

Rediscovering the true meaning of Christmas is a pledge that you hear a lot at this time of year usually in relation to commercialism and excess. But this year Johnny Bayfield was determined to deliver on it and he put his plans for a Do-It-Yourself Christmas into place when there was still leaves on the trees and warmth in the sunlight.

Buying presents has become the great bane of every Christmas season. My parents sometimes speak about the simple Christmases of their youth, when finding a lone tangerine or a Beano annual stuffed into one of their mother's laddered tights was considered a heady haul. Today, however, such simple gifts would struggle to make the grade in what's become an annual cycle of feverish Yuletide buying. We've all been there, scanning the shelves in the vague hope of finding something that might perfectly appeal to a loved one's sensibilities. Sensibilities that in truth we never really know as well as we probably should. The number of times I've held a scented candle aloft declaring to the gods 'My mother would love this' despite knowing full well that never have I witnessed my mother light any candles other than those little ones in the bottom of trays that keep Chinese takeaways warm.

This desire for approval has taken away the nuances of gift giving. I'm in my mid 20s, I write for a living, and therefore disposable income is limited. And by limited I mean practically nonexistent. In addition, like many millennials, I can scarcely think of anything I actually want or need. I mean the only constant on my letter to Father Christmas is to find a bank that will give me a mortgage.

For my demographic tracking down a cost-effective weekly supermarket job is the new Tracy Island. With this in mind I decided to take a stand and set myself a little challenge. This Christmas I would buy no gifts from standard shops. Instead each gift would have to be either handmade, hand-found or if money were to change hands, then it would need to contribute toward a good cause. With the challenge set I needed to do some forward planning.

In September I found myself trekking into a set of Tardis-like fields. For four hours I endured the lashings of black thorn bushes as I stole their fruit. Three months later and a hefty batch of delicious homemade spiced slowed gin has matured in the airing cupboard. Potent enough to launch a Spitfire. So that's my dad dealt with.

Next to find something for my mother, always a challenging woman to get gifts for. She will say things like 'What can you get the girl who has everything?' then as soon as she's confronted with nothing, she does wonder why she hasn't got more. For her I took inspiration for one of our favourite Mother-Son pastimes: the devouring of cheese and crackers while watching Mike Leigh films. Following an assault on my girlfriends' unripe tomato crop and then seven hours toiling over a stove like a character out of Downton Abbey, I ended up with several jars of delicious coronary-inducing chutney. But something was missing. The gift was not complete: a trip to the local Hospice Charity shop provided the cherry on the chutney, as it were, and for 50 pence a DVD of Abigail's Party completed the offering. Then my partner. We were of a similar age. Both of us disillusioned with the world around us. I racked my brain for inspiration but nothing fell out. I scoured the streets, the charity shops but nothing seemed worthy of her. In the end I took a risk. A lot can be said for giving an experience instead of a physical gift. So in keeping with my rules I packed

up some leftover chutney, the dregs of the slow gin, even baked up a cake from what was left in the kitchen. And the other day we trekked out to a hidden field, shouldering the city with a view that cut straight to the heart of the Thames. My gift to her was simple, old-school, a picnic. No phones, no work talk, just us.

Contemporary culture has fed us the notion that simplicity is the enemy and that decadence and pricing is our king. This year in my own little way I've changed that and so can you.