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Ethical shopping revisited

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Before the holidays, I made some suggestions of "10 ways for Christmas gifts to reflect your values [1]." Now that the tree has been recycled, the decorations are down and the thank-you notes are (almost) written, I wanted to revisit my own suggestions and evaluate how well -- or not -- I did at trying to shop in a more ethical way this year.

Although I didn't frequent as many small businesses as I would have liked (Idea No. 1), I'm happy to report that I succeeded in avoiding most big-box stores, including Target, Wal-mart and Best Buy. My personal boycott of Target was directly aimed at my displeasure over the company's decision to open on Thanksgiving Day [2]. I did, however, buy craft supplies at Michael's, which even beat Target at pushing back Black Friday to Thursday.

Speaking of craft supplies, I was able to make a number of gifts (Nos. 3 and 4). The kids made salt dough ornaments for their grandparents and godparents, and I made a dozen batches of homemade toffee. I also made Jesse trees [3]for two of my godchildren, baked homemade granola for my brother-in-law and sewed vintage buttons on cardigan sweaters for my sister and mom.

My crafting, unfortunately, meant a number of visits to Michael's and Hobby Lobby, which I will be avoiding in the future because of the company's lobbying against gay marriage and refusal to provide contraceptive coverage [4] to its employees. (They do, however, provide Sundays off.)

One of my favorite gifts this year was to "steal" a ukulele my father had acquired that needed fixing so he could start playing it with some friends at a local library. I took it to a small business that fixes stringed instruments and surprised him with a restrung and otherwise refurbished ukulele. In one sense, I was giving him an experience (No. 2).

He and my mother, in turn, gave me a great experience: tickets to "The Book of Mormon" here in Chicago and some money for dinner out and a babysitter. Thanks, Mom and Dad! We also received a membership at Costco, which is a big-box store that treats its employees more fairly. And our children received some ducks that were donated to a needy family through Heifer Project [5] (No. 8).

Our 4- and 5-year-old received plenty of toys, though perhaps comparatively we were relatively restrained, spending less than $100 on both of them. A couple of their gifts came from either the thrift store or secondhand bookstore (Nos. 6 and 7). My parents and in-laws also are receiving gift subscriptions to *NCR*, and my husband gave books to his siblings (No. 6).

Overall, while we weren't perfect, our family did make an effort to put our money where our values were when it came to holiday shopping. One of my resolutions for the new year is to try to keep it up and find a new place to buy craft supplies!

How did you do with your Christmas shopping this year?

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Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/news/people/10-ways-christmas-gifts-reflect-your-values
[2] http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/going-cold-turkey-black-friday
[3] http://spiritualknitter.blogspot.com/2006/12/amys-jesse-tree.html
[4] http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/12/28/1174404/-Hobby-Lobby-to-defy-courts-over-contraceptive-ruling-and-impose-religious-views-on-workers#
[5] http://www.heifer.org/