By Eric Steuer

My friend and I never used to exchange gifts. I’m not quite sure why, although I’m pretty sure it had a lot to do with money.

But now we’re older. Although we’re not necessarily any richer, we are more mature and these days we give gifts to each other. Pretty much all of my buddies do it, although there are still a few chumps who refuse to join in.

It started with my friend Dave’s birthday. He’s one of those kids with a birthday right around Christmas, who consequently receives fewer gifts per year than do those kids with birthdays in June. Anyway, a few friends and I decided that stiffing the guy for the 20th straight year wasn’t cool. After all, we were no longer teenagers—we should begin acting more like the men we claimed to be—and we chose to all chip in and buy Dave a huge birthday/Christmas gift that he would never forget.

The only problem was that we couldn’t figure out just what the gift should be. It was three of us on the giving end. We had each known Dave all of his life—for 19 birthdays and 19 Christmases—but had never shopped for him. The way we figured it, we owed him the equivalent of 120 gifts (3 people x 40 gifts ...you get the picture). What in the world would make up for 120 unique gifts but wouldn’t bleed us dry?

So we asked everyone we knew. Brent’s brother suggested that we get Dave a stripper. We looked into it. They were actually pretty reasonably priced. But we still declined, fearing that Dave would see right through us and figure out our hidden agenda.

Collin’s mom suggested that we take Dave on a fishing trip. That’s what she had done for Collin one year and he loved it. We asked Collin if he really did love it and he admitted that he didn’t. Plus, Brent gets real seasick—so we scratched that idea.

Then, finally, we had an idea. In all of the years that Dave had been missing out on gifts from us, he had never had a party thrown for him. Well, at least not since his 10th birthday at Chuck E. Cheese’s, when he threw up pizza all over the guy in the big mouse suit. Regardless, it was a better time than ever to do it—so we started making plans.

The night of the big bash, we took Dave from his house, blindfolded him and took him to “PARTY CENTRAL” at a secret location. He thought we were nuts!

“Surprise!” Everyone yelled when we got there. “Oh, you guys!” he said, wiping his eye. “This is the best gift you ever got me.”

“It’s also the only gift we’ve ever got you,” said Brent. We all laughed.
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Secret: Buy Nothing and Show You Really Care

By Noah Blumberg

Besides the occasional Topps or Donruss baseball card set, I never got much excited for the holidays. I was a sly kid; I had that sauvage flair that other kids envied. Nothing much excited me about the gifts that appeared before me. I remember the time in the early '80s when I opened a box containing a shiny new Rubik’s Cube, and leaning over to my mom, I whispered, “I’m disappointed.” How could I have anticipated the sense of accomplishment I would feel when I pulled apart and reassembled the mystical box?

I don’t know, but maybe it’s something about the selfishness of youth or the youthfulness of the self, but I always loved receiving and saw giving as a chore. This is OK for kids, but when you get older it’s considered immoral. I’ve also noticed that there’s a direct relationship between the amount you give and the amount you receive — the more you give, the more you get. This is what has galvanized me to my present state: giver.

I give of myself, not merely material things. I shop, not only for material gifts, but for ways to be better to the person I’m shopping for. The mall is in my mind and its countless memories. I search for the moment when my receiver-to-be said, “That really bugs me.” Then I begin to not do those things that bug the person. I don’t want the immediate reaction when I give someone a tangible gift. It’s much slower.

Once, my friend Chaz said it really bugged him when I touched his food with my unwashed fingers for no reason. As a gift, I stopped doing that. Coughing in someone’s face is also a frequently not-done action for me around the holidays.

This is the beauty of the holidays. I’ve learned the value in tangible gifts worth specific sums of money, of giving. Over the course of several years, I’ve slowly transformed from a small, heartless, selfish boy into something less repulsive.

Another thing I’ve also learned to take into account during the holidays is my responsibility to check out the companies I’m patronizing. I insist that gifts on my wish list are not harmful to others. This is a good thing, too, but it’s hardly practical. I’ve almost excluded every type of gift. This year, my sparse list includes only some wire for a mobile and a box of Bisquick in a large biodegradable box. I’ve also asked that my gift be wrapped only in leaves, if at all, and that they presented to me in a manner that will not be too indicative of gender roles in our society.

I hope this sheds some new light on the holidays. They are, however, if tempered with the right amount of paranoia, a pleasant and bearable time for all.
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Once again, it is that time of the year when we head out to local shops and dole out great deals of money to buy gifts for others who will make us feel guilty if we don't.

Well, actually, that's a pretty Scrooge-like way of putting the month of December (or late November, for those of you overachievers who buy all your presents 20 minutes after finishing the stuffing and cranberry sauce). Buying gifts can actually be a pretty rewarding experience, but only if you challenge yourself properly.

Now, I'm not talking about racking your brains to decide exactly what that special someone desires — when they say it's the thought that counts, I take that as gospel. I'd much rather get a handmade clay ashtray with a cool skull sculpted into the side than a new VCR filled with cool gadgets. Of course, I don't own a TV, and I really could use an ashtray.

But this is beside the point. What I am getting at is that holiday shopping should be seen as more than a chance to abuse your credit cards into receivership — it should be seen as a mission.

Every year, I pick a common theme that makes my winter shopping a true task, increasing the excitement of discovering a gift for someone where I'd least expect it. I remember one year when I would only buy gifts for people that featured meek forms of life. My friends were overjoyed when they got their Sea Monkey aquariums, Chia Pets and clocks that run on potatoes.

But this year, I've decided to try something a little different. Once it dawned on me, I set out on my Herculean feat right away, with a burning question in mind — is it possible to buy all of my gifts on campus, while avoiding the MallCen?

Sure, anyone can go into the Boutique, I mean, Bookstore and take advantage of its "20 Percent Off Holiday Sale" or "Free Christmas Teddy Bear when you spend $100," but I'd rather piss on a fusebox before I succumb to the commercialized mecca that has relegated the sale of educational items to the dank basement while sprinkling miniature pine trees around the Clinique counter.

So off I went, on a search unprecedented by any student before. I had no clue of the wealth of great gift items I would soon find.

The first items that caught my eye were the wares of campus vendor Al Espino, who sells products made exclusively of hemp and its fiber next to Storke Plaza. His articles include hats, belts, wallets, backbacks, twine, paper, guitar straps, soaps and a plethora of other items that he didn't have there that day.

"Hemp products are eight times more durable than cotton. Hemp is the strongest, longest and most durable natural fiber on Earth," he said. "We've got gifts for everyone, from environmentalists to stoners."

"Do you ever have legal problems?" I asked.

"Most cops know the law, and they know that what I sell is perfectly legal," Espino said. "I don't sell any paraphernalia, so it's on you, not in you."

I could probably attain all of my holiday needs right there, but I reluctantly decided to move on. Next I trekked to the Chemistry building, where I got lost for a few minutes amongst threatening signs saying "HIGH TOXIC GAS LEVEL" and "RADON LASER IN USE," but I soon found a tucked away haven called the Graduate Storeroom.

When holiday shopping, the place to go - but some of the found anywhere else except...
Here, they distribute big ol’ beakers and vials that would make great vases or novelty glasses, as well as funnels, water bottles and jugs full of hydrochloric acid. Although I have some psycho friends who would love to receive a bottle of dangerous poison, the items in this room are only available to graduate students with an account for their class. So although I can’t obtain any of those things, dedicated chemists working on their Ph.D.s should look into it.

Unfazed by the disappointing realization that I wouldn’t be able to buy fragile glass products, I headed over to the Film Studies Dept., where occasionally they give out free movie posters, albeit from obscure artsy-fartsy movies with subtitles.

After talking to office staffer Barbara Whitehead for a few minutes, I found that T-shirts from last spring’s “Reel Loud” show are still available for only 10 bucks apiece. I tried to do a little haggling, but she wouldn’t lower the price.

They also sell shirts commemorating 100 years of cinema. “It was Dec. 28, 1895, when the Lumiere brothers held their first public movie screening in Paris,” she said, before going down the hall to verify the date with a professor. When she came back, she added, “They’ll be collector’s items. Come January, I’ll be 101 years of cinema.”

Although I didn’t want to miss out on the best investment since Detective Comics 27, I moved on to the Microcomputer Lab, where I learned all sorts of technical stuff about what they offer.

“We sell computer disks and disk cases — nothing unusual,” said receptionist Theresa Saguros. “You can buy a VendaCard. You use them in the laser printers around the MCL. People choose to buy it rather than use dot matrix. You can buy one for a friend.”

Well, as much as I love high-tech jargon, I headed back toward the UCen. I was reluctant to actually enter the pinkish edifice, but I knew of one place to go where they don’t care about increasing revenue for the holidays — the Comer Store!

Although the place looks like a Godforsaken am/pm convenience store, it boasts employing the coolest, most laid-back clerks of any campus store. Now that they can play music again, the place was jamming when I walked in, as hunched-over consumers danced gently in the aisles.

The only real gift item the Comer Store offers is snowflake-patterned bags to fill with its famous, only slightly crusty bin food. You know you have real friends when they give you bags of peanut butter logs and gummy hot peppers.

As appetizing as this seemed, I figured I had seen enough. It was time to head home, for however many different gift items I had seen, none seemed to stand out as the perfect present, the one that I would be stoked to have.

And then I saw it. Dean Travel is having a sale on Eurail passes. So if any of you friends out there feel like buying me a ticket to Amsterdam, I’ll be happy to reciprocate with a Hemp Seed Pen. Hey, ’tis the season.
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108 Thursday, December 7, 1995 Advertising Supplement Daily Nexus
By P.T. Bligman

His spurs jangled softly as the travel-worn cowboy hoisted himself up into the cracked, dusty saddle and positioned himself comfortably for the long, lonely ride ahead. He reached inside his cowhide jacket, brought out a sack containing what remained of his tobacco and rolled himself a cigarette, which he lit by striking a match against the sole of his boot. But as he gazed out over the desolate ghost town which stood below the ridge his horse Elgar teetered on, he realized it would be a long, grinding his cigarette on the butt of his holster, the cowboy closed his sheepskin-lined parks and urged Elgar on with his spurs, encouraging the beast downward through the rocky terrain. After about an hour the pair reached the bottom of the ridge and, following a dilapidated trail, entered the crisscrossing streets of the small town. A newsfront page of the paper before it was washed away. The cowboy moved on. Milo — for that was the cowboy's name — dismounted from the horse and swacked it on the rump, sending it away so it could graze on the weeds that were growing through the cracked asphalt streets. Unslinging the guitar, he headed on. See GHOST, p.12B

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Continued from p.11B

that was strapped to his back, Milo strummed a few chords and reminisced about the way life used to be in the small seaside community.

He remembered how the sidewalks used to be a bustle with activity and students could be seen pickling through the streets discussing Sartre and politics. He remembered how the stores, restaurants and markets used to be open at all hours, day or night. And he remembered how there used to be all sorts of vehicles — bikes, cars, skateboards — cluttering the narrow streets and wreaking havoc with the traffic flow.

But that time was long ago, way back when the school year was in session. Now, during the cold month of December, the sidewalks were empty and the streets were bare, save for the random abandoned vehicle. Although some of the shops remained open, most of them made the unavoidable switch to "limited hours," claiming that there just wasn't enough business to keep longer hours.

Looking about, Milo saw a few people walking dejectedly around the town — these folks, Milo knew, were the remnants of the long-gone student body, the ones who didn't save enough money to go skiing, or the ones who couldn't catch a ride back to their homes in Glendale. Milo averted his eyes so as not to make eye contact with these people — he knew what they were going through, and he knew it sucked. Milo really felt for these poor souls.

Milo quickly decided that this town certainly wasn't where he wanted to spend any more time, so he whistled a quick "tweet!" and his horse came bounding from around a corner. Milo mounted Elgar, and as the pair started off out of the small town, Milo knew that he would be back in Isla Vista as soon as the next school quarter came around. "But until then," Milo whispered to Elgar, "we'll party in Lompoc!"

This spirited Isla Vista house is uncommon in the weeks ahead, as students venture home and leave the seaside hamlet a ghost town.
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