

## The Greatest Gift

○ The best presents can't be wrapped, nor sometimes quickly grasped. By Edie Morgan

**We've developed a tradition in our house at Christmas.** Every year the kids ask for a Wii, and every year they don't get one. This isn't because we're the meanest parents in the world (though on some days we'd get two votes). This is because my husband and I share a theory about presents: We believe the greatest gifts have two things in common: First, they are legitimately needed ("needed" being a relative term, of course); and second, they inspire the gift-receiver to get outside, rather than stay inside.

Because of our family's shared obsession with skiing, this theory holds particularly true for Christmas presents. What's not to love about comfy new ski

**DAD PICKED HIS ONE TRADITION WELL. SKIING ON CHRISTMAS DAY IS MORE THAN PARADING AROUND YOUR NEW GEAR.**

boots, flashy new skis, a stylish warm coat or your very first GS suit—all things that have been under our tree at some point. Inevitably, Christmas Day comes and goes without any disappointment other than the fact that it's over.

I will say, though, that it would be much more convenient if Christmas were on, say, Thanksgiving, when the ski season actually starts rather than a month later. It would be kinder, too. The Christmas my oldest son graduated from ski-swap ski boots he was overjoyed and

even somewhat surprised to discover the exact pair of bright blue Langes he had tried on a month earlier—the ones he had fantasized about every time he had to cram his feet into too-small boots earlier that season. I felt bad about the pain, but he got over it.

Likewise, it killed me to see my youngest son start every season in his brother's outgrown, battered helmet and look longingly at the kids with pristine new head gear. But when he unwrapped his first very own helmet, a glittering blue masterpiece with matching goggles, the suffering was forgotten.

I'm the only one who suffers every year, as I try to stand firm on our practical gift-giving policy despite the relentless pull to join the pathetic parental ranks who stand in line for the "G.I. Joe-with-the-kung-fu-grip" of the moment.

I continue to do this despite my own shamefully familiar experience of buying expensive (and almost immediately abandoned) trendy gifts for my kids—despite the greatest gift in my childhood memory: a green puffy down coat.

I was 12 the November I first saw it in our local sports shop, and every day after skiing I visited it to pet it and try it on. When one day the saleswoman gently informed me a man had bought it for his daughter I was devastated, and still really cold in my outgrown parka. My parents said nothing, though I'd like to think they



agonized over my grief. When I opened my big present on Christmas Day, it was as if I'd rediscovered a long lost friend.

But the best part was yet to come. My family was a little loose on observing any holiday that affected their ski time—and even Christmas Eve was flexible some years. But we had one steadfast Christmas tradition. After the last box was opened Christmas morning, Dad herded us to the mountain. "The best skiing of the year is on Christmas Day," he'd remind us. "Nobody gets out there early." So we abandoned the debris in the living room and hit the slopes, green coat and all, to enjoy Christmas together.

Dad picked his one tradition well. Skiing on Christmas Day is more than parading new gear. It's about being with your people. Every face on the mountain glints with a similar look that is equal parts wonder and joy at being able to do this sport, in this place, *together*. It took me a bunch of years, two kids and a little maturing to get it, but the "we" of skiing is the greatest gift we can give our kids.

Even better than a green puffy coat. ●