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Elf Help

THE CALLS USUALLY COME in around the 22nd of December. As I sit by the tree wrapping a gift, or perhaps am mid roll-out of Gingerbread men cookie dough in the kitchen, the phone will ring, piercing the holiday bubble, and serving as a call to arms. I look at the caller ID, only to confirm my suspicions. These calls are expected each year and are ones I am prepared to answer. They come, usually within a day or two of each other, from my brothers-in-law, Aaron and Jerry, married to my two older sisters, Shannon and Courtney, respectively.

“Hello,” I say as I tuck the phone between my ear and my shoulder, continuing to work on my task at hand. “Hey Blythe Jane,” comes the voice on the other end if it is Aaron; “Hi Blythe!” is the salutation when it is Jerry. The greetings may be slightly different, but there is one reason and one reason alone for these calls: they are activating the elf help system.

Elf help is the term used in my family when my dad or one of my brothers-in-law, men who steer clear of retail establishments in general, need help finding gifts for their wives – in this case, my mom and sisters.

Last year my elf services were rendered in a group setting: Aaron, Jerry, my niece, Molly, a junior apprentice elf; and I gathered together on the 23rd of December. In his 4WD and with his Wisconsin-winter background, Aaron, with Molly in tow, braved the snow-engulfed roads to pick up Jerry and me. We headed downtown, where a throng of other shoppers who had recently escaped their snowed-in homes was out in full force. We had one afternoon for them to find the perfect gifts.

We decided to divide and conquer. I left Molly to monitor her dad, while I took Jerry for a little one-on-one elf help. He knew he was after jewelry, but he also wanted to find some clothing for Courtney. I took him into the first store and let him peruse on his own. He walked toward a mundane silk blouse and lifted it up to momentarily examine it. I flinched, instinctively reaching to hold him back, but realized this was supposed to be a learning process. I was relieved to see him back away from the blouse, letting it slide back onto the hanger, and move toward a beautiful red merino wool sweater. “Yes!” I thought, bursting with elf pride as he reached for what I deemed to be an excellent choice. He picked it up and said “I really like this...is it okay?” I was so proud; years of lessons were starting to pay off. “It’s fabu-

Editor’s Letter



lous,” I said. One purchase down, we headed toward the next shop.

It was soon time to rendezvous with Molly and Aaron. We found them in the jewelry department of another store. When we got there, Aaron was well into the search process. He looked up as we came over. “What do you think about this?” he questioned, pointing to a beautiful necklace he had picked out and which the sales clerk had displayed on the counter. I sighed; here too, years of elf help were paying off, and he was making wise decisions when it came to gifting. I realized soon they will no longer need elf help, but will be certified elves themselves.

If you could uses some elf help of your own, turn to page 63 for our annual Holiday Gift Guide, full of great gift ideas from local retailers.

Finding the “perfect gift” is not what I enjoy most about my role as an elf. What is so fun and keeps the tradition going is the chance to spend time with my family and help them find a gift that showcases their love for another. It reminds me of what is truly important in life.

Likewise, I realize that what goes under the tree, whether it is *to* you or *from* you, is not the most important part of Christmas. The chance to be with family, to celebrate the joy of the season together, and to rejoice in the good news proclaimed on that first Christmas morning is what means the most to me.

My wish for you is that this Christmas your inner-elf will shine, helping you and your loved ones rejoice in the spirit of the season!

Blythe