

A HOLIDAY NOTE FROM ALYSON NOËL

As a kid, the holidays were always my favorite time of year, starting with the Halloween festivities of pumpkin carving and trick-or-treating. By the time Thanksgiving rolled around things really got kicking, and from that point on it was a non-stop whirl of planning my birthday party (December 3rd) and revising my Christmas Wish List (constantly adding new items I was sure I couldn't live without). The whirl always ended in a queasy, sugar-induced, bloated-belly hangover on January 2nd.

Later, when I was working as a flight attendant, I rarely spent Christmas at home. The year I left my job in order to write full time, I was looking forward to a nice, "normal" holiday with family. Sadly, my husband and I lost loved ones that year, yet as December began we couldn't help but feel incredibly grateful for what we still had, despite all we'd lost. We knew it was time to stop looking back and focus on what lay ahead, most immediately my niece and nephew's upcoming visit.

Wanting to give them the best holiday possible, my husband and I hit the mall, stocking up on all kinds of gifts they might like. But somewhere in the middle of all that shopping, we felt compelled to give thanks for our good fortune by giving to someone in need. And so, among the clothes and books and skateboards and iTunes gift cards, we made donations to Heifer International in each of their names. And then, we took it one step further and made donations in all of my family members names too.

I admit to being a little nervous when I handed over those Heifer envelopes, hoping they wouldn't be disappointed when they saw it was a charitable donation instead of the gift card they were expecting. But once we explained what it was, that a simple donation of honeybees can help a family to sustain themselves, allowing them to earn an income through the sale of honey, beeswax and pollen. The enthusiasm was palpable, and what started as a one time way to give back, has now become our family tradition.

You don't need deep pockets to provide hope or make a profound difference in someone's life; sometimes a kind word is all that's required. So this year, along with all of the usual books, and clothes, and electronics, and gift cards, I'm also giving hope to someone who needs it—and I hope you'll consider giving hope too!

Happy Holidays everyone and all good things in 2010!

Alyson Noël

