Date: Dec. 3
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From: Roxie Dinstel via Ronda Boswell
Re: Pinching Pennies to run Monday, Dec 16
Additional Contact: Debbie Carter, information officer, 474-5406, dscarter@alaska.edu

NOTE: PLS. RUN THIS COLUMN ON DEC. 16

T’was the week before Christmas and all through the home
Not a present was found, I admitted with a groan
The stockings were empty, the cupboards were bare
Oh, how can I tell my kinfolks that I care?

We've all been to that point. The list is still long and the budget is at almost zero. So what
do you do to finish your list without breaking the bank?

First, go back and examine that shopping list. Make sure that you really need to give a
gift to everyone on your list. It might be that some of those on your list are just as cash
strapped this year as you are. So they might be relieved that you propose that no presents
are to be exchanged.

Now that the list is pared down, it’s time to get to work. There are many ways to give
presents and pay nothing (or just a little bit).

Think about your talents and how you can share them. Give the gift of a skill. Teach
someone to sew, plant a garden or make Christmas candy. Or think about downloading
their pictures or setting up the computer to automatically back up online. I always told
my kids when they said they had no money for presents, “I have a dirty car, a dirty
refrigerator and a dirty house. Pick any of the above to clean and I’d love it.”

Give the gift of time. How about a gift certificate for the neighbors for a night of
babysitting? Or a Saturday trip to the museum or another special activity for a child in
your life? Make a certificate that the recipient can present when they want the gift.

How about creating a family recipe book? Take everyone’s favorite family recipes, put
them on the computer and make a cookbook. Include who makes it and when it is
normally served. If you’d like, give them one of the recipes already made up.
Calendars are another great idea. There are templates online to use or you can buy blanks from the craft store. Download some family pictures, add special dates and you’ve got a great present that will really be used. My daughter does a calendar with the latest pictures of her kids and lots of family dates each year for the grandparents and other kinfolks.

A memory jar was a great present that one of my friends did for me. She had asked friends to write down a memory that they had with me and put it on a card about the size of a business card. Then the instructions were that I was to pull out one of the little slips each day and read it. It was a great way to relive some wonderful memories. Think about doing something similar for an elder and letting all the family contribute a memory or maybe even a picture.

How about a custom spice rub for fish or meat? A friend did a sampler of 3 different rubs for last year’s present for just a few dollars per gift. Buy bulk spices in the store, mix them up and put in a small jar. Give them with instructions for use. There are lots of recipes on the Internet, or I have a publication with a variety of spice mixtures. Call us at the office and we’ll be glad to share.

Nice presents don’t have to cost a bundle. Use your imagination, talents and a little time to fill your list with money to spare.

Roxie Rodgers Dinstel is a professor of extension on the Tanana District Extension Faculty. Questions or column requests can be e-mailed to her at rrdinstel@alaska.edu or by calling 907-474-2426. The Cooperative Extension Service is part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, working in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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