

## A creative Christmas on a budget

**By Nate Smelle**

Year after year, it never ceases to amaze me how especially generous this community is during the Christmas season. This annual communal outpouring of compassion and kindness exhibits what's best about this community, and what many larger communities are striving to attain. Nevertheless, there are hundreds of families in the Bancroft area rationing their wages to cover the costs of water, food, heat, hydro and toys again this holiday season, and far more who will be celebrating Christmas on a budget. Supposed to be a joyous time of year where families, friends and communities come together to celebrate; for many, financial woes lead to stress and depression instead.

Talking about this with my folks over the phone the other night, they described to me some of the seasonal insanity they had witnessed working in retail over the years. The one incident that stood out in both of their minds was seeing a man arrested for stealing toys and socks for his children. Unfortunately, they said there was more than one sad occasion where something like this went down.

My mother told me the story of one of her favourite holiday memories as a child. Vividly, she recalled waking up on Christmas morning and running to the tree with her three sisters to find a handcrafted puppet stage full of hand sewn puppets. They were created from recycled cloth and reclaimed wood in the basement and carried upstairs while my mother and her sisters slept. She remembered sitting at the top of the stairs the week before Christmas, listening to my grandmother and great grandfather laughing, while the sound of a sewing machine and nails being hammered climbed the steps and seeped into the kitchen from under the door. Several years later, she said these memories became even more treasured to her when she learned that my grandmother had decided to make the stage and puppets, because she was not earning enough money from the three part-time jobs she was working at the time.

Thinking about our conversation, I couldn't help but take away a few insights on how to celebrate Christmas on a budget. Most importantly, using one's creative talents is a kind, thoughtful, frugal, sustainable and unique way to show someone you care about them over the holidays. The value of a gift resides in the memories it creates, not how much it costs. One-of-a-kind Christmas gifts like these, are an embodiment of that generous community spirit which possesses so many people in North Hastings to give their time and energy to helping those in need at this time of year.