

The lights twinkle alluringly on the tree, reflected in the shiny bauble ornaments. The lull of age old carols play in the background, and there, beneath the tree are a few small parcels wrapped in worn brown paper, red and white ribbon holding piles of them together. They sit forefront under the tree, the small bulbs of colorful light at the base of the tree shining directly on them.

There are other gifts there too, hidden beneath the small packages wrapped in worn brown paper, but they are not as easy to see and the eyes are not as readily drawn to them. Many wandering eyes rove the glimmering tree, pretending not to care much about what lays under it, and yet those eyes pause, for longer than a moment on the small wrapped gifts.

“Mom, what’s in these packages?”

“Books.”

“Yeah, but what books? Whose stack is this? I can’t see the gift tag properly.”

“You’ll find out soon enough,” she replies with a slight chuckle.

The Christmas season is full of wonder, longing, and excitement for many as they celebrate in their own unique ways. There seems to be endless family traditions around the world from cinnamon rolls for breakfast to when and where people open presents, and, we, like so many other families, have our own family traditions that make our own celebration unique to us; from our quilted Jesse Tree, down to some of the very gifts we give.

We have many traditions that have lasted the test of time, and some that haven’t. For instance, back when my eldest was barely a year old, I made cinnamon rolls for Christmas breakfast. I had no clue many families hold it as a tradition, I’d simply been [reading a mystery novel](#), and the main character was a chef who made cinnamon rolls. The [recipe](#) made 12, supposedly, and I wanted to try it out. I continued that tradition until one of my son’s & myself were diagnosed with a gluten allergy.

We have other traditions we’ve grown and sewn along the way, some we leave off one year

in lure of another, and other years we indulge in all of them. Yet, there are some traditions in our home that are a constant. The first is that every year after Thanksgiving dinner our beloved [quilted Jesse Tree](#) is hung upon the wall. We don't start it until the last day of November, but we seem to always hang it on the same day.

We also have gift giving traditions. Years ago my family moved so far around the world, "if we keep going we'll be circling back!" or so the joke goes. It meant leaving most of our worldly possessions behind in a storage facility, the idea that movers would collect it and bring it to us down the road. As it turns out, the movers did not ever bring us our goods, and slowly, oh so slowly, over the years we attempted to replace some of those items.

Every Christmas there would be games wrapped under the Christmas tree. I spend far too much time looking up games, watching how they are played {because honestly} and drooling over some graphic artists's clever work to lure me into wanting to buy those pretty pictures.

Selections are made, and eventually a box full of games is zooming across the country towards our home. Over the years we've added many games to our collection. This year is no different, in fact there's a game under the tree right now that has become the butt of all jokes. Why? I purchased a game for myself and gave it to the others to wrap. This isn't abnormal, but for some reason it's really cracking the young adults up this year.

The other gift giving tradition that my family holds dear is the giving of books. Now, I know there's a fun little factoid, or meme, running around about the Icelandic word [jólábókaflóðið](#). The word meaning, book flood, relating to a supposed tradition that books are exchanged on Christmas Eve and the receivers stay in their jammies, lay in bed, and indulge in their books often while consuming chocolate.

I chuckle every time friends and family tag me when this factoid/meme pops up, it shows just how well they know me. I'm not Icelandic, and I didn't even know such a tradition existed, but there's something about moving around the world and not bring your home library with you, and finding that your local library is woefully understocked, and a huge love for books that inspired this tradition in our own home some fifteen or so years ago.

Now, admittedly, we don't give out the books on Christmas Eve, they are given out on Christmas morning, but given they are. Each year I buy my children a large stack of books, admittedly with the rising cost of books in our current location the stack has gotten quite a lot smaller, but still the stack remains an ever present gift.

Each book is carefully selected, purchased, and wrapped in brown paper. I've always wrapped the books in brown paper, and for that I have no explanation other than books are such a beautiful gift they don't truly need fancy alluring paper, do they?

I save the brown packing paper from packages all year long, I save the paper bags my grocery shop charges me .20 for, and when times have been desperate I save the flexible cardboard piece inside the wrapping paper tubes. It doesn't matter that the paper is wrinkled, and that some of it even has perforations along it. Each book is still individually wrapped in the well worn brown paper. When the entire stack of books has arrived the books are then tied together with a simple colourful ribbon. This is in part due to wanting the stacks to look alluring, but it also helps hold all the different sized books together in a stack!

A tag is placed atop the package, a bookmark is slid in under the string some years, and the stacks are carried to the lounge room, and placed under the tree. Sometimes I've selected books I've heard my children request, sometimes I pick books I've heard recommended, I might choose books I know are on a topic that will interest the reader, and other times I purchase books to help the receiver finish {or begin} a collection by a particular author.

This tradition is not limited to my children either. My husband will also find a stack of books under the tree, and I confess that I have bought him more children's books than adult books. There are no complaints though, and often those particular books are enjoyed by all, laughed over, mocked, reread, quoted at the oddest of moments, and are generally the best ever books for playing the game, *Bring Your Own Book*.

Yes, I even select a stack of books for myself. As my children have become young adults they attempt to intercept those particular selections as they come in, mostly because I've been known to sneak in a chapter or two before wrapping my own books. Guilty as charged.

This year's books help me towards completing my collection of Anne of Green Gables series. The books are here, and neatly wrapped under the tree, the children snookered me and did not wrap them in brown paper because I told them how I might need to get up in the middle of the night and unwrap *Anne Of Windy Poplars*. After all, despite knowing the ending of Anne & Gilbert's story, on this current read through its horrifically painful to leave them as I did.

Thus, to thwart my plans my children confiscated the book when it arrived, wrapped it up and have hidden it somewhere in which I'm not to know. At any point I'm left alone in the room with said book the youngest is sent back to make sure I don't hunt for it. To be quite fair, I think this is a ploy to make me believe the book is in that particular room, when I suspect it is likely hidden in the bottom of someone's closet.

The thing is, the book giving portion of our Christmas tradition is not just limited to ourselves either. When we have company for Christmas, the type that spends the night with us and awakes lingering back expecting few, if any gifts, they are always escorted straight to the sofa that has been turned to face all the excitement. They are told to sit down, and then their own small stack of brown wrapped parcels lands in their lap.

We have given books on cd to those who struggle to read or who have limited sight, we've given small paperbacks to those who have far to travel home again after the holidays. We've given favoured picture books to little visitors to introduce them to well loved friends. We have given audio books of well loved narratives with the most breathtaking orators reading. We've given the occasional ebook to those who prefer reading off a tablet or Kindle. Each guest may only have one or two books, but they too are brought into the book giving tradition.

There is such joy in picking out the perfect book for each person, especially for that non-reader in your life. To find that *one* book that will captivate them in words or picture. To find the long lost book one has spoken of with much love from their childhood, and told you over and over how they wish they still had a copy because it is now out of print. Or to simply introduce your children to books you once read and loved, and know they would too if they'd only dive into the adventure.

Helping a loved one complete a collection of books is simply breathtaking. Perhaps that's too strong of a picture for you, but truly it is! When you give a book it's like giving away a little bit of who you are, it gives insight to your thoughtfulness, the things that might make you smile or laugh or cry. When you hand a book to someone and say, "After much deliberation I think this one was the perfect fit.."

There's that moment of anticipation as they pull off the simple wrapping to reveal the cover, and you wait quietly to see if the title, cover, and synopsis are enough to lure them in. Or, if you're like me, you interrupt them while they try to take it all in with the reason as to why you bought the book for them, or your own memory from the book with lots of, "Wait I can't finish saying that or it will give everything away!"

Perhaps if you're incredibly naughty like me you might hand over a copy of *Murder On The Orient Express* and say, "Dad loves Agatha Christie books and so does Gram, I thought you might just love this crazy mystery. I won't tell you who did it, okay yes I will, it was everyone!" And the receiver raises an eyebrow, throws back his head and laughs.

Upon finishing the book he returns, hand on hip eyebrow raised, his foot tapping the floor, "You totally gave away the ending, and I thought you were joking!" Then he thrusts another book at me, "Here, read this, I need to talk about it and I can't say anything or I'll give the whole story away."

Truely, one of my absolute favourite traditions at Christmas is our book giving tradition. I'm currently as desperate to give my family their books as they are to know exactly which books I purchased. Will they love the choices? I think they will.

Now, if you'll excuse me I need to go hunt down where they've hidden *Anne's of Windy Poplars*.



Author's Note:

The night prior to posting this I was overcome with a horrific migraine, likely a mixture of too much screen time and a whacky weather pattern. I was frustrated by the situation because I was suppose to be putting the final edits into this very piece .

I was sitting in the dark on one of our sofas feeling rather sorry for myself when I heard a deep voice quietly ask, "So, what's in this package?" As I peered towards the direction of the voice I spotted a six-foot young adult laying on the floor under the Christmas tree.

He was holding a stack of books I'd neatly wrapped and slid under the tree a week ago. The excitement amongst my nearly grown children this year is quite amusing to watch, especially over the known books, but the unknown titles.

There was a complaint that I'd positioned the gift tags in just such a way they couldn't even tell who's stack was who's! It made me chuckle and climbed off the sofa and lay own beside the the child perusing parcels.

"I know which package is which, so it doesn't matter!"

"How can you possibly know that?"

"Because I know what books I bought for each of you."

He wasn't easily curtailed by that statement, and if it weren't the fact that I know he's a subscriber to this website, I'd actually tell you what books are hidden in brown wrapping for him. He's one of my non-readers, and choosing just the right books for him can be a real trick. He has a lovely collection of coffee table books, and believe it or not, he actually reads them!

Last night's unfolding scene that had us all in laughter finally gave way to the opening of this small piece today. I was stumped on a decent opening, and as is often the case a bit of laughter, a fresh look, and a migraine free moment have helped with just that!

The Reluctant Author

