run clear when it is done.

* I used Diamond kosher salt. You want to use about half as much if using other salt.

Marvelous Mashed Potatoes Serves 6-8; Total cost: \$4.13

Mashed potatoes can make or break a meal, especially a holiday one, so I focused on getting the best result possible with this recipe. These are just the right level of creamy and are a great way to repurpose drippings. They can also be made with any variety of potatoes, as opposed to many recipes that suggest only specific, more expensive varieties. I hope you enjoy this as much as my family and I did.

- 6 large potatoes - \$1.25
- 3 teaspoons kosher salt - \$0.06
- 1/2 teaspoon poultry seasoning - \$0.22
- 4 tablespoons butter - \$0.82
- 1/2 cup sour cream - \$0.85
- 2 cloves minced garlic (or roasted garlic; see Optional below) - \$0.25
- 1/2 cup shredded cheddar cheese - \$0.68
- Optional: Chicken drippings, 4 cloves roasted garlic, mashed into a rough paste

Peel and chop potatoes into half-inch cubes. Add the potatoes to a medium pot along with 6 cups of water and 2 teaspoons of salt and bring to a boil over medium-high heat.

Reduce the heat to medium once boiling and simmer until the potatoes are easily poked with a fork (about 30 minutes).

Strain the cooked potatoes and return to the pot. Turn off the burner. Use a potato masher (or a fork) to roughly mash the potatoes. Add in the sour cream, garlic, and butter and mash until you reach desired consistency and the ingredients are thoroughly combined.

Put the heat back on low and stir in the cheese, 1 teaspoon of kosher salt, and the poultry seasoning until combined. Continue to gently stir and heat until the cheese is melted and fully incorporated. Serve!

* I used Diamond kosher salt. You want to use about half as much if using other salt.

Oven use

In addition to using simple, cheap ingredients, I made an oven usage plan to reduce energy consumption when preparing all these dishes at once. This reduces time and can save a few bucks on the electric bill by cooking multiple things at the same time and avoiding preheating the oven repeatedly. The plan I used is as follows:

Preheat the oven to 415°F. Add in the chicken. Cook for 35 minutes. After 35 minutes has passed, add the first round of roast vegetables (beets) and bake for another 15 minutes.

Reduce the temperature to 375°F and add the rest of the veggies. Bake for another 10 minutes.

You can remove the chicken at this point if it is fully cooked and add in the rolls to bake for 30 minutes. Veggies and rolls should finish around the same time!

My challenge for this meal guide was to make something that would serve about 6-8 people and still costs under \$50. With prices on everything increasing, this was certainly a challenge, but I was able to successfully create delicious results on a budget.

The price of the ingredients was calculated using QFC Capitol Hill prices and dividing those by the amount needed to make the recipe. The Seattle tax of 10.25% was also added, and the grand total came out to \$43.73! This just goes to show that good food and hosting a holiday gathering doesn't have to break the bank.

Share your dishes and connect with me on Instagram @juliastastykitchen2. Happy holidays!

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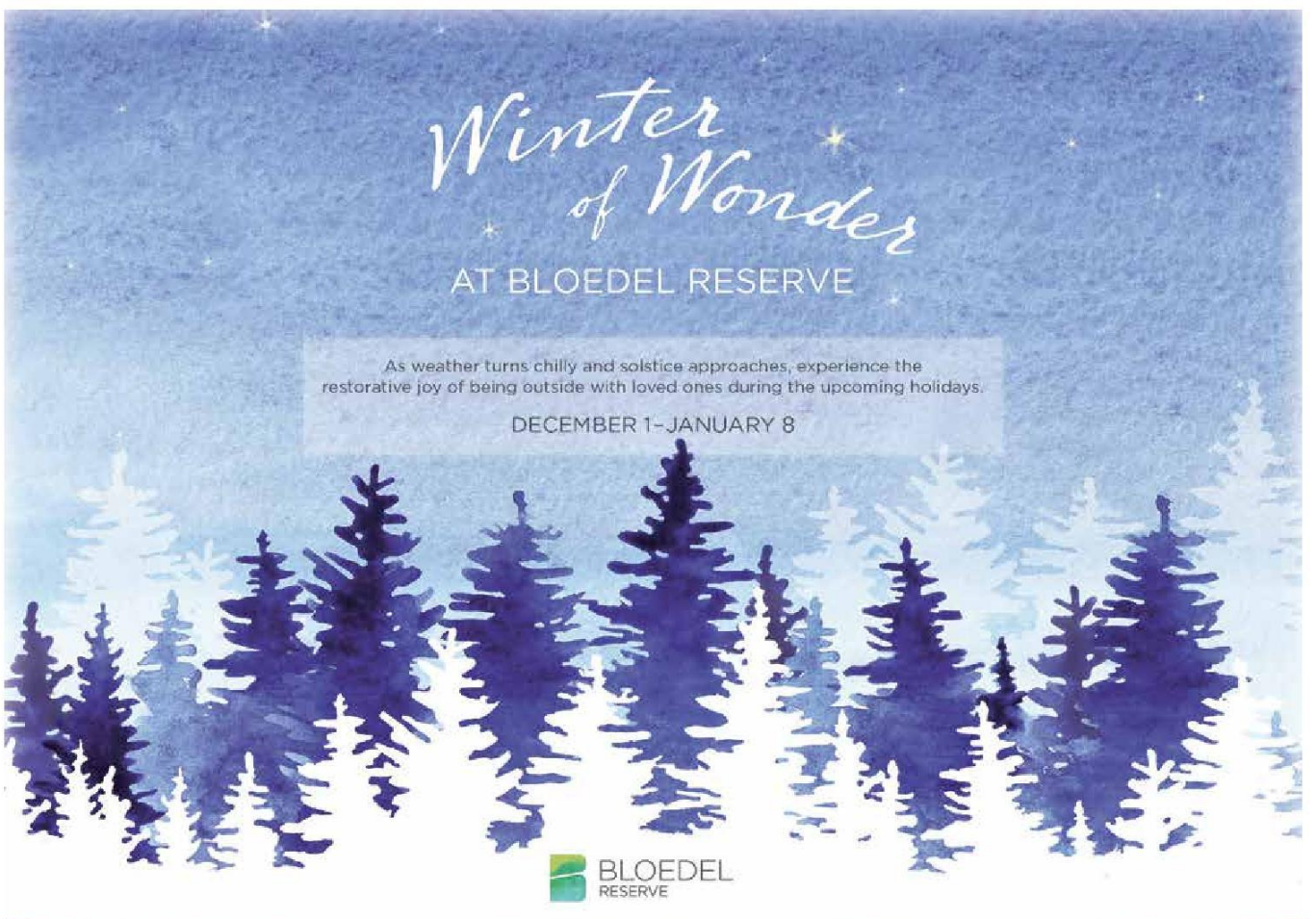
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BY MIKEY ROX
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

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Mr. & Mrs. Claus mugs

Two glazed-ceramic Santas are better than one when you cop SUNNY&TED's hand-painted Mr. and/or Mrs. cocoa mugs, available in three blush-faced skin tones and two genders to accurately rep your festive-Queer holiday cheer.

<https://sunnyandted.com>, \$27.50 each

Whiskey a gogo

Lift holiday spirits (in handsome drinkware, like Baccarat's Harmonie Double Old-Fashioned Tumblers) by offering party guests a sampling of your home bar's top-shelf reserves, like Blade & Bow's Kentucky Straight Bourbon, Glendalough Pot Still Irish Whiskey, and Westward American Single Malt Stout Cask — a holy trinity all its own.

<http://www.reservebar.com>, \$48, \$57, \$91

Happy Hanukkah tea gift set + Subarzsweets

VAHDAM India's Hanukkah-special assortment of luscious herbal, chai, and black teas — paired with Subarzsweets' handmade, small-batch biscotti-cookie hybrids (the lemon-thyme flavor is what the chef's kiss emoji was meant for) — is the treat-yo-self pick-me-up you'll crave after eight crazy nights.

<https://www.vahdam.com/products/happy-hanukkah-assorted-tea-gift-set>, \$24; <https://www.subarzsweets.com>, \$45

America the Beautiful annual pass

One of your nice-listers resolving to travel more in the new year? Set 'em up for success with the National Parks & Federal Recreational Lands' America the Beautiful annual pass, providing access for the holder (plus guests) to over 2,000 federal sites in the United States, including parks, monuments, battlefields, protected wildlife refuges, stunning seashores, and more.

<https://www.recreation.gov/pass>, \$80



Whiskey a gogo



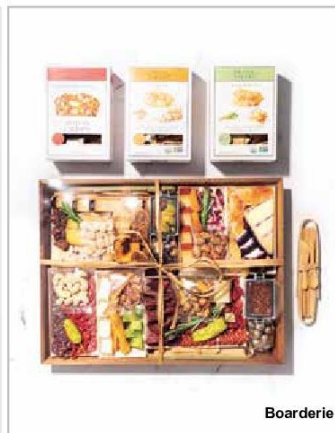
Happy Hannukah tea gift set



America the Beautiful annual pass



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Boarderie



Wagged Tails

Yves Durif grooming set

Yves Durif didn't reinvent the Italian-made, natural rubber resin petite brush and comb that bears his synonymous-with-style name, but he did make these luxury tools sexy AF so you can feel like a million bucks.

<https://www.yvesdurif.com/shop/yves-durif-comb-and-petite-brush>, \$105

Boarderie charcuterie

A far cry from the shelf-stable meat-and-cheese gifts mom loaded up on at your local mall's pop-up shop, Oprah-approved Boarderie charcuterie boards are chef-made daily and feature hand-selected artisan cheeses, meats, dried fruits, nuts, and chocolates on keepsake Acacia platters. Hickory Farms could never.

<http://www.boarderie.com>, \$129–239

Wagged Tails custom "a-paw-rel"

Memorialize your loved ones' recently passed pets with Wagged Tails' custom-printed apparel and accessories, including T-shirts, tumblers, totes, and mugs, emblazoned with their favorite heaven-sent smush-faces. Keep the Kleenex close.

<https://www.waggedtails.com/collections/frontpage>, \$18–67

see GIFTS page 16



Dough Bowl candles

Dough Bowl candles

Drop a needle on Aunt Dolly's holiday vinyl before lighting the wicks on Stroud's Simply Southern dough bowl candles and you've got yourself an instant country Christmas. <https://stroudsimplysouthernco.com/collections/christmas-candles-gifts-collection>, \$24–79

Cantilever toolbox

Utilitarianism is a hallmark of Japanese design, and Toyo's handcrafted cantilever steel storage and tools boxes are no exception, with two handy adjustable upper trays and eight removable dividers housed in a handsome, spacious shell deserving of double-takes. <https://www.placewares.com/products/cantilever-steel-storage-and-tool-box>, \$129

Habibi Santal Journey

Can't go wrong with a fresh scent tucked under the tree or inside a stocking, and it doesn't get any fresher (or spicier) than Habibi's Santal Journey, with notes of dry cedarwood, oud, and sandalwood atop whiffs of crisp pear and precious orris. <https://forhabibi.com/collections/fragrances-for-him/products/santal-journey-edp-2-5-fl-oz>, \$119

NQi GTS e-moped

In sport mode, the NQi GTS e-moped's top speed is a hair-straightening 50 mph, thanks to a 60V26Ah Bosch motor, fourth-gen lithium battery tech, and a few body-shop elves who've watched *2 Fast 2 Furious* 2 many times. <https://www.niu.com>, \$7BD

Rotate watchmaking kit

Challenge your better-half gadget geek over holiday break with customizable Rotate watchmaking kits — available in easy, medium, and hard configurations — that come complete with parts, tools, and a user-friendly guide to keep the cursing at a Christian minimum. <https://rotatewatches.com>, \$195–225



Cantilever toolbox



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Coravin x Keith Haring wine opener

Art and wine go together like Saint Nick and snickerdoodles, which is why the Coravin x Keith Haring Timeless Six+ Artist Edition bottle opener — featuring the late artist's iconic dancing figures in black and white — will look just as good on your dinner-party table as it will on display. <https://www.coravin.com/products/keith-haring>, \$350



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Nuzzle weighted blanket

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Mikey Rox is an award-winning journalist and LGBT lifestyle expert whose work has been published in more than a hundred outlets across the world. Connect with Mikey on Instagram @mikeyroxtravels.



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A READER'S GIFT GUIDE 2022

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMEYER
SPECIAL TO THE SGN

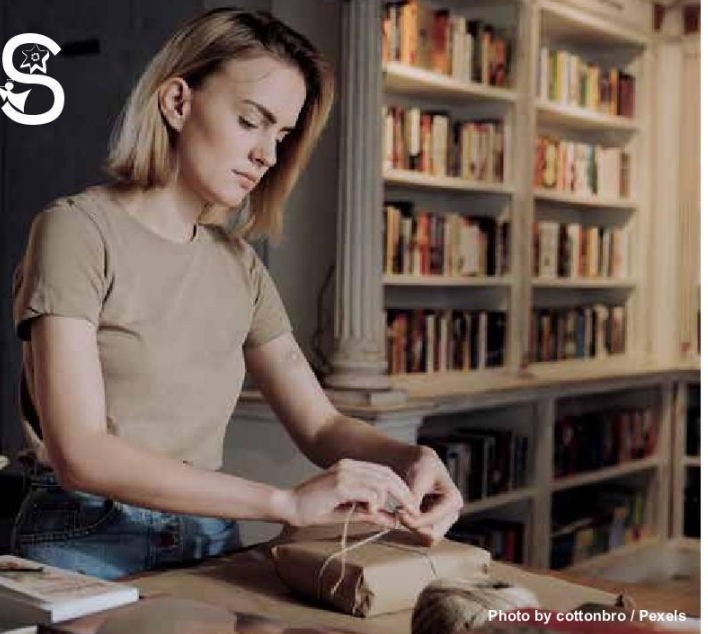


Photo by cottonbro / Pexels

So you're ready — almost — for the holidays, except for those few tricky gifts that you just can't seem to figure out.

How about books? Easy to wrap, they make people happy to get them. Why not look for these great ones?

Fiction

Lovers of fantasy stories will love *Illuminations* by Alan Moore, a collection of short stories with an underlying theme of comics and the industry. Perfect for the young gamer or comics reader.

For those who like novels with a twist, wrap up *The Storyteller's Death* by Ann Davila Cardinal, the tale of a girl who learns, at age 18, that she's a storyteller, which is something that's passed down through the women of her family. But this blessing turns out to be a curse when she sees a murder that happened long ago. Give it with *The Strange Inheritance of Leah Fern* by Rita Zoey Chin, also a story of a young fortune teller and a vision she may or may not have wanted.

The person who loves to people-watch and connect with, well, *everybody* will want *Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting* by Clare Pooley, the story of an advice columnist who amuses herself during her commute by watching the other people on the train — until the day something happens, and commuters suddenly become something more. Pair it with *Has Anyone Seen My Toes?* by Christopher Buckley, a hilarious novel about life during the pandemic, when one's health is the least of one's worries.

Give the historical fiction lover *A Woman of Endurance* by Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa, the tale of an African woman who's captured and sent to a plantation in Puerto Rico for the sole purpose of having babies that are always taken from her immediately after they're born. How she survives and heals is part of this book's appeal.

The reader who loves to laugh will thoroughly enjoy *Random* by Penn Jillette, the story of an almost-21-year-old who inherits a pile of debt from his horrible father, and it's due to the (even more horrible) loan shark when the guy turns 21. Will all of the dice eliminate all his problems? Lucky is the person who gets this book and finds out.

And if you've got a father-son duo on your gift list, see if you can get them to share *The Ski Jumpers* by Peter Geye, the tale of a son who can never forgive his father, a father who has a past the son is just now learning, and a brother who's caught in the middle.

General nonfiction

The reader who wants a little diversity in their selection will love *Latino Almanac: From Early Explorers to Corporate Leaders* by Nicolas Kanellos, PhD, which is absolutely filled with mini-biographies of Latino luminaries, heroes, and inspirations, and it's perfect for any reader age 14 and up. Give it with *Indigenous Firsts: A History of Native American Achievements and Events* by Yvonne

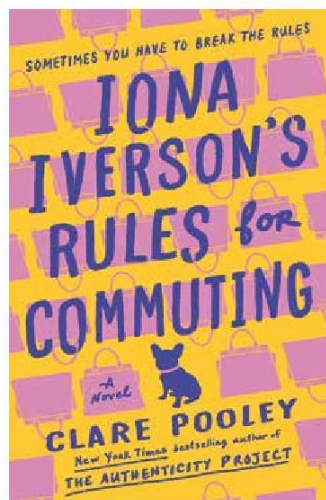


Image courtesy of Pamela Dorman Books

Wakim Dennis, Arlene Hirschfelder, and Paulette F. Molin, which has fast facts about the achievements of Indigenous Americans.

If you're looking for something unusual for someone science-minded, then find *The Handy Engineering Answer Book* by DeLeann Tolbert Smith, PhD; Aishwary Pawar, Nicole Pitterson, PhD; and Debra-Ann C. Butler, PhD. It's perfect for anyone who works in or dabbles with any kind of engineering today; it's also the kind of book your dedicated science fan needs.

For the person who always embraces the good in life, *Inciting Joy* by Ross Gay will be a welcome gift. It's a collection of essays on the things that make us happy, that cause us to count our blessings and smile, and that gather us together. Wrap it up with *Happier Hour* by Cassie Holmes, PhD, and help someone decide what's worth their joy.

There's just no way your animal-loving recipient won't want a copy of *Possums Are Not Cute!* by Ally Burguières. It contains adorable photos of possums of all ages, in cute poses and just living their best lives. Bonus: possum facts and trivia! Give it along with *Sentient: How Animals Illuminate the Wonder of Our Human Senses* by Jackie Higgins, for a gift that'll make your animal lover roar.

The historian on your gift list will enjoy *Mutinous Women: How French Convicts Became Founding Mothers of the Gulf Coast* by Joan DeLeann, the true story of 132 women who were taken from France to the mouth of the Mississippi and released in 1719 — partly because they'd been accused of crimes they didn't commit, and because they were considered a commodity: women were needed in the new settlements. Pair it with *The Women of Rothschild* by Natalie Livingstone, about influential women in one famous family, women who left their

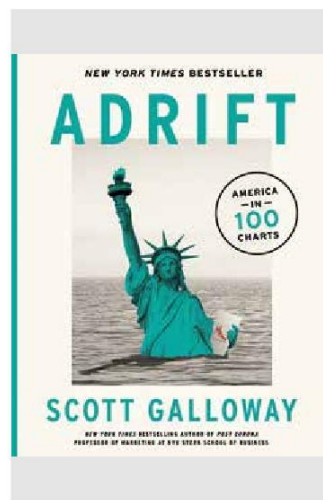


Image courtesy of Portfolio

marks on the world, despite the men in the family who tried to shut them out; or with *The Scandalous Hamiltons* by Bill Shaffer, the story of a Gilded Age scandal and the beginning of tabloid-style journalism.

They will also whoop when the wrapping comes off *The Escape Artist* by Jonathan Freedland, the story of a man who actually broke out of Auschwitz and lived to tell the world what was going on. It's a true story that reads like a deadly thriller.

For the person who is obsessed with current events, *Adrift* by Scott Galloway could be the gift this year. It's a book of charts: where America's been, where we seem to be heading, and how our leaders are leading. Give it with *Myth America: Historians Take on the Biggest Legends and Lies about Our Past*, edited by Kevin M. Kruse and Julian E. Zelizer. Together, these books are both eye-openers, for sure.

Or give them *The Storm Is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything* by Mike Rothschild. It's an eye-opener. Add to it *Seek and Hide* by Amy Gajda, about our right to privacy throughout history, what it means, and how the demand for privacy today can be a good thing or a bad thing; or *Conspiracies and Secret Societies*, third edition by Brad Steiger and Sherry Hansen Steiger. How could anyone not want to own one of the last books by these two late, great authors?

For your media-obsessed giftee, *It's Not TV: The Spectacular Rise, Revolution, and Future of HBO* by Felix Gillette and John Koblin is a nice look at how we watch television, even in an age of streaming. It will go well with a book that reads like a movie: *Same Ground* by Russell Wangersky, about a journey across America, in search of a family story.

For the loner in your life, or the person

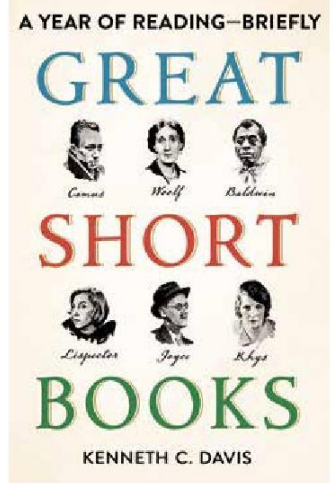


Image courtesy of Scribner

who longs for connection, *On Belonging* by Kim Samuel might be a great gift. It's a book for our times, in four categories: isolation in our relationships, belonging in nature, being alone in political spheres, and a sense of belonging within our inner cores. Pair it with *The Newlyweds: Rearranging Marriage in Modern India* by Mansi Choksi, about three modern couples who've set aside tradition and arranged marriages in favor of love on their own terms.

The reader who's concerned about migration and immigration this year will want to read *Nomad Century: How Climate Migration Will Reshape Our World* by Gaia Vince, who says that climate change will cause worldwide change in cities; and *Somewhere We Are Human*, edited by Reyna Grande and Sonia Guinansaca, which is a collection of stories from migrants and new citizens.

Is there a parent on your gift list, one that continually gets to the end of their rope? Then give *What to Do About Your Troubled Child* by Laura J. Stevens, MS and Richard W. Walker, Jr., MD, about behavioral disorders in children ages 3–11, and how to cope with them.

If you know someone who is interested in the paranormal, then give them *Here & Hereafter* by Tyler Henry, who is a Hollywood medium. What can they learn from the dead? Find out by adding *Hollywood Horrors* by Andrea Van Landingham. Oh, the scandals and murders in Tinseltown past!

Won't your reader enjoy *Great Short Books* by Kenneth C. Davis this holiday? The answer is yes: this book is about books — specifically, more than 50 short novels by authors you know and don't know. Wrap it up with a gift certificate to your favorite bookstore.

see **BOOKS** page 20

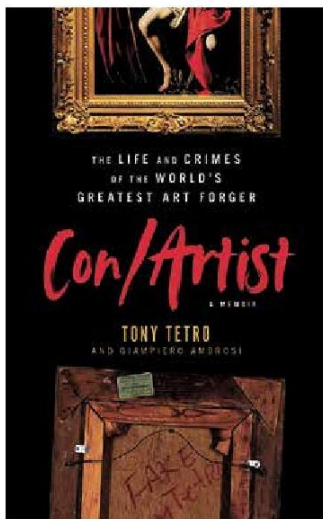


Image courtesy of Hachette Books

Memoir

Music lovers will absolutely want *Loud* by Tana Douglas, a memoir of rock & roll and working with the band (Douglas was the rock world's first female roadie). And yep, there's plenty of behind-the-scenes stories. Your giftee won't be able to resist.

Another adventure to find: *Life on the Mississippi: An Epic American Adventure* by Rinker Buck. The author built an old-time wooden flatboat and sailed it down the river. You can't miss what happened then...

Board-game lovers will enjoy *A Game Maker's Life* by Jeffrey Breslow, with Cynthia Beebe; there's plenty of insider info to make any player smile. It would also complement *This Is NOT a Book About Benedict Cumberbatch* by Tabitha Carvan, about passion, obsession, and being a big — really big — fan.

For the reader who loves a sweeping, but differently told life story, *I Always Knew: A Memoir* by Barbara Chase-Riboud might be just right. This is the story of the author and artist, as told through a series of letters written to her mother. It showcases not only Chase-Riboud's life but also her works, and the many people she met along the way. Wrap it up with *Seven Aunts* by Staci Lola Drouillard, about the author's far-flung, but very beloved, aunts and the ways they held the family together.

The Hollywood watcher will be so happy to receive *Garcelle: Love Me as I Am* by Garcelle Beauvais with Nicole E. Smith, a biography of Beauvais' life, work, struggles, and triumphs. Pair it with another great Hollywood memoir: *Waxing On: The Karate Kid and Me* by Ralph Macchio.

More from Hollywood: Check out *No Filter* by supermodel Paulina Porizkova, or *Don Rickles: The Merchant of Venom* by Michael Seth Starr? So many gifts, so little time...

And for the art lover, put *Con/Artist: The Life and Crimes of the World's Greatest Art Forger* by Tony Tetro and Giampiero Ambrosi beneath the tree.

African American studies

The activist in your life will be very happy with *The White Allies Handbook* by Lecia Michelle. Yes, it's meant to teach white readers how to eliminate racism within their own lives, but it's also a good way to learn to help friends who are working on it. It would go well with *No Justice, No Peace* by Devin Allen, with images by Gordon Parks, which is filled with inspirations messages and pictures from 60 years of activism.

For the reader — male or female — who's interested in the culture of manhood, you'll want to give *Patriarchy Blues* by Frederick Joseph, a collection of essays, poetry, and reflections on what it means to be a man today.

Readers of any age will enjoy *Originals! Black Women Breaking Barriers* by Jessie Carney Smith, PhD, a fascinating (and browse-able) collection of mini-biographies about Black women who changed the world. Give it along with *Ride or Die* by Shanita Hubbard, a feminist manifesto for Black women, and slip *Black Women Will Save the World* by April Ryan (yes, the journalist) into the package, too.

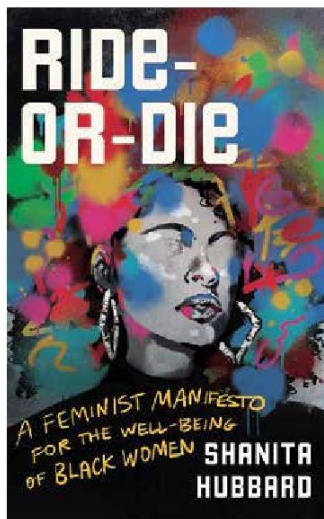


Image courtesy of Legacy Lit

The restless person who longs for the meaning of home will want to have *The Long Road Home: On Blackness and Belonging* by Debra Thompson, a book with one foot in America, one foot in Canada, and a search for place between them. Wrap it up with *Fruit Punch* by Kendra Allen, a coming-of-age memoir about growing up a woman in the South.

The historian will enjoy *The Grimkes: The Legacy of Slavery in An American Family* by Kerri K. Greenidge, a sweeping and detailed story of two slave-owning sisters who became fierce abolitionists, and the legacy they left to the Black people to whom they were related.

For LGBTQ readers

For the person who loves dark, gothic, romantic mysteries, give *Mourning Light* by Richard Goodkin, the story of a man who can't let go of the guilt he feels since his lover died. Coincidentally, that death happened on the exact same day he met another man that he can't stop thinking about.

Those who like a good memoir will want to read *A Place Called Home* by David Ambroz, a tale of homelessness, foster care, coming out, and how sheer determination put that all in one man's past.

For someone who made a difficult decision this year, *Families We Keep* by Rin Reczek and Emma Bosley-Smith is a good idea. It's a look at LGBTQ people who have decided to stick with their families, though there may continue to be a struggle for acceptance or a total lack of it. It means work, and this book might help. Know your giftee well before giving this book.

Until recently, there really haven't been a lot of books about bisexuality, which is why you might want to give *Bi: The Hidden Culture, History, and Science of Bisexuality* by Julia Shaw to someone special. There's a lot to know about the subject, from genetics to legalities, celebrities to monogamy.

The Trans reader on your gift list will want to own *Fat, Crazy, and Tired: Tales from the Trenches of Transformation* by podcaster Van Lathan, who writes that being fat was harder than being Black. Needless to say, this book is funny and inspirational, and the recipient will love it. Pair it with *Side Affects: On Being Trans and Feeling Bad* by Hil Malatino. For those who sometimes struggle, this book is great acknowledgement.

For the reader who loves history, *The Women's House of Detention* by Hugh Ryan could be the perfect gift this year. It's the story of a prison in New York's Greenwich Village that, for nearly 45 years, was the landing place/home/jail for thousands of women, gender-nonconforming people, and Transgender men. Angela Davis was there. So was Afeni Shakur. This book takes the reader there, too. Add to it *Manifesting Justice: Wrongly Convicted Women Reclaim Their Rights* by Valena Beety.

Mystery

People "of a certain age" will absolutely love getting *Killers of a Certain Age* by Deanna Raybourn, a thriller-mystery about four women who've worked as assassins

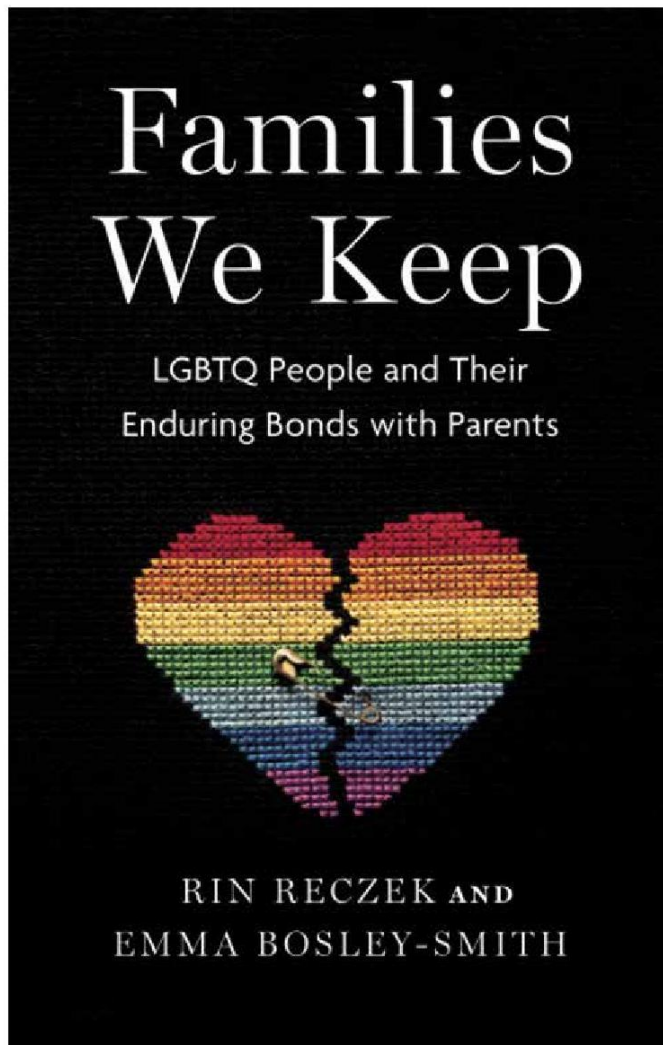


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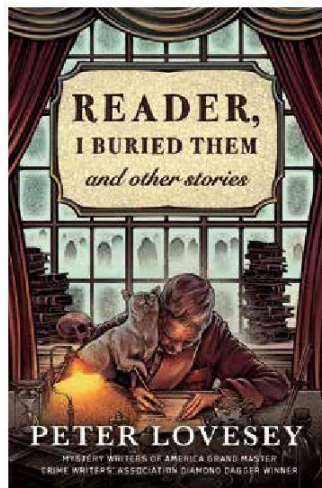


Image courtesy of Soho Crime

for decades, but suddenly everyone thinks their methods are outdated. They're sent on vacation, but it's really no vacation. How do they get out alive?

Lovers of short mysteries will love to find *Reader, I Buried Them and Other Stories* by Peter Lovesey. This book, in celebration of Lovesey's more than 50 years of mystery writing, is full of mayhem and murder, and you know your giftee will want it.

True crime

So your giftee is *obsessed* with the *Godfather* movies, eh? Well, then, you can't go wrong with *The Godmother: Murder, Vengeance, and the Bloody Struggle of Mafia Women* by Barbie Latza Nadeau, the story of the women behind the men in the mob. Giving it to someone is an offer you can't refuse.

For those who can appreciate a good true crime tale set outside the US, look for *In the Mouth of the Wolf* by Katherine Corcoran, the story of a journalist who's

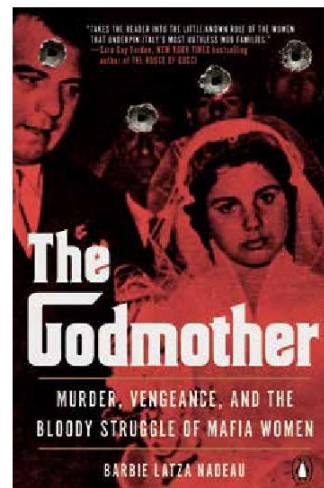


Image courtesy of Penguin Books

about to expose corruption in the Mexican government, but she's thwarted in many ways. When she's found dead in her motel bathroom, Corcoran, then the AP's Mexico bureau chief, goes in search of answers. Speaking of answers, give it with *The Forever Witness* by Edward Humes, the story of a double murder in Seattle more than 30 years ago. The trail went cold... until the use of DNA became more common and other technology put the case front and center.

Sometimes, the setting of the story is everything. Case in point: *All That Is Wicked* by Kate Winkler Dawson. In 1871, Edward Rulloff was awaiting execution — but several people wanted him released because of his *intelligence*. Was his brain too refined to belong to a killer? Add to it *Killer Collections: Dark Artifacts from True Crime* by Paul Gambino, a loaded-with-photos anthology of items associated with murder.



Mauro Porcini

Chief Design Officer of PepsiCo

Image courtesy of Berrett-Koehler Publishers

Business

What do you give the businessperson who's also a people person? *The Human Side of Innovation: The Power of People in Love with People* by Mauro Porcini, which shows why it's best for a business to put people first, always, and unapologetically. Readers who want to know where the next trend is may find it here.

The entrepreneur in your life might enjoy *Launchpad Republic: America's Entrepreneurial Edge and Why It Matters* by Howard Wolk and John Landry. Let them know that history agrees with their can-do spirit. It would go well with *Flywheels: How Cities Are Creating Their Own Futures* by Tom Alberg, about how businesses can partner with cities to attract the brightest employees and citizens.

For the person whose dream is to head a corporation, *Leading Lightly* by Jody Michael could be the perfect gift. It's a book that advocates for a gentler way of leadership, one that's easier on the led as well as the leader. *You're the Leader. Now What?* by Richard Winters, about being a good leader, from the Mayo Clinic, would be a nice complement to it.

If there's a new grad or a newly unemployed-just-looking person on your gift list, look for *Sell Yourself* by Dr. Cindy McGovern, all about making and promoting a personal brand that employers will find irresistible.

Another book for prospective leaders: *True North* by Bill George and Zach Clayton, about authenticity in leadership and how to keep it. Also look for *When Women Lead* by Julia Boorstin, for the female entrepreneur who's ready to succeed.

For someone who watches their pennies, or who's thinking about dabbling in crypto-currency this coming year, give *Cloud Money: Cash, Cards, Crypto and the War for Our Wallets* by Brett Scott, which goes deep into the new frontier that is digital financing. Pair it with *Finance for the People* by Paco de Leon for a nicely balanced gift.

The reader who loves a good business

biography will enjoy *Happy at Any Cost: The Revolutionary Vision and Fatal Quest of Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh* by Kirsten Grind and Katherine Sayre, about a beloved business and the visionary who created and nurtured it.

The business leader who enjoys looking into the future may like reading *Reshaping Work: How to Transform Your Organization & Make Hybrid Work for Everyone* by Lynda Gratton, about how to make away-from-the-office work succeed. Wrap it up with *Competing in the New World of Work* by Keith Ferrazzi, Kian Gohar and Noel Weyrich, about radical adaptability in business today.

Science

For those who love the movies, half the fun is wondering if what's on the big screen is really possible. *Licence to Kill: The Science of 007* by Kathryn Harkup looks at all the what-ifs of the Bond movies, from the POV of real science, and no armchair detective will be able to resist.

Foodies would love getting *Ten Tomatoes That Changed the World* by William Alexander, which weaves a long, juicy trail from South America and Mexico to the New World and beyond to show how one vegetable changed the way we eat.

Romantics with an inner streak of science-lover will be enthralled by *Wired for Love* by Stephanie Cacioppo, a neuroscientist. It's the story of her unlikely (but absolutely wonderful) romance, a devastating loss, and why we bother with love anyhow.

For gearheads, *Racing Green: How Motorsport Science Can Save the World* by Kit Chapman would make a great gift. It's the story of how innovation in our vehicles is saving lives, taking the sting out of commutes, and helping environmental causes.

Health, death, and grieving

For the person who hates to exercise, hates eating healthy (let's face it), and stresses about it all, you can't go wrong with *The Gospel of Wellness: Gyms, Gurus, Goop,*

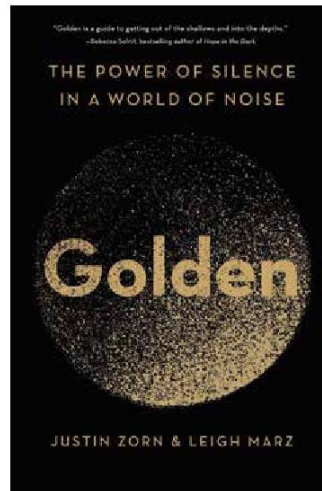


Image courtesy of Harper Wave

and the *False Promise of Self-Care* by Rina Raphael. Doesn't that title say it all? Give it with *A Life in Light: Meditations on Impermanence* by Mary Pipher, about aging, losing, and knowing that life goes on.

Someone who's struggling with a diagnosis that's not yet determined may want to read *Inside the Orphan Drug Revolution* by James A. Geraghty, about rare diseases and how modern medicine is in the midst of a revolution in care. Beware before you give this book, but it may be the perfect thing for the right person. Wrap it up with *This Boy We Made* by Taylor Harris, the story of Harris's son, and a little boy's health mystery.

For medical-minded recipients, think carefully before giving *This Is Assisted Dying* by Stefanie Green, MD, one doctor's story about patient care and the end of life, as it could be controversial.

Someone who's grieving might also appreciate *After Affects* by Andrea Giliat, on various kinds of grief; *When a Child Dies* by Claire Aagaard; *Letters of Note: Grief*, compiled by Shaun Usher, a collection of meaningful letters; or *All of This* by Rebecca Woolf, on losing a husband and regaining strength.

The person who suffers with chronic pain may want to see *The Song of Our Scars* by Haider Warraich, about pain, suffering with it, and surviving it. Pair it with *How Am I Doing* by Dr. Corey Yeager, for your recipient's mental health.

If you know someone who loves reading true medical stories, you can't go wrong with *Spare Parts: The Story of Medicine Through the History of Transplant Surgery* by Paul Craddock. It's filled with a good timeline of bad medicine and how far we've come in keeping people alive with someone else's body parts.

No doubt you know someone who longs for total silence. That's the person who should have *Golden: The Power of Silence in a World of Noise* by Justin Zorn and Leigh Marz. It might be right to also throw in *Good Anxiety* by Dr. Wendy Suzuki, about seeing anxiety in a whole new light.

The reader who is still trying to tease out all there is to know about the pandemic will want to read *Breathless: The Scientific Race to Defeat a Deadly Virus* by David Quammen. Yes, it's all true, but it reads like a thriller. Give it with *Plagues and Their Aftermath* by Brian Michael Jenkins, for a wider look through the history of that which affects us.

Children up to 6

The preschooler who loves polar bears will love getting *A Bear Far from Home* by Susan Fletcher and Rebecca Green, based on the true story of a gift from Norway to England, and the meaning of home. Give it with *The Worst Teddy Ever* by Marcelo Verdad, the story of another kind of bear and its love of a little girl.

For young environmentalists, *A Planet Like Ours* by Frank Murphy and Charnaie Gordon, illustrated by Kayla Harren, could be a great gift. It's a sweet, uncomplicated reminder to love the earth we have.

For young Black boys, a book like *Black Boy, Black Boy, Celebrate the Power of YOU* by Ali Kamanda and Jorge Redmond,

with pictures by Ken Daley, is a welcome gift. It's an inspirational book full of all the good that Black men do, and that a Black boy can hope for.

The child who's having a rough holiday may want to have *There Was a Hole* by Adam Lehrhaupt, illustrated by Carrie O'Neill, read to them. It's the story of a little girl who's missing something, and she thinks she's the only one. It's a pretty sweet tale of loss and coping that would go well with *Everything Will Be Okay* by Anna Dewdney, with pictures by Judy Schachner, a comforting book for when nothing goes right.

For the kid who needs a boost of confidence, *Most Perfect You* by Jazmyn Simon, illustrated by Tamisha Anthony, is a good choice. Irie hates her hair, and she wishes it were different. Her mother's answer is perfect.

For the littlest reader (think: someone who entered the world this year), *Hello, Baby! I'm Your Mom* by Eve Bunting, illustrated by Jui Ishida, is the sweetest, gentlest, most perfect gift. Hint: it's really for mom... Pair it with *My Hero* by Brian Biggs, which is really a good book for dads and kids.

Youngsters who love the water will love opening *Monsters in the Briny* by Lynn Becker, illustrated by Scott Brundage, about the monsters that live in the sea; it's a great introduction to mythology and cryptozoology. Add it to *Too Many Pigs in the Pool* by Wendy Hinote Lanier, illustrated by Iris Amaya. Yep, it's a pigsty in there.

Children 6-9

Seriously, who doesn't like pizza? If so, they'll also like *Pizza! A Slice of History* by Greg Pizzoli, a cute, colorfully illustrated, fun book on everybody's favorite food.

For the kid who loves monsters, *Mythical Beasts* by Stephanie Warren Drimmer could be the right gift. It's full of information from National Geographic Kids about real animals that were somehow mythologized throughout history.

If there's a child on your list who loves legends, then *The Return of the Christmas Witch* by Dan Murphy and Aubrey Plaza, with illustrations by Julia Iredale, is the book. It's the story of Kristorn, who was Santa's twin sister, a battle, a mystery, and a bit of Christmas darkness. (No worries, happy endings abound.)

For the kid who's suddenly become a big brother or sister, *The Baby-Changing Station* by Rhett Miller, illustrated by Dan Santat, is absolutely the best gift. It's the tale of a boy who isn't happy that there's a baby brother in the house, until he discovers a machine that changes the baby, but not in diaperish ways...

Children 9-14

The young environmentalist will be so happy reading *Meltdown: Discover Earth's Irreplaceable Glaciers and Learn What You Can Do to Save Them* by Anita Sanchez, illustrated by Lily Padula, which is full of ideas, information, pictures, and graphs, as well as a sense that kids really can save the world. Add it to *Dinosaur Atlas* from National Geographic Kids, a large-size book all about dinos and where they lived. Your young scientist will love it.

If there's a child who loves good historical fiction, then find *The Other Side of the River* by Alda P. Dobbs, the second part of a story featuring a character based on a real girl who immigrated to the US after the Mexican Revolution. If your intended recipient hasn't read the first book, give both.

Young adult books

The social media-obsessed teen may need to read *The Facebook Narcissist* by Lena Derhally, which may make them think twice before posting and sharing.

If you read *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* by Isabel Wilkerson, you know that it's a great book to share with your young adult this holiday, because it's not in a version that's adapted for young adults.

If you have any questions or need other suggestions, please do lean on your favorite librarian or bookseller. Seriously, they are like your favorite comic book superheroes, only better, because they know books.

Season's readings!



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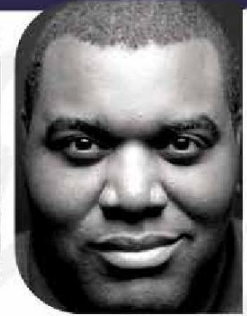
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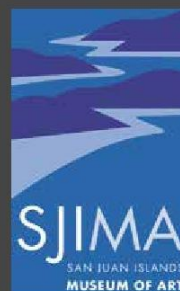
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