Post-Christmas pondering

Days leading up to Christmas had the various members of the Brandt family anticipating one another's arrival at my parents' house for the holidays, but I believe my family may have been expecting a cranky green visitor as well.

You see, at Thanksgiving, I suggested that we skip presents this Christmas. At first, everyone nodded along and told me it was a great idea. It soon became obvious, however, that no one else shared my enthusiasm. Some already had gifts purchased, others had plans they just couldn't bear to abandon.

For most, it just didn't feel right not to give gifts on Christmas, and they ultimately thought it very strange that I didn't seem to be bursting with Christmas spirit.

It's not that I didn't want to celebrate or that I was opposed to Christmas. We decorated the tree and listened to Christmas music for hours on end. We went to a candlelight service on the 24th and ate all the usual Christmas goodies.

By all other measures, I was just as filled with the Christmas spirit as I'd been every other year. I just didn't want my family to give or receive any presents. At risk of being seen as a grump, I stuck to my conviction and didn't buy any gifts.

I did my best to explain my position to my family, and I am going to attempt to put it into words here.

Lately my eyes have been opened to just how blessed I am. There has never been a time when I haven't been provided for, and sometimes I think I take that for granted. Over the past year and a half, I've been a resident parent to many different children through the boarding school I

work at.

Those kids come from all different backgrounds, each with a unique story. Some come to the school with little more than the clothes they are wearing. A few come with more toys than they know what to do with.

As I witness my students going through their daily lives, being kids and playing with each other, I have an external perspective that I don't have of my own life. I can see that more toys don't make a child happier, and fewer toys don't make her unhappy.

It makes me think about the "toys" in my own life. Does my fancy phone make me happy? Would a bigger TV do the trick? Sometimes I daydream about driving a nicer car, but I don't think these are the things that bring me happiness.

Observing the kids, it's also quite obvious when they have an overabundance of toys that they're not even playing with. When that's the case, I periodically send home extra things with their families on the students' weekend visits.

It's a bit more difficult for me to objectively pick out the unnecessary excess in my own life, but lately I've been trying. Recently, I also happened to have discovered a TV show called "Hoarders." Episodes show interventions in the lives of compulsive hoarders.

These people have homes stuffed to the max, and in almost every case their hoarding is ruining their lives. It's not that I'm concerned that I am a hoarder, but it does make me think. In the show, they address two problems: acquiring too much and an inability to get rid of any of it.

I don't mind getting rid of things I don't need or use anymore, but I think it makes more sense to be conscientious about the things we acquire, not snatching up new possessions so hastily.

Christmas may be an odd time to be pondering all this, but I just wanted a chance to say that

my holiday was different. There were fewer gifts given and received, but it was a great day nonetheless. We still celebrated the birth of our savior, and we still spent time with our loved ones.

The important things still remain in the absence of material exchange, and that’s a thought I don’t mind dwelling on.

Holyoke Enterprise December 27, 2012