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## **ARTICLES & ACTIVITIES**

Written by Nicole Wall

### **You Too Can Be Organized For The Holidays!!**

"It's the most wonderful time of the year..." or so the song goes. But is it? Are you completely exhausted and stressed out beyond imagination once the holidays start? Maybe some organization can help you not be so stressed this year. December is typically a month crammed with shopping, entertaining, visiting, decorating, sending cards, cooking and baking. Being organized will help.

#### **GIFT BUYING**

Make a list. Write out a list of everyone (and I mean everyone!) you are going to buy or make something for and stick to the list. You can add people later if you feel you have forgotten someone. (You may want to invest in a small notebook available at the loonie store for 50c or \$1.) If you are giving the newspaper delivery person some homemade cookies, mark it down. If you are making a craft with the children for their teachers, mark it down. If you have some gift ideas, pencil them in also. This will give you some ideas when you are at the mall searching for the perfect gift that you remembered last Wednesday, but what was it again?

1. Set your budget. In your list, pencil in the amount you want to spend on each person. Then add it up and make any adjustments.
2. Make a list of things to do. Write out what baking you want to do, what crafts you want to make and what gifts you are going to make. Start gathering the supplies you are going to need to make these items. Divide the list up and ask family members to chip in. Dad can wrap. The older children can do some baking. The younger children can decorate cookies.
3. Start shopping now. Right now! There are already a lot of sales and the crowds aren't too huge YET... Mark down what you have bought for who on your list. Also go through your "hiding places" and write down those gifts you bought in January on your

list. There's nothing worse than finding your "hiding place" on December 26th full of gifts now for Christmas 2004!

4. Start wrapping. I know it's only November, but wrapping can become a HUGE job if it doesn't get done. Bring home your purchase, mark it on your list as bought and wrap it up. If you want to wait to do ribbon, that's fine, but at least put a sticky note saying who it's for. If you forget what it is, you can always check your handy-dandy notebook.
5. Stop trying to find the "perfect gift." Don't drive 50 kilometres to find "the perfect candlesticks" for Aunt Mabel. Think about gift certificates for hard-to-buy-for people. Wrap them in fancy boxes. Then the recipients can choose their own present after the holidays - often at reduced prices. Consider a magazine subscription or gift coupons for a massage or movie. Try catalogue shopping. Your purchases are generally delivered right to your doorstep. (See the Classified Section for more great gift ideas!!) Instead of a gift, spend time with that person. Have them over for a meal, go bowling, mini-golfing or to a movie together. You will remember the time spent together before you remember what you received for Christmas 2003.

*TIP:* Try to keep in the spirit of the season as you go about your shopping. Instead of whistle while you work, hum (a Christmas tune) while you shop!

## SOCIAL PLANNING

Inviting family and friends during the holiday season can be like scrambling to find a partner for the last dance at the school prom. To avoid disappointment, phone early. As for accepting invitations, don't overbook your social calendar. Don't accept every invitation. Leave some evenings free to relax and go to bed early. Avoid more than one event for the same evening. The "We'll try to drop in" syndrome can leave you clock-watching and running from place to place.

## GREETING CARDS

1. Prune your list every year. Eliminate people who haven't sent you a Christmas card in three years. It's the three year rule!

2. If you are running short of time, try copying a card that everyone in the family has signed. Personal messages aren't necessary in cards for people you see regularly.
3. Most importantly, start early. Do a few at a time. Pace yourself. Sending holiday greetings can be an enjoyable activity if it's done when you're relaxed and unpressured.
4. Get your children involved. Younger children love licking stamps and envelopes for you. Older children can help stuff envelopes and ask you questions about names they don't recognize. It can be fun to tell them about your best friend from high school or a special teacher you still keep in touch with.

## BAKING & COOKING

Baking for the holidays can be a big chore, but not if you are organized. You can organize a "Baking Exchange". This year I invited some friends to make some of their favourite baking with me. We have six in our group. We are each baking six dozen or 6 pans of whatever item we have agreed to make (agree in advance or you may end up with 6 dozen shortbread cookies!) and voila! My baking is done. We are doing the exchange early in December in case some of this baking is to be used as gifts. Cooking in December can become a major chore while trying to get everything else done. When cooking a meal now, double the recipe and freeze the extra. Then you can just throw that in the oven one night when things get out of control and you are still providing a well balanced meal for your family. Also, check out some frozen meals. They aren't great for every night, but will do fine in a pinch. Keep lots of fresh fruits and vegetables on hand for nutritious side dishes and quick snacks.

These are some ideas of how you can be organized and hopefully less stressed for the holiday season. There are about 30-plus shopping days till Christmas - use them wisely. There is no one quite so relaxed as the person who's done all their shopping by early December, has their tree trimmed, their house decorated, their cards mailed and their social calendar planned. They look so mellow and relaxed. Well, if you get organized now, that person could be you!