



HOLIDAY FUN WITH THE REVERSE ADVENT

By Lorraine Payette

Advent calendars are old hat. Sure, the kids like candy every day, but most of them get in and steal it ahead of time, and it doesn't last. Instead, why not do something fun and meaningful for advent, start a new tradition, and make Christmas better for someone else at the same time?

Reverse Advent is a great way to put extra meaning into the season. First, find someone you want to help. Maybe there's a senior citizen down the block who is struggling financially, or a single parent who could use a boost, or someone who has lost a loved one and needs to be lifted up, or... There's always someone out there. Learn about this person, what is needed, and start from there. It is also a good idea to make sure they would be open to receiving such a gift – some people are not comfortable with the idea, no matter how much they might truly benefit from it.

Next, get a nice container and decorate it appropriately. Maybe some ribbons and greenery, a little tissue paper, whatever makes it feel festive. If you know the person well enough, look for something he or she would enjoy. Maybe tea towels would be a good choice, or small toys, or something else.

Every day of Advent, put something appropriate into the container. It can be non-perishable food items, clothing, toys, diapers, pet food, whatever would be appreciated

by the person you have in mind. Make sure to put in fun things as well as necessities – remember how much you hated getting socks and underwear when you were a kid? A senior might like puzzles or a couple of books, a single mum might like something for her kids, but also something special for herself like bath salts or scented candles. Be sure to put in something sweet if the person can enjoy it – a bag of special candies can put a smile on the saddest face. Coupons for goods and services like hair styling or foot care, donut shop cards, and magazine subscriptions are great additions to the collection.

It's amazing how much you can get together in 24 days – be sure your original container is big enough to handle it all. And remember, December 24 is the day you've been aiming at. Tuck in a cheery holiday note with an uplifting message about how much you want this person to have a wonderful time during the season.

When you make your delivery, make sure that the person is ready for it. Although it would be great fun to deliver everything anonymously, we are living in an era where that might actually frighten the recipients. You are far better off setting up a time with them that will be mutually convenient and letting them have a say in that part of the process. Make sure that the person you chose is able to receive the gift and help them get it inside where it can be best appreciated.

Whatever you choose to give and whomever you choose to receive it, reverse Advent adds extra meaning to the season. Instead of getting something for yourself, you are giving something from the heart to someone who can really use it, and that can be the best gift of all. **LH**

A nicely decorated basket of useful items is a fun way to celebrate Advent with people who could use a boost during the holiday season.

