



**SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCE PROJECT**

*e-newsletter*

# Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

Feeling stressed over the holidays? Visit some of these sites for some helpful tips that will keep you from "tearing your hair out".

<http://www.fleetcare.com.au/index.cfm?objectID=D7E92AB5-F203-0EC4-A2BB725039EB15E8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g5Z1HG5Bkjc>

From SNRP to your family, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

If there is anything that is not discussed in our newsletters and you would like to see it discussed, or you would like to be added to our newsletter mailing list, please contact us at [snrproject@hotmail.com](mailto:snrproject@hotmail.com)

## Avoiding the "Christmas Crazies"

By Linda Jorgensen

We love the Holiday Season at our house but it can often be hectic and downright crazy. Our everyday household routine is already a busy one and, given some special needs, unpredictable which can make the added activities of the Holiday a bit stressful. Especially if something unexpected occurs. We'll use Christmas 2008 as an example.

Early last year my husband and I decided that we really enjoy relaxed holidays, could have a wonderful Christmas on a budget, prepare a bit earlier and we could be a bit more thoughtful and even "greener" in our approach. We made some goals, set a budget and decided to do early preparation so we could enjoy the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas without the rush. Turns out this planning session was a great idea.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2008 our daughter landed in the hospital with a potentially life threatening medical condition. Of course everything at home came to a standstill while we spent every minute of the next 4 days at the hospital with our daughter. Christmas could have been a disaster but because we prepared early and had set limits the holiday, while a bit different, was still enjoyable and memorable. We were able to weather our daughter's health crisis and still enjoy our Christmas without any last minute rushing around to shop or complete last minute errands. Last year's strategy worked so well we're following it again. This time, crossing fingers and knocking on wood, without the trip to the hospital.

### Our Strategy

To begin with we reviewed the holiday past and made notes. I have a notebook we use as our holiday planner and with my husband we jotted down all the things that did, and did not, work for us. Likes, dislikes, traditions to keep, traditions not to keep, things we enjoy, budget and spending, favorite activities etc. Once we had our list we then prioritized it, weeding out the things we no longer wanted to keep.

We then set a goal to have the majority of our Christmas preparations completed by the first week in December. We want to enjoy the holidays, not fret through them.

Next we set a budget. We included ALL Christmas related spending from postage stamps to how much we wanted to spend on gifts, food, entertainment and household décor. We figured how much we had spent the year before and using that as a basis set a budget for this year.

We pared that number down by quite a bit. Gift shopping can occur throughout the year as long as we stick to our list. A favorite place to find terrific stocking stuffers and specialty items is the hospital gift shop. Given that we visit at least one hospital a month, if not more often, it can be easy to find small, inexpensive items to tuck away for later. We use our Christmas club account to purchase these items, making sure we keep a list of what we have (and where it's tucked away!) so we are not over buying. By the time we get to December, most of the stocking stuffers have already been purchased. Best of all, the money we spend at the gift shop generally goes to support charity programs at our local hospital.

We reviewed our Christmas club account. We've had this account for years but we could be more efficient in how we use it. We set a monthly amount to be automatically withdrawn from payroll deposits each month. We decided we would try to use as little of this account as possible, going "homemade or home grown" where we can. Any leftover funds would be rolled into next year's savings enabling us to decrease monthly payroll deposits into this account while still enabling us to have the dollar amount we need when the Holidays roll around.

Once the budget and savings accounts were decided we made a Master list beginning with the gift giving. Fortunately I keep a list from year to year in my day planner so we could see what we had been giving and how much we had been spending. We decided this year we would be more thoughtful with the gift giving. Not just to give but to make the receiver's life easier or bring moments of true enjoyment. Neighbor gifts were "simplified and healthified". We made salsa late in the summer with produce from our garden. Neatly wrapped and packaged with a bag of tortilla chips they make terrific neighbor gifts. Not quite the usual plates of candy or cookies yet still something that can be used during the Holiday season.

The next item we reviewed was how we spend our time. With a busy therapy schedule it's easy to wear family members out with all the added possible activities we could attend. It was decided we needed to limit outside functions. Not spend so much time dashing about that we feel like we've rushed the holidays away but keep the activities we truly enjoy. It was important to schedule quiet time at home, allowing for adequate rest and time to complete other needed

activities. Visiting family and attending the obligatory unit Christmas party was on the must-do list along with jingle jaunting, attending a production of the Nutcracker Ballet (a family favorite) and several nights to watch Christmas movies at home. At least 3 nights per week were "blacked out" or reserved for home time only. These nights generally fall on the same day as physically draining physical or occupational therapy sessions, allowing everyone an evening to recuperate.

The last item we discussed was decorating the house, both inside and out. It was decided we really only need to put up the decorations we truly love and enjoy. Outside lights would line the roofline, a wreath would hang on our front door with two more over the carriage lights on the garage. No need to compete with Clark Griswold. Simple will do.

The décor inside the house was inspired by a Christmas copy of *New Zealand Home & Garden* magazine sent to me by a friend living in New Zealand. Browsing through it we noticed it had a lighter decorating style that we like. A tree, stockings, nativity and a few other small decorations were all that was needed to make for a cozy and festive atmosphere without adding extra clutter and decorating time. Not only that but many of the items used in the photo shoots are items we already have on hand for everyday use. I just needed to change how I've been using them. This approach allowed us to complete decorating the interior in only a few hours, instead of the usual few days. The house is uncluttered but still very festive. Less, in this instance, really is more.

By making a plan and sticking to it we've managed to create a Holiday we can truly enjoy. And if, for some reason, we're interrupted by one of life's unexpected events we're prepared and ready, no matter what comes. Leaner, greener, more thoughtful and relaxed. We're really enjoying this!

