

# Season's Greetings



RECORD  
Supplement  
December 2009

# Best wishes from the Musée

Sherbrooke, Tuesday 8 December. During the Holiday Season, the Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke invites you to see or see again the exhibitions Mario Merola and Hairstyles and Fashion in Québec. Portraits of Women, 1790-1860. The Musée invites you also to discover the new presentation of its permanent collection: Espaces et paysages, made possible by a grant from the ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine.

**Holiday Schedule:** The Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke will be opened on 22, 23, 27, 29 and 30 December and 3 January, from noon to 5 p.m. Back to the regular schedule on Tuesday 5 January 2010. And, please do not forget to visit the museum's boutique for the last minute and perfect gift: original works from the Townships artists, including paintings, drawings, photographs, jewellery and pottery, something for everyone! The boutique's schedule is the same as the museum's. Happy holidays!

## HAIRSTYLES AND FASHION IN QUÉBEC. PORTRAITS OF WOMEN, 1790-1860 (UNTIL 10 JANUARY)

The Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec is proud to present this introduction to the art of hairstyling and fashion between 1790 and 1860 based on a selection of full-scale portraits and miniatures from its collections. Silver and gold pieces, jewellery, photographs and furnishings provide a bridge between the works by giving visitors a glimpse of the public and private spheres inhabited by the sophisticates of that era. A visitors' booklet, published in English, will enable you to grasp all aspect of the fashion of the era.

## MARIO MEROLA (UNTIL 17 JANUARY)

This exhibition relates the many facets of the career of this artist: drawings, paintings, reliefs and sculptures. Born in Montreal in 1931 of an Italian father and a Québécoise mother, Mario Merola studied at the École des beaux-arts of Montréal and in 1952, he re-

ceived a scholarship from the government of France which enabled him to enrol in scenography at the École supérieure des arts décoratifs in Paris. On his return to Montréal he became a regular visitor to the Atelier de la place des arts and in 1954, he joined the Société Radio-Canada, and for three years worked in costume design for the newly emerging sector of television. In 1956, Mario Merola took first prize in a national competition for the development of a mural for the Canadian Pavilion at the Brussels World Fair. This marked a turning point in his career. For more than twenty years, he produced murals, reliefs and sculptures for public spaces, and showed his work both in Québec and abroad. He has been a member of the Royal Academy of Canada since 1977.

The Musée des beaux-arts de Sherbrooke, 241 Dufferin Street, is open Tuesday to Sunday, from noon to 5 p.m. Entrance fees: \$7.50, adult, \$6, senior, \$5, student. Guided tours in French every Tuesday at 2 p.m. English tours and group tours available anytime upon



COURTESY OF MBAS

reservation. The Musée is supported by the Ministère de la Culture, des Communications et de la Condition féminine du Québec and Ville de Sherbrooke.

## 1906: First Christmas Broadcast

By: Matthew Farfan

Reginald Fessenden (1866-1932), a native of the Eastern Townships, was the first person in history to send wireless broadcasts of voice and music.

Fessenden was the inventor of the

sonic depth finder and wireless submarine communication. He held over 500 patents. Born in Brome County in 1866, he spent much of his youth in Ontario. A gifted child, Fessenden excelled in mathematics. At the age of 10, he watched Alexander Graham Bell demonstrate the telephone in Brantford, Ontario. Fessenden studied Bell's work and dreamed of transmitting the human voice without wires.

Fessenden enjoyed a brilliant academic career at Trinity College School in Ontario, and Bishop's College in the Eastern Townships. At the

age of 20, he was hired by the Thomas Edison Machine Works. He later taught electrical engineering and furthered his research in wireless communication. Yet few of his contemporaries (Edison included) shared his view that broadcasting voices was possible. Radio at that time was limited to Morse code.

While working for the U.S. Weather Bureau, Fessenden transmitted radio's first voice message from an island in the Potomac River. It went like this: "one, two, three, four, is it snowing where you are Mr. Thiesen? If it is, would you telegraph back to me?" Thiesen, a kilometre away, responded, and radio broadcasting was born.

Fessenden's breakthrough was marred by patent disputes - a problem that would dog his entire career. And despite his successes, his colleagues questioned his theories. Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of wireless telegraphy, believed that sound waves were

created by a spark that caused a whiplash effect. Fessenden argued (correctly) that sound waves continuously rippled outward, like water when a stone has been dropped into it.

In 1906, after years of experiments, Fessenden was finally able to demonstrate radio's great potential. On Christmas Eve, in Boston, he transmitted the very first yuletide broadcast. Wireless operators on ships in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean heard him play "O Holy Night" on his violin, read from the Bible, and wish them all a Merry Christmas.



MATTHEW FARFAN

In 1987, Canada Post issued a stamp honouring Reginald Fessenden.

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## Bombardier: Townships visionary

By Matthew Farfan

It is thanks to an Eastern Townships man that winter is as much fun as it is for thousands of people across North America. The man in question is inventor Joseph-Armand Bombardier; his invention, the Ski-Doo.

Born in 1907 and raised in the village of Valcourt, Joseph-Armand was the eldest of eight children. Like most young inventors, Joseph-Armand was a natural tinkerer. His favorite pastime was to spend long hours taking apart and re-assembling machines of every imaginable kind. Before the age of twenty, Joseph-Armand opened a garage in Valcourt, servicing the growing number of cars and trucks that were appearing on local roads. When he wasn't fixing cars in his workshop, or raising his family of six children with his wife Yvonne, the young mechanic experimented with machinery.

Like much of Canada, the countryside around Valcourt was buried under a thick blanket of snow for much of the year. Snow storms, poor roads, and miserable driving conditions hampered vehicular travel for several months each winter. It was within that context that Joseph-Armand Bombardier began to dream of building a vehicle that could travel with ease through the snow.

Over the years, Bombardier experimented with numerous designs, testing various types of snow vehicle. In 1937, he perfected his "B-7," a 7-passenger, tracked vehicle. He patented the wheel and track mechanism that he would later use in most of his other snow machines. At that time, Bombardier also founded his company, L'Auto-Neige Bombardier.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Joseph-Armand Bombardier continued to perfect his snow vehicles for use in forestry and other industries. In 1959, he launched his famous "Ski-Doo," the personal snow machine that would spawn a whole new winter sport. Bombardier, who died in 1964, lived to see the success of his snowmobile. And in the 50 years since the launch of the Ski-Doo, Bombardier's company has grown to become one of Quebec's largest, and snowmobiling has increased in popularity by leaps and bounds.



MATTHEW FARFAN

Bust of Joseph-Armand Bombardier at the Bombardier Museum in Valcourt

## New adventures for the family

By Jen Young

Soon enough Christmas bells will be ringing, meaning kids will be off school and parents will be wondering what to do as a family. Eastman's Magali Halt, co-owner of Nordik Aventures says this year is shaping up to be a perfect season to introduce the family to dog sledding.

"I find it sad that most of the people who dog sled are outsiders, not people who actually live in Quebec," says the dog sledding business owner, who anticipates her third winter. "It makes for a great day with the family. You go out for a 50-minute ride in the fresh air and come back, visit with the dogs and enjoy a hot chocolate. It's a great way to experience our Quebec winters."

While local ski resorts are less than satisfied with the late coming of white stuff, Halt says that the season is not late and dog sledding trails will be open come Dec. 26.

"We're waiting for more snow and for the temperatures to get colder so the lakes freeze," says Halt, who runs the business with her husband, Bastien Lefebvre. "Last year we started on Dec. 26 and that's usually when we start but if the colder temperatures come sooner than we will open earlier. We'll be ready for the holidays for sure."

The couple began with 15 sled dogs. Some of a malamute and husky mix, but most of the pure bred husky breed.

To date, they have 49 dogs, 40 that are used for sledding - each sled uses eight dogs - and nine puppies that Halt says will all be kept for the pack.

Huskies are an active, energetic and resilient breed whose ancestors came from the extremely cold and harsh environment of the Arctic.

Siberian Huskies were bred by the Chukchi of Northeastern Asia. The dogs were imported into Alaska during the Nome Gold Rush and later spread into the United States and Canada.

They were initially sent to Alaska and Canada as sled dogs but rapidly acquired the status of family pets and show-dogs.

Halt, a true blue animal lover, and Lefebvre, who was always fascinated with dog sledding, opened the business

three years ago and she says word of mouth has really paid off as business has grown considerably.

Sledding excursion costs \$70 per adult and only children over the age of 10 are permitted and have a 20 per cent discount. Only two individuals can occupy a sled and each excursion can accommodate eight people.

Each ride includes a tour of the facilities and dogs and hot refreshments.

The only thing Halt says is necessary is "layers of clothing to keep warm."

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# I'll be wired for Christmas

By Matthew Farfan

Just about everything these days seems to depend on the dictates of fashion: cars, sunglasses, underwear... Christmas decorations are no exception, because that colourful kitsch that we love to deck our homes with every December (and I'm no different) seems to change every year.

When I was a kid, there weren't a lot of choices. Basically, you could put up a crèche, or maybe a string of lights. The lights came in two sizes: big and small. Sometimes the bulbs were multi-coloured; sometimes they were all one colour; sometimes they flashed; sometimes they didn't. The only dilemma people had was whether they should line their windows and eaves for the straight, symmetrical look, or whether they should go for the irregular look and put their lights on their shrubs.

Also popular were the fake candles you could put in your windows - or at least the windows the neighbours could see. These gave the appearance of an old-time house before the advent of electricity. When we bought our house, we found a huge box of these candles in the basement - one for each of our 14 windows. What a pain to find plugs for them all!

Back in the seventies, they came out with strings with hundreds of tiny lights. People soon discovered that the whole string was useless when one bulb was broken, and no one could bother taking the time to figure out which light was broken, because they were all dark and how can you tell which one is no good when they're all dark? So they just threw them away

and bought new ones. This was the dawn of disposable Christmas lights.

Then there were those illuminated plastic Christmas characters: Santas, Mrs. Clauses, Rudolphs, elves, snowmen, and those big red candles that always toppled over in the wind. For those of a more religious bent, there were Baby Jesuses, Mary and Josephs, and entire crèches. Plastic glowing crèches were great because there was no maintenance. There was no straw.

A few years ago, hanging "icicles" were all the rage. Every second house had them. It seems no one has them now. Did people store them in their basements until they come back into style, I wonder. Or did they just chuck them out when they saw that everyone else on their block had them?

And then there were those shining stars that you had to stick to the top of your house, the ones with the long string of white lights leading up to the star. These must have been quite a hassle to put up. Most of them seem to have gone the way of the icicles.

At some point, someone thought of attaching an electronic music chip to a decoration. Now passers-by could be treated to synthetic Christmas carols coming out of a flashing penguin. If they weren't too irritated at having their peaceful stroll in the snow interrupted by the noise, they could hum along.

I think my least favourite of all recent Christmas innovations are those humungous inflatable figures, the ones that have to be pumped full of air. It seems to me they're not only way too much work, but they also look really gross when they're flat on the ground with the air seeped out.

I guess it all just depends on taste. What stuff you put out. How much of it. Does more look better than less? Is too much too garish? But then again, let's not kid ourselves: it's always fun to outdo the neighbours, isn't it?



MATTHEW FARFAN

*Nutcrackers, Stanstead*

## I promised myself I wouldn't do this again ...

By Claudette Mortimer

At the end of every holiday season, I promise myself that next year will be different. Next year, I will be organized and I will make a list. Next year, I will start my holiday shopping in August and finish by November. Next year, I'll really get my act together!

With the holiday season upon us, chronic last-minute shoppers like me are more frazzled than festive. Thoughts of holiday shopping make you want to hibernate for winter - you're frustrated, short tempered and would rather do anything but lug your winter coat through a busy shopping mall.

Despite last year's holiday resolution, if you find yourself delaying the inevitable holiday shopping expedition, here are some helpful tips on how to ease the burden of the gift giving blues:

**Easy Photo Ideas** - You know that shoe box overflowing with childhood pictures hidden in the back of mom's closet? Well, get in there and rescue it to create a present that is sure to please. Visit your local photography store and create a scrapbook, photo album, calendar or digital slideshow highlighting both old and current photos.

**Give the Gift of Time Together** - Think outside of the box and create an experience for someone that caters to one of their passions.

If you have a musically-inclined father, purchase a guitar lesson for two at the local music store.

For your sushi-loving partner, book a Sushi 101 cooking lesson at a culinary school or Japanese restaurant and learn to how to make California rolls together.

**Gift Card to the Rescue** - If a hip pair of jeans tops your daughter's wish list, but you don't know how they'll fit, consider packaging a Visa gift card with a photo of the latest denim trends so she can pick out whatever style and size she wishes.

The Visa gift card can be used wherever Visa cards are accepted, which makes your gift completely versatile. And not only are they more festive than giving cash, they're more secure because they are covered by Visa's Zero Liability policy. Visit [visa.ca/giftcard](http://visa.ca/giftcard).

With a little creativity, even last-minute shoppers can succeed at giving thoughtful, practical holiday gifts. With a little ingenuity, you will surely find something to delight even the most difficult person to shop for on your list.

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# Perfect Gifts for that special someone

**T**he holiday season can be a hectic time, especially when it comes to picking out gifts. No matter what the occasion, have fun finding that special gift for that special someone this Christmas:

**FOR YOUR MOM**

Put some thought into your gift for mom by keeping it meaningful and simple. This year, why not try spending time with your mom, making her dinner, watching a movie together or reminiscing about your Christmas memories. If you want to really impress her, try making a scrapbook of all your favourite times together. This is sure to be an endearing Christmas gift she will never forget.

**FOR YOUR DAD**

Look into things that your dad enjoys- hockey, gardening or cars. Maybe it's the latest electronic gadget he has been eyeing, like an MP3 player, a new set of golf clubs or tickets to see his favourite music group.

**FOR YOUR WIFE OR HUSBAND**

Be creative and think of things that he or she would appreciate. A night on the town might be something they would love, or perhaps taking them to a day spa for a relaxing afternoon, maybe even attending a sporting event. It could



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be something as simple as treating them to dinner and a movie. Why not think about gifts they will appreciate rather than the traditional socks and a sweater?

**FOR YOUR KIDS**

Children love having options, so this Christmas why not give gift cards? A gift card can be a great gift especially

when the interest of the person is kept in mind. Your children might want video games, clothes or even CDs for Christmas. Why not give them the pleasure of choosing that they want this Christmas?

**FOR YOUR GRANDPARENTS**

Make a donation to your favourite charity in the name of your grandpar-

ents. It's a meaningful way to express your love and help make a positive difference in the world. The World Vision Gift

Catalogue ([www.WorldVision.ca/gifts](http://www.WorldVision.ca/gifts)) offers great gifts such as school supplies, warm clothing, medicine, and even items like piglets and bunnies. It will leave a legacy that your grandparents will truly appreciate and will always remember.



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# Toys of 2009:

By Corrinna Pole

For most kids out there, the best thing about the holidays hands down is the presents that seem to show up miraculously overnight. As they rip into the paper, unravel the ribbons and bust open the boxes, they don't think for a moment of the work that went into getting their presents.

The adults however know exactly what lengths have been reached to get the simplest of presents. They also know full well that kids are inundated with advertising around this time of year telling them what they want, even if they don't really want it or will toss it to the side a few minutes after it's been opened.

No wonder toy purchases can be a strain. But have no fear, we've taken care of some of the work for you and to save you the hassle of trying to make your way through crowded stores we used a 31-year-old parent and an 8-year-old child to test out what retailers consider their "hot" toys of this season.

### \$25 AND UNDER

Due to the economic slowdown, many toy retailers are responding to the quickly sagging shopping spree spirit by promoting products that are less expensive but still provide a pretty good bang for the buck. This

year's price point has been determined to float around \$25, a very attractive number when you have to buy for more than one person.

**LPSO (Littlest Pet Shops Online) Pets.** (SRP (Suggest retail price): \$17.99)

If you haven't heard of LPS's where have you been all year? These adorable mini pets with wiggly heads have been the "IT" toy for many little girls. LPS's started out as tiny pocket pets, then came the play sets and now LPSO's which are cuddly plush animals that transport children on a virtual adventure.

The LPSO's come with a secret code, hidden in the pet, that unlocks a secure online world - <http://www.lps.com> - with virtual pets. If you've heard of VIP's (Virtual Interactive Pet) they are similar except the LPSO's have funky designs, live in more of a three dimensional world than the flatter digital world of the VIP's, and participate in an online community with other pets.



### Verdict:

LPSO Pets got a huge nod of approval from both subjects while the parent did add a suggestion that the website make the move to include a feature for parents to limit their kids online time as some other sites are doing.

Both also agreed creating an account and playing the game for free was great. Test subjects were polarized when it came to the "premium membership" option (prices vary from \$6.95 a month to \$57.95 for 12 months).

The parent felt that once the toy was purchased that should be the end of it where the child argued that it "only cost a little bit of money."

Something to consider is that kids will have the fun and funky plush pet in hand but may hound you to upgrade their account to have more online fun.

### BOP-IT! (SRP \$19.99)

Making its return to the toy market this year after its introduction in 1996, the BOP-IT's look has been updated and players are even more challenged. The device features three tricky new levels that can be played by one or more players. The game calls out an action that the player must react to quickly in order to advance to the next round. BOP-IT also features a party mode that has players use a body part such as elbow or head to "bop" the device.

### Verdict:

The parent was quickly reminded that reaction time declines with age while the kid was thoroughly amused throughout the game play at watching an adult attempt to make it past three commands. Our kid subject greatly enjoyed the game but said it would be more fun played with others and not themselves.

If buying this for just one kid you may be better off looking for something else but if you know they will play with others, or their parents for added entertainment value, the BOP-IT is worth the reasonable price tag. Note that adults who are not in touch with their inner child may start inventing excuses to get out of potential family game nights. Amusement value seems high.

### \$50 AND UNDER

**Etch A Sketch Freestyle.** (SRP: \$25-\$30)

A new twist on the old Etch A Sketch, the Freestyle version allows kids to not only draw lines but also create circles and curly-Qs. The controller allows for much more freedom of movement with a 360-degree radius and like the original product you shake to erase. As an added bonus, the Freestyle comes with a screen that can be traced and more pictures, games and mazes can be downloaded for free at [www.etchasketch.com](http://www.etchasketch.com)

### Verdict:

Both boys and girls will enjoy this toy. It comes in pink and red, and the parent added that long car trips might be quieter if the freestyle comes along. Our creative kid tester really enjoyed making all kinds of patterns on the unit. The Freestyle is fairly easy to cart around as its roughly the size of a novel. We couldn't really find any cons about this item. It's simple to use and keeps kids, and parents, occupied. We still can't figure out why the Canadian distributor, RPT Limited couldn't give us a more specific suggested price, but overall it seems like a well invested gift.

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# Hot or Not?

## Busy Ball Popper (SRP \$34.99)

For little ones ages 9 months and up, Playskool's Busy Ball Popper is a brightly coloured game adorned with cute characters. Kids drop the balls down the spiral track and when they reach the bottom they are popped back out of the top using air to do it again. Babies can chase after balls that pop out of the toy. Toss in silly sound effects and eight lively songs and this is a cute toy for babies and toddlers.



### Verdict:

The popper passed the parent test for amusement and entertainment value but received a low grade for the price, volume, battery use and the fact that balls popping out could get easily lost or stepped on. This toy is one that should be thought on before purchase. On the great side, the 11-month-old test subject we found to give it a go loved the popper and had fun dancing to the music and chasing delinquent balls.

## Gormiti Mountain Playset. SRP: \$39.99

Manufactured by Playmates, Gormiti seems to be a fantasy based miniatures card game loosely comparable to such games as Magic the Gathering using Manga-inspired characters. Figures and cards battle it out and there is an online aspect.

Frankly this toy baffled the parent and kid testers so we took it to a more experienced fantasy game player. The expert said the concept was actually quite simple and good for building basic math skills since numbers on the feet of characters and on the cards lend to the game play.

The fantasy world and back-story, Gormiti are groups of tribes who are battling the evil Magmion and his followers over the mountain and the Island of Gorm, encourage imagination.

On the negative side, there are too many additional characters that would need to be purchased to continue playing and the amusement value may be short lived.

"It could get boring quickly because once you know the creature and card values you already know whether or not you can defeat your opponent."

The play set aspect even baffled the expert who felt it had little to do with the game itself, not adding structure or rules but only providing eye candy. It's a large volcano with passages, traps and hiding spots

perhaps elements that are very entertaining for young boys.

Game play instructions were easy, far too easy, leaving little structure and uncertainty. Our expert added that this may be a good game for younger kids with vivid imaginations who may be able to expand upon the basic concept on their own. It is aimed for ages 4 and up.

### Verdict:

Gormiti only seems to appeal to a very select audience. It's not worth it unless the child your gifting this to is really interested in this type of game.



## FisherPrice Ocean Wonders Aquarium (SRP \$49.99)

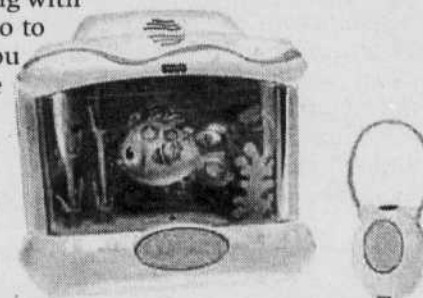
Advertised as being able to sooth baby to sleep, the aquarium features calming lights and sounds as fake fishes and seaweed gently sway with the "tide". One of the best features was the remote allowing a parent to activate the aquarium from outside the room.

Since it was designed for infants, we located a

week old baby girl instead of our kid tester. The infant seemed fascinated with the gently moving objects and appeared relaxed. The parent loved the aquarium but mostly adored seeing a calm quiet and distracted baby.

### Verdict:

If you have an infant this product should make it on your wish list, however try and figure out if it will fit on your crib first. Attaching the aquarium to the crib can be challenging so don't try it if you're easily frustrated. The biggest con we could find was again the batteries, which may not last that long with regular use, also to replace them you need to remove the device the crib.



## Season's Greetings

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# Some are worth every penny ...

By Corrinna Pole

Even though they exceed this year's \$25 price point, there are still some gifts that are worth that little extra, especially if you don't have that many kids to buy for. Here are our three favorites, two of which have particularly interesting back stories.

### Fisher-Price Kid-Tough Digital Camera (SRP \$59.99)

This preschool appropriate (ages 3+) rubberized digital camera is durable and easy to use. The camera features a 1-inch LCD screen that kids can use to take their shots or they can use the binocular like viewfinders. It takes four AA batteries and a SD card, which surprised us on a toy, the card allows kids to snap even more shots.

Picture quality is a different matter, it is a VGA resolution camera so shots are rather poor but considering most preschoolers are taking pictures of the floor

and their toys, this camera, which may be a little more toy than camera, is a great purchase for aspiring shutterbugs.

One warning, the toy is noisy. There are sound effects with every action and they can't seem to be turned off.



### Verdict:

Kid tester took a bunch of low-grade photos and was very proud of them but did complain that the camera was a bit heavy after awhile.

The parent cringed a bit at the price tag before stating that it was a small price to pay to keep little hands away from more expensive real digital cameras. Both testers were quick to suggest a dozen kids who would love to receive the camera under their tree this year. The camera narrowly slides into our "worth the extra" category because the pros definitely outweigh the cons here.

### Furreal Friends Zambi the Baby Elephant (SRP \$59.99)

A robotic baby African elephant, Zambi responds to voice and touch, trumpets, wiggles his ears, curls his trunk around your finger and blows kisses. Just on his own the pachyderm is precious. But it's the story behind Zambi that is perhaps the most appealing.

Project Zambi is a global cause initiative started by Hasbro employees who were inspired by the Chikumbuso Women's and Orphans' Project in Zambia. With the project, Hasbro aims to raise awareness and funds for support programs to help care for the estimated 15 million children orphaned as a result of the AIDS epidemic in Africa.

The company has pledged to give 50 per cent of the net profits from the global sales of the special edition Fur-Real Friends (a minimum of \$500,000 in U.S. dollars) to the Project Zambi Fund.

Soft and cuddly, Zambi features a special fabric pattern on

his ears and feet that has been designed by children from Zambia who have been orphaned by AIDS. A bracelet also accompanies the toy.

To learn more visit [ProjectZambi.com](http://ProjectZambi.com)

### Verdict:

Get one! Zambi is cute and the background cause is wonderful. When the parent saw this toy they were immediately enamoured. The kid tester was not able to put Zambi down since his "personality" was immediately apparent and appealing. The only con that could be thought of was the battery use but it's a fair trade for such great animatronics. Note however that Zambi is not designed for younger ones because of all his parts.

### MapleLea Girls (Doll \$99.99, accessories vary)

For girls ages 6 and up, MapleLea Girls are high quality dolls with detailed sculpting that come with interactive journals that help create their individual personalities and teach kids more about the diversity within Canada.

Take Jenna for starters. She's from Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, has red hair, loves sports and plays the fiddle. Then there is the newest doll Léonie of Quebec City. This bilingual cutie plays guitar and flute, loves birds and her favourite sports are hockey and snowboarding.

The dolls are excellent role models for easily influenced young girls. As the company describes on its website:

"The Maplelea body is a realistic physical representation of a 10-11 year old girl and all accessories and storylines are appropriate for girls age 6 to 12+. Maplelea does not encourage your daughter to wish away her childhood, longing for the day she is older, nor does it encourage her to role play scenarios appropriate for teens and adults."

Everything about the dolls is Canadian, except their manufacturing. According to the company there are no vinyl doll factories in the country

Award-winning Canadian company Avonlea Traditions Inc. launched the dolls in 2003 and now has five characters, the company hopes to launch a new one every two years. The product line also includes separate accessories sets, doll furniture and matching clothing for dolls and girls.



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# ... some are just plain tacky.

**Verdict:**

Our parent tester was "blown away" by the presentation of the doll, which came in a beautiful blue box, and the quality. We could pick on the price to death, yes \$99 per doll is a lot, but with the high quality, positive message, and developed identity we think the price is well worth it.

The kid tester was captivated with the new friend and loved holding her as they read the journal together. In fact our kid tester couldn't put the doll down and we're glad we left this one to the end because we couldn't get her to look at anything else once she met her new friend.

The only con is that Maplelea Girls can only be purchased through the company - on-line, by phone or by mail - so these dolls need to be ordered ahead. But Kathryn Morton, President of Avonlea Traditions Inc., assured us that the company has a two working day turn around time and shipping to Quebec is 2 to 4 days. Express Shipping and FEDEX are also being used so the company will be taking orders until the last few days before Christmas.



Of all the toys that were reviewed this year a few stood out as really not worth it, mostly due to the toy's playability coupled with the price tag.

**Rocky the Robot Truck**

The first is Matchbox's Rocky the Robot Truck. Although the promotion point of interactive sensors bringing him to life sounds totally incredible, and he talks, dances and interacts with kids with jokes, in reality he seems bulky, overpriced and too noisy. The eight-year old wasn't interested, so we tried him out on a 4-year-old boy, closer to the age 3 and up grading. The little boy seemed more interested than the 8-year old and had a few hours of fun but ended up getting quickly bored and opted to play with blocks. At the SRP of \$86.99 poor Rocky has been relegated to the "If it was on liquidation I might buy it" pile.



**Little Mommy Baby Ah-Choo**  
Although cute, the Little Mommy Baby Ah-Choo doll has a somewhat

creepy element to it. Aimed at children age 2 and up, Baby is very stuffed up, squeeze the doll's tummy and she sneezes, she needs mommy to help her get better with the interactive thermometer, "medicine", measuring spoon and box of tissues.

Our 8-year-old test subject couldn't wait to get her hands on it. To the parents prediction, the child enjoyed it for approximately an hour and a half before putting baby to bed for the night and four days following.

At the suggested price of \$42.99 it simply doesn't seem like a good purchase unless your child is really into playing mommy roles and is good at developing an identity for the doll on her own. Baby Ah-Choo really lacks personality.

**Disney Fairies Tea Kettle Play Set**

Manufactured by Playmates and distributed by RPT Limited, the Disney Fairies Tea Kettle Play Set (SRP \$30-\$35) starts out as a teakettle but turning the kettle lid pops it open to reveal the rooms Tinkerbell lives in.

Simple and cute but not a lot of wow here. Our test kid loved the fairy aspect and Disney association. Our parent quickly pointed out the small figure of Tinkerbell that seems predestined to disappear into the couch or anywhere else. The toy is marketed for ages three and up. The packaging also seemed to pitch products that were not included in the box. As any parent knows this leads to little voices nagging for more and many parents tend to avoid purchasing products in that kind of self serving packaging in the first place.



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# Furoshiki: Japanese cloth wrapping

By Corinna Pole

Saving money and being eco-friendly have taken on a new importance when it comes to holiday gifting but often it's thought that the two don't really go hand-in-hand.

When it comes to gift-wrapping they can if you learn Furoshiki, also known as Japanese wrapping cloth.

Wrapping paper is fairly inexpensive and easy to use but it's short-lived and ends up filling up the trash. Many papers can't even be recycled. Then there is the trick of getting the wrapping to look just right, something that requires in-depth training for some, and the use - or overuse - of tape.

Furoshiki uses one piece of fabric to wrap your gifts, there's no tape, just knots and it's a fun reusable way to make a present stylish and unique.

Furoshiki - pronounced like "fu-rosh-ki" and meaning "bath spread"- originally came about as a way to bundle clothing together when using a public bath. The practise, or art, has since spread to bundling, carrying, and containing practically anything.

The beautiful cloth used to wrap a present can also be used over and over again. Furoshiki's popularity also grew because in some areas of Asia, the wrapping of a gift is more important than the gift itself.

The Japanese government is so proud of the sustainability of the product that their Ministry of the Environment created a furoshiki cloth to promote its use

in the modern world and they have posted a visual guide online ([www.env.go.jp/en/focus/attach/060403-5.html](http://www.env.go.jp/en/focus/attach/060403-5.html)) with instructions on how to wrap all kinds of gift items.

The practise is fairly simple but can get very elaborate with experimenting. This reporter read two sets of instructions and was able to wrap one gift immediately.

### MAKE YOUR OWN

To create your own furoshiki materials, visit a craft store and pick fabric to your liking. You can use practically anything - cotton, silk, nylon or rayon, - as long as the fabric is not too thick like denim. Sizes also vary as long as it's square.

- Fold the edges under 1/4 inch to the backside or "wrong side" of the pattern. Press, then fold, the already-folded edges under another 1/4 inch and press again.

- Mitre the corners by unfolding each corner and trimming the corner edges diagonally across the lower fold line. Fold this new diagonal edge under 1/4 inch then press. Fold under 1/4 inch again and press.

- Lastly, top-stitch around the entire edge of the square.

If you don't want to bother making your own material you can use sheets, square scarves, bandanas or the like.

### EASY FOUR-TIE METHOD

For this example we will assume you have approximately one yard of fabric in

a square shape.

- Wash your material and press it so there are no creases or wrinkles.

- Lay the fabric out flat place the present in the middle.

- Fold over two opposite corners and tie them together in a square knot.

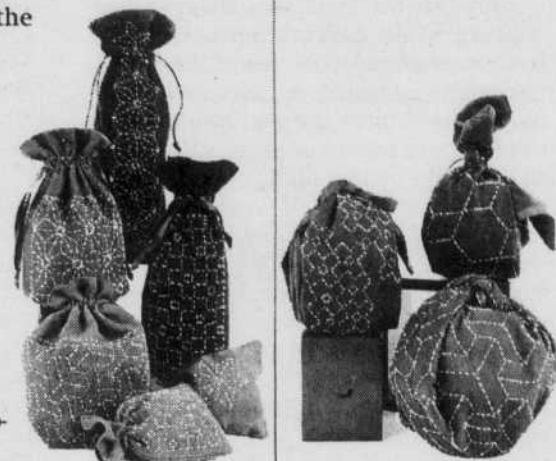
- Fold the other two corners over and tie another knot on top of the first.

There you should be done!

One of the best things about Furoshiki wrap is that it comes in handy in many ways throughout the year. If you find yourself short of shopping bags?

Take a square of fabric, you may even be wearing it as a scarf or shawl, and three knots later you can carry your groceries home.

You can also use the technique to make nesting bags for knick-knacks or connect a few bags together and toss kids' toys into them. By the way, they also make cute hand or shoulder bags.



There are endless possibilities once you learn the technique and there's also no shortage of instructions on the Internet. So search furoshiki and get crafty.



**Merry-Christmas from all of us!**

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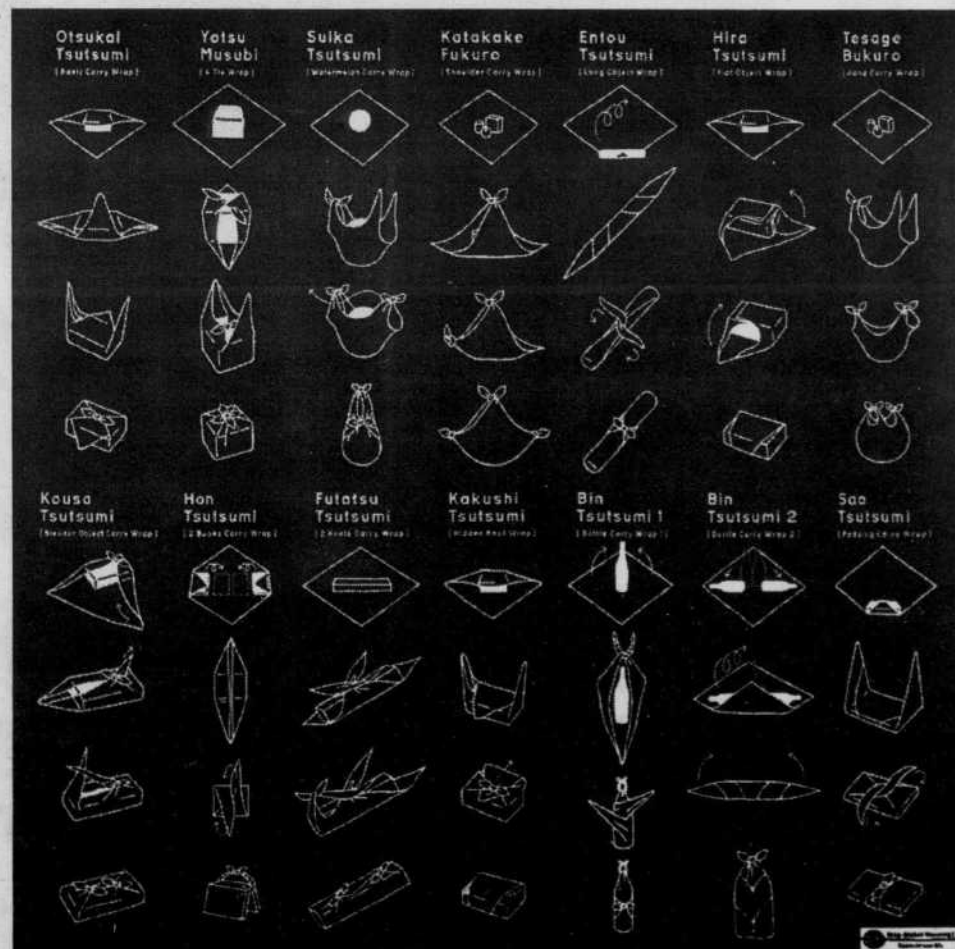
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How-to guide to several Furoshiki wrap-ups

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# Christmas on the farm

By Claudia Villemarie

Going to 'the farm' was always an adventure. We're talking here about the first years after WWII. Rural life hadn't changed very much yet, electricity hadn't ventured onto the winding country roads where a strip of grass still graced the middle of the road, culverts were often just a few small logs stacked to form a tiny bridge, other occasionally wet spots were filled with round stones, easily crossed by horse-drawn buggies or wagons.

Life was simple. And when leaves began their final, floating fall, country folk settled into a routine that left plenty of time for outings in the family sleigh or pung, (a larger sleigh on wooden runners with an open, rectangular box where kids could dig into straw or hay, cover up with buffalo skins and stay warm for the trip).

Kitchen parties didn't take fancy planning or written invitations and the ties of friendship and neighbourly support were tightened during those long winter evenings.

My first and only recollection of just such goings-on was probably during wartime. We lived in Sherbrooke, a city of just over 30,000 at that time. Getting to 'the farm' meant a train ride from the CNR station downtown, leaving when it was just hinting at daylight in the eastern sky.

Huffing and puffing, the steam engine, towing of course, the coal car, baggage cars where milk cans glistened in the growing light and, most times, two or three passenger cars, filled with good-humored folk, quite a few in military uniform, and, as Christmas and the New Year approached, quite often, those chilly, grimy passenger cars rocked with song and laughter.

My only memory of the only actual Christmas Eve and day spent on 'the farm' with Ma and her hired man, Dan Smith, began with just such a train ride.

Bundled into a woolly, one-piece snowsuit that made walking in anything more than an inch of snow almost impossible, sleepy and fearful, Mom would tug the family suitcase, an elongated contraption of leather and frayed

straps, with me warned to not let go of the hem of her coat, (I was very short), we would struggle into a taxi and set off for the train station.

We traveled to 'the farm' by train quite frequently during the winter months during the years when roads were not plowed and family vehicles, if you were lucky enough to own such a thing, were stored away 'til spring.

This early-morning train was the one every one called 'the milk train'. There were stops at tiny stations along the way where teams of steaming horses stood patiently while full cans of milk were loaded and empties returned to the waiting sleighs.

This train was invariably late and would set the telegraph and Morse code tapping frantically long before Mom and I would arrive at the station called Gore, a mile-long echoing climb out of the Richmond rail yard.

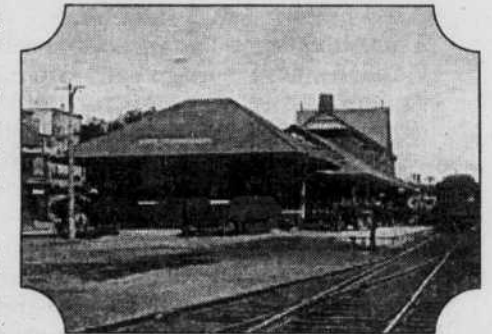
But the reason for its slow progress was due more to the sociability encountered at each stop than the weather, although snow and drifts could make train schedules less than useful.

This time, excitement was at full pitch. The prospects of Christmas at 'the farm' with Ma, my grandmother, stirred up visions of a country Christmas where I would be allowed to keep a fall kitten

in the house, where I could check up on my favorite calf, the one I had played with in the summer and hopefully, where a country Santa would have no trouble finding me in the old farmhouse, standing alone on a stretch of drifted road where traffic was, for the most part non-existent.

I remember wondering at the irregular circle of heavy hardwood with the hole drilled in the middle during those summer days.

It was always in the same place, under the windowsill in the shed. Finally, I would realize this was the Christmas tree stand, a slice from the stump end of a huge maple, tugged into the 'parlor' every year, a freshly cut balsam tree, the stump end trimmed and tapered, forced into that opening.



PLEASE SEE PARLOR PAGE 14

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# Season's Thievings

By Corinna Pole

As shoppers storm the stores to make their holiday purchases, thieves are also readying to seize the opportunity that comes with increased financial transactions.

To guard against identity fraud and theft, there are a few precautions you can implement into your shopping routine.

- Try and remain alert to your surroundings

- When paying with a credit or debit card keep the card in your sight and swipe your card yourself, when possible.

- Do not leave your receipts at bank machines, bank wickets, in trash cans or at unattended gasoline pumps. Bring them with you and shred them when they are not needed.

- Do not write your PIN numbers or your social insurance number in your wallet or hand bag.

**ONLINE SHOPPING:**

- If shopping online, only do so from your home computer and not a shared

one.

- Visit retailers' websites by typing in the address into the web browser instead of clicking on links in an email or web ad.

- Make sure you are using a secure connection. Do not enter any financial information on a site if you see a broken key or open padlock symbol on your Internet browser.

- Complete key or locked padlock symbols indicate a secure transaction.

- E-mail messages are not private, do not send confidential personal or financial information this way. Instead trust secure order forms on a website.

- Avoid spam by guarding your email address on and off line. You can also protect your friends when you forward emails by removing the addresses from the body of the text and sending to multiple recipients by putting their email addresses in the Bcc line.

- Monitor bank and credit card statements online so you can get an instant fix on what's happening in your account. If you see discrepancies report them immediately.

- For payments consider using an escrow company (reliable third party) a credit card with a low credit limit or a single use payment card.

**OTHER TIPS:**

- Secure your mail by taking it out of your mailbox as soon as possible and do not leave letters lying around.

- Destroy pre-approved credit card applications, credit card receipts, bills and such information when they're no longer needed.

- Keep personal information such as your SIN, date of birth, credit card numbers, or PIN to yourself. Never share it over the telephone or email.

- Criminals often use mail or telephone solicitations disguised as promotions to obtain personal information in

exchange to collect a prize. Don't fall for it.

It is ok to be a Scrooge with your personal information. If you feel you've been victimized by a scam or a fraud report it immediately to the local police.



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**PARLOR:**

The 'parlor'.  
Now that was the inner sanctum of any decent farm home. The least used and most cared for room in the house, where the minister and his wife would be entertained. The farm parlor was off limits most times. The piano and old pump organ would never quiver with anything but quiet, sedate selections, the flickering light of the oil lamp casting long shadows in forbidden corners and pale, yellow light on the tattered sheets of music.

The door was left open Christmas eve, the tree, with homemade paper chains, garlands of popcorn and wild cranberries, a few precious ornaments, stood tall and proud, a crinkled star gracing the top spike. There were no lights and no tinsel.

But to me it was pure magic. Small gifts, wrapped in tissue paper saved from past Christmases, the smooth surface showing its age much like the weathered face of the farmer carefully opening his gift, were most always hidden in the tree branches.

That old hardwood base provided a hiding place for a kitten or two with perhaps one or two larger gifts laid out there too.

That Christmas memory, with hand-knitted mitts and a small truck my only gift, has never faded. The night before, I remember being lulled to sleep with the pungent smell of the oil lamps mingling with traditional spicy aromas of mince pies and roasting chicken, and being tucked into the cozy warmth of a feather-bed warmed with hot bricks wrapped in homespun pieces of wool

blanket - there was no television -



radio. Certainly no cell phones or ipods.

The phone was attached to the wall, the receiver hanging at the side, the mouthpiece part of the phone box and when it did ring, someone was sure to pick up that ear-piece and listen a moment or two, just in case a neighbour needed a helping hand or there was a bit of gossip humming along those old wires, often strung on top of fence posts.

But there was popcorn and ribbon candy, quiet conversation at the kitchen table where the lamp, (I still have that oil lamp) made a circle of light.

Outside, the pines, spruce and balsams sighed in a gentle breeze, and, that year, my imagination was enhanced by the possibility I would see Santa in the silver light of a full moon.

Breakfast was the first order of any day and Christmas was no different.

First things first meant bundling up,

climbing the usual snowdrift out of the shed, struggle to the stable where animals impatiently waited for their first feeding. Even here, there were no frills. Watering troughs were often frozen solid by morning, so all the cattle were turned out to the watering trough,



hand-hewn log, where spring water flowed constantly.

Horses were included in this exercise and invariably, there would be a playful twirl around the barnyard after ice cold water had gurgled down long necks, cooling animals from the inside out and motivating a few quick maneuvers before heading back into the stable.

In the house, lean salt pork, sliced and frying would be sputtering in the hottest spot on the woodstove, potatoes browning with onions in their own pan, homemade jam and freshly churned

butter to spread on bread fresh from the oven and, topping this Christmas breakfast, a warmed apple pie twas ready.

Then, as dishes and cream separator were washed and scalded, floors swept and everything put in its proper place, THE moment finally arrived.

Finally, the 'parlor' door was opened again. Gingerly, Ma, Mom, old Dan and I perched on the lovingly polished and dusted furniture. Softwood floors were swept clean, the favorite dust squelcher dried coffee grounds, always found in a small dish in the stove's warming oven.

We hardly dared move in this inner sanctum where only parsons and their wives would eventually be ushered. Mom began gently moving branches on that wonderful tree, finding (or making believe she was surprised) the meager gifts so long awaited.

It didn't take long before wrappings were carefully folded, ribbons smoothed and everything cleared away, ready for the usual carol-sing, Ma's quivering, gentle voice, rising to the challenge of O Come All Ye Faithful and Hark the Herald Angels sing.

But hunger pangs and the aroma of roast chicken with all the trimmings cut the music a little short. It didn't take long to set up the Christmas dinner table.

Homegrown chicken, potatoes, carrots and squash, pickles, perhaps a bit of applesauce made from winter apples that had been wrapped individually in precious tissue paper earlier in the fall and of course, mincemeat pies and Christmas plum pudding.

Shadows lengthened early this memorable day in my life.

Filled to the brim with good things, too tired to tumble through the snow to the stable for nightly chores, barely able to sit quietly for my grandmother's blessing before the final meal, much the same as Christmas dinner, they trundled me off to that warm nest where, for a very few minutes, I could watch the shadows of those singing trees play across the frosted panes, once again lighting up an imagination that pictured the sleigh ride to that tiny station at Gore where, tomorrow, Mom and I would take the evening train back to the city.

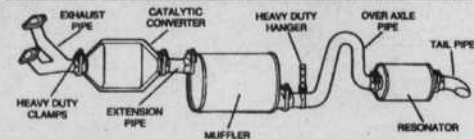
That was my magical Christmas, something like the Polar Express movie we see these years.

Did I believe in Santa Claus? Did I believe we had celebrated Baby Jesus' birthday?

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Season's Greetings to all!

# The indomitable Sarah Hoblyn: Musician & Choir Director Extraordinaire

By Heather Patterson

**T**hirty years ago, I was one of a ragtag group who first gathered at Sarah and John Hoblyn's house in Georgeville to rehearse the music for the first annual Festival of Lessons and Carols under Sarah's direction. We called ourselves The Occasional Choir, and joked that the title meant that we occasionally hit the right note. Sarah was fresh from England, where she had won top prize at London's Guildhall School of Music, and had gone on to establish a highly successful singing and teaching career. However, the credentials that stood her in good stead in England were not recognized in Canada. Undaunted, she started, among other ventures, a local choir in the village of Georgeville.

As most of us know who have gone through the Canadian public educational system, music education in our schools is not a high priority. Many of the choir members at that time, myself among them, had a minimal knowledge of music and singing. Shocked though she must have been at the paucity of our knowledge, Sarah was not to be discouraged. She threw everything she had at us, while we sat, open-mouthed, doing our best to pretend we had some inkling of what the heck an arpeggio or a diminuendo were, and how we were supposed to figure out all those circles and tadpoles on the paper and read the words at the same time. But Sarah's enthusiasm and high expectations were contagious, and slowly, very slowly, we began to catch on. I'll never forget those first few times we started to feel the music, to hear the whole and astounding sound we created as a group. It felt like magic; it was Sarah's magic.

And now, this Sunday, December 20th, at 4 p.m., the Georgeville Occasional Choir will be performing the 30th edition of Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, an event—that has become a Georgeville tradition. Now a large, enthusiastic and well-versed choir—about 30 singers from near and far—they will treat us with the songs first performed by the choir at a Christmas 30-years past.

Sarah's way of directing choirs has changed over the years, become less formal. Now, she says, "I direct the choirs mostly by the seat of my pants. The im-



HEATHER PATTERSON

Sarah Hoblyn doing what she does best.

portant thing is to inspire the singers to really feel the music—I use my face and body to convey passion." This is not an exaggeration; when Sarah Hoblyn directs a choir, she is the essence of the music from head to toe. From her facial expressions of encouragement, dismay and delight, to her body, leaning and swaying like a willow tree in the wind, to the expressive movement of her arms and hands—she draws forth the best the choir has to offer.

Since its inception in the 70s, the Georgeville Occasional Choir has taken on challenges that would have been unimaginable then. The choir has sung Gabriel Fauré's Requiem at the Abbé St. Benoit, and Karl Jenkins challenging piece about war, The Armed Man, a Mass for Peace. They have performed jazz and spirituals and The Wind in the Willows, the story interspersed with music by John Rutter.

The Junior Children's Choir was started about 10

years later; after that, a choir of very young children called The Joyfulle Noyse QuinesterQuiristers, who really do omit a joyful noise, and sometimes even a recognizable tune. "We're never too young to start," says Sarah. She has also given individual piano lessons to many children. Her work with children has allowed them to learn the joys of singing and has expanded their musical horizons.

Apart from directing choirs, Sarah has had a long career in teaching individual singers.

CONT'D ON PAGE 17

## Season's Greetings!

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# Tipplés to give - and to get for yourself

By Nick Lees  
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

There comes a moment during every festive season when sitting down and enjoying a favourite tipple brings perfect peace.

If you're looking for a gift and know the recipient's taste, there is that special bottle that makes the perfect gift. Place it under the Christmas tree or carry it to a dinner party.

A sparkling bottle of wine cost only \$10 and is always a good way to make an event sparkle. If you're spending a little more for connoisseurs, it's good to know their taste.

Here are suggestions in a few popular categories.

- Coffee liqueur

Kahlua Mocha, \$33. A new flavour in the Kahlua family of premium liqueurs is the deep, caramel-coloured Mocha. It's made from a blend of 100 per cent Arabica coffee, natural vanilla, and dark chocolate from the finest cocoa beans. Kahlua and

milk over ice is a popular drink. Or throw in a splash of vodka and a lime wedge for a Mochatini.

- Single malt scotch

Macallan 18 Year Old Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky, Speyside, Scotland, \$189.99. Many whisky connoisseurs consider this to be the Rolls-Royce of single malts. It's the colour of rich, burnished mahogany. The balanced aromas suggest dried fruits, ginger and cinnamon, with a wisp of smoke.

- Bourbon

Bookers Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whisky, U.S., \$76.99. For serious bourbon drinkers. It's made the way bourbon used to be made, straight from the barrel, uncut and unfiltered. It's 126.7 proof. Complex flavours of vanilla, toast, caramel and fruit. A hint of tannin and smoke in the finish.

- Limoncello

Zanin Limoncello, Italy, \$34. A lovely, soft, refreshing drink loaded with the taste of Italian lemons. It's perfectly balanced between fruit and acidity. It's a good sipper and a great cocktail base. A splash can make a dessert exotic.

- Orange liqueur

Grand Marnier Louis Alexandre Liqueur, France, \$74. This liqueur, created in 1880 by Alexandre Marnier-Lapostolle, is a kind of triple sec made from a blend of true cognacs and distilled essence of bitter orange. It's a higher-end Grand Marnier and best enjoyed after dinner. It's a golden-amber colour and has an aroma of sweet dried orange rind and mild spice.

- Ginger liqueur

Domaine de Canton French Ginger Liqueur with VSOP Cognac, \$63.99. Golden in colour, 28 per cent alcohol by volume and packaged in a bamboo-shaped bottle, this liqueur can be served on the rocks, in a ginger martini or used as a cocktail base.

- Chocolate cream liqueur

Gianduia Bottega Chocolate Cream Liqueur (Alexander Grappa Base), \$27.99. This chocolate cream liqueur is made by mixing grappa with liquid Gianduia chocolate, milk and fresh cream. It belongs to the old tradition from Piemonte made with hazelnuts. A great dessert.

- Gin

Many people's idea of a good cocktail is

a straight-up martini with a lemon twist. And they have their own favourite gin. Any real gin-martini drinker will enjoy a bottle of distilled-and-bottled-in-Scotland Hendrick's Gin (\$44). This is a unique gin with flavours of coriander, juniper, citrus peel and cucumbers.

- Cognac

Camus XO Cognac, France, \$149. Each Cognac house has a style, and this award-winning blend of more than 150 fine cognacs from four top districts is always appreciated. It's one of very few XOs to include a high proportion of Borderies cognacs. A fruity nose has hints of prune and hazelnut. It's full-bodied, a balanced sip of nutty flavours with hints of vanilla.

- Icewine

Paradise Ranch Riesling Icewine, VQA, Okanagan Valley, B.C., 2008, 375 mL, \$35. A great buy, it's loaded with flavours of apple pie, apricot and honey, with a delicate finish of tropical fruit and peach. It comes in an elegant box created from salvaged B.C. pine-beetle "blue" wood. Enjoy as a liquid dessert or pair with desserts and cheeses.

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# The Tao of Bow

By Derek McCormack  
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

There's no need to wrap a Christian Louboutin purse in Christmas wrapping paper: The purse itself is wrapping. "Cadeau" is the name of a clutch that Louboutin's selling this season. It's decorated with what the designer calls a "cadeau bow." Made from silver or gold leather, the bow is star-shaped, like the ones people put on presents.

Bows are big. Michelle Obama affixes ribbon bows to the neckline of her dresses. Maison Martin Margiela creates Christmas bow bracelets and rings from metal. Lanvin's accessories line is full of gorgeous grosgrain ribbon bows. And Style.com recently tutored readers on the proper way to wear dresses with bows. What does it mean, this new ubiquity of bows? That sometimes a gift's packaging is as important as the gift.

"At Christmas, we offer holiday red and classic white ribbons" says Andrea Hopson, vice-president of Tiffany & Co., Canada. "It's the finest satin ribbon. I have heard many times of women ironing the ribbon after they receive it, and keeping it."

Packaging, Hopson explains as she sits in a salon in the Tiffany store in downtown Toronto, is part of the Tiffany experience: The allure of the robin's-egg blue box is sometimes as powerful as the contents it conceals. Customers collect the boxes; those who cannot shop at the store, she says, have been known to Dumpster-divine in search of them.

"The anticipation of a gift is as important as seeing the gift," she says. "Women get excited when they see the Tiffany box, and when they untie the bow." Tiffany's blue box is famous; the Tiffany bow almost as much so. "The client is part of the presentation process," she continues. "The item is placed in a blue suede pouch, then put into the appropriately sized box. Then it's tied up in ribbon, all in front of the customer. The bow must be perfect, or the associate will start again with fresh ribbon."

A Tiffany bow is special, because it requires no knot. Greg Mark, a sales associate at Tiffany & Co., shows me how to tie one. Mark pulls the ribbon taut across the bottom of the box, then crosses it at the centre of the box's top. At the cross, the ribbon should lie as flush as possible to the box and be dimpled like a properly-tied neck tie. He loops only one end of the ribbon under the box again, then brings it all the way back to the top, and crosses it again. He forms a loop



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in one hand, and another loop in his other hand, then ties them loosely, cutting off extra-ribbon with extra-sharp scissors. He passes the box to me. The bow is perfect. Not too large, nor floppy. I pull at it. It falls apart without a fuss. A knot would wrinkle the ribbon. It would make it difficult to undo the bow. Tiffany & Co. doesn't want to vex its clients at the very moment their presents are about to be unveiled. "I would say that two out of three clients choose the red ribbon over the white at Christmas," Mark adds.

Like all Tiffany sales associates, Mark studied their signature bow-tying techniques at an intensive training session when he started with the company. Tiffany offers no wrapping paper; the blue box and beautiful bow are eye candy enough. That bow has since been translated into objects Tiffany sells: bow-shaped charms on bracelets, bow-shaped pendants on necklaces, replicas of the Tiffany Blue Box in porcelain -and for Christmas, bow-shaped crystal ornaments. The store also sells a charm in the image of its shopping bag: a souvenir of shopping, a memento of money spent.

Gift wrap is democratic; Tiffany and Christian Louboutin have turned it into something else. The practice of wrapping Christmas gifts in pretty papers became popular during the Great Depression of the 1930s. People who couldn't afford to buy pricey presents could buy trifles, and prettify them with paper. For most Canadians, this is still the purpose of wrapping paper.

Sometimes gift wrap is important for other reasons, too. For the Salvation Army, it's the gift that keeps on giving.

"Tight corners," declares Major Sophie Gilbert of the Salvation Army, when I ask her about the most important part of wrapping gifts. "Corners must be tight, with sharp creases. Use your creative juices."

National Post

SARAH HOBLYN

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Sarah has taught for 15 years at Bishop's University, where professional and aspiring singers came to her aspiring to every field of music—from jazz, to rock, to opera and liedertlieder. Vital to her voice lessons are proper warm-ups. Serious damage to her vocal chords in 1993 taught her the importance of caring for the voice; she has developed a number of very effective vocal warm-up exercises. Not only professional singers, but students from the Bishop's Drama School came to her for voice lessons, establishing a connection between the drama and music departments. Sarah is remembered at Bishop's for the impeccable quality of her teaching, for her many recitals with pianist Tom Gordon, and for her highly contagious enthusiasm.

"Music is what I live for," says Sarah. "I love it so much, I want to share it with everybody."

Singing, she believes, is the ultimate in communication. "The words are as important as the music. The sound of the voice is like a filament between the singers and the audience. The benefits of singing are enormous. It expands the mind and body, helps your breathing, your sense of rhythm, and gets you out with like-minded others. I feel truly privileged to share music and the joy it brings to people."

Apart from her awards in England, Sarah was named an OutstandingTownshipper for her contribution to the education, promotion and expansion of choir music in the Eastern Townships. For those of us who live here and love music, Sarah Hoblyn's work has made a remarkable difference. So many of us have had our lives enriched by Sarah's passion for music.

Come early Sunday, December 20, for the 4:00 performance of Festival of Lessons and Carols. Seating is limited.

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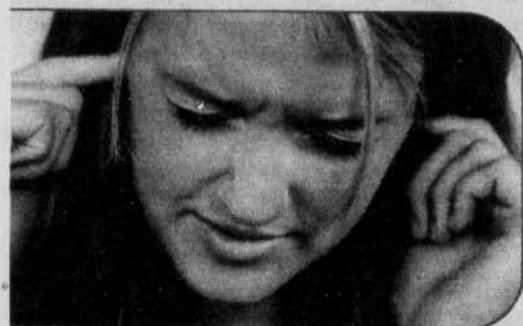


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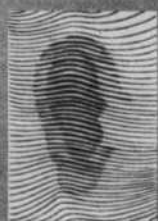
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# Cookies: The Christmas Craft

By Shelley Boettcher  
CANWEST NEWS SERVICE

There's something so deliciously satisfying about baking cookies this time of year. Maybe it's the cold and snow outside. Maybe it's all the festive lights and decorations around the city. Whatever it is, we hope you'll join us as we pick a few favourite recipes, head to the kitchen and bake some memories this holiday season.

## 10 tips for top cookies

1. Follow the recipe. I'm serious. Don't make any last-minute substitutions. Measure accurately. And preheat the oven, so the cookies will be done when the recipe says they will be done.

2. Use the best ingredients you can afford: real butter, fresh flour, fresh spices, fresh nuts.

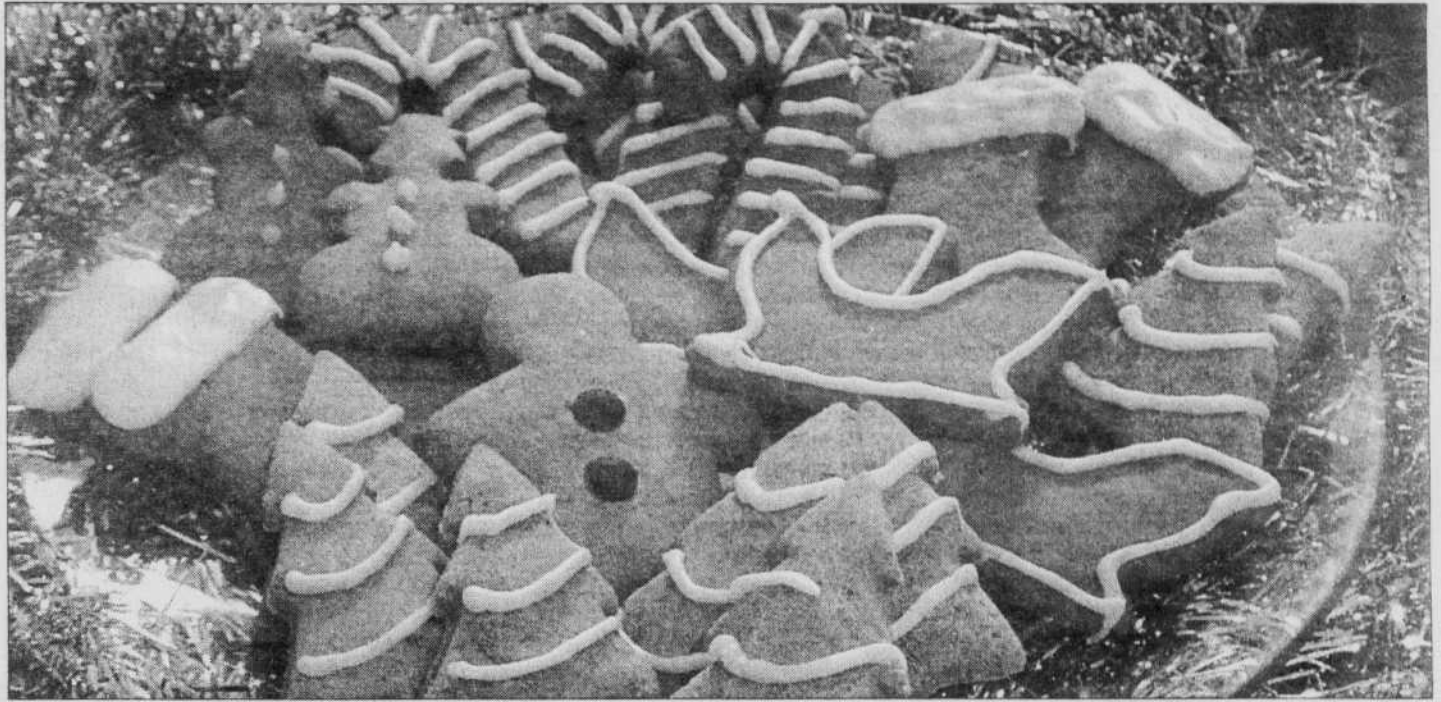
3. Buy a timer - and use it. (Or figure out how the one on your stove works. And use it.) Don't trust that you'll remember to take your baking out on time. You've worked too hard to burn them.

4. Don't rush. Ensure you have enough time to chill the dough (if necessary), roll it out and follow the instructions. A tip for rolled cookies? Roll the dough between two pieces of parchment paper, then chill it and cut out your designs. The cold will help your cookies hold their shape when cut.

5. Butter isn't your best choice for greasing your cookie sheets. "Butter can be unreliable, sometimes releasing your cake from the pan and sometimes holding onto portions of it," writes Lauren Chattman in *The Baking Answer Book* (Storey, \$18.95).

"Non-stick vegetable shortening is a better bet for most pans. It's flavourless and guarantees that your cake will slide right out of any pan. Avoid vegetable oil, which can burn and can give your finished cake an unpleasant aroma and flavour."

6. "Always place your cookie dough on a cool or room temperature baking sheet," writes Chattman in her book. "If you don't, the dough will start to melt as you work, instead of beginning to bake properly with a hot blast of air



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from the oven."

7. If the recipe calls for unsalted butter, use it; the salt in regular butter varies from brand to brand, so you can't just use it and cut back on the salt called for in the recipe.

"For the most consistent results, it is better to use unsalted butter and add the precise amount of salt specified in a particular recipe," writes Chattman.

8. Need to bring your eggs to room temperature? Place them "in a bowl of hot tap water for five minutes," writes Chattman.

9. Are they done yet? "One sign that firm cookies, such as sugar cookies, are done: they lift cleanly and lightly off the baking sheet," writes Susan Samson in *12,167 Kitchen and Cooking Secrets* (Robert Rose, \$27.95).

10. Let cookies cool before putting them in containers. "Store similar cookies together, opposites apart. Separate dry and moist cookies, and those with clashing flavours," writes Samson in her book. "No biscotti with oatmeal cookies or peppermint with gingerbread."

The lowdown on five common Christmas cookie spices:

- **Cinnamon:** The dried inner bark of the tree of the same name, cinnamon was used by ancient Egyptians for embalming. Nowadays, we Canucks prefer to add it to our baking.

- **Cloves:** One of the strongest of all spices, cloves are "the dried immature flower buds of a tree in the myrtle family, *Syzygium aromaticum*, which is native to a few islands in present-day Indonesia," writes Harold McGee in his legendary tome, *On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen* (Scribner, \$49.95).

"In much of the world, cloves flavour meat dishes, while Europeans use them mainly in sweets. . . . By far their largest role is in the Indonesian flavoured cigarette, kretek, which may be 40 per cent shredded clove."

- **Ginger:** A distant relative of bananas, ginger is also related to cardamom, turmeric and galangal. "The name comes via Latin from the Sanskrit singabera, meaning horns or antlers, which the branched rhizomes resemble," writes McGee.

"To make the dried spice, mature rhizomes are cleaned, scraped to remove most of the skin sometimes treated

with lime or acid to bleach them, and then dried in the sun or a machine."

- **Jamaican ginger,** McGee adds, is considered to be the world's finest.

- **Nutmeg:** "When Columbus sailed from Spain looking for the East Indies, nutmeg was one of the spices for which he was searching," write Sharon Tyler Herbst and Ron Herbst in their book, *The Deluxe Food Lover's Companion* (Barron's Educational Series, \$35.99).

The tropical evergreen tree's fruit "is split to reveal the nutmeg seed surrounded by a lacy membrane that, when dried and ground, becomes the spice mace."

- **Cardamom:** Grown primarily in India, Sri Lanka, Mexico and Guatemala, cardamom is a tall perennial shrub that's related to ginger, according to *The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Spices and Flavourings: The Complete Practical Guide for Cooks* by Elisabeth Lambert Ortiz (Dorling Kindersley/Reader's Digest Association, out of print). Each seed capsule must be harvested by hand; perhaps not surprisingly, then, it is one of the world's most expensive spices.

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