All too often, gift giving is all about the latest gadget or toy. But it is very rare that a material item is long remembered. This year, consider giving gifts that will never be forgotten: gifts of experience. It should be no surprise that these memories last longer than the latest gadget, and they have the added bonus of being less stressful on our environment.

When our money is invested in experiences, the thrill stays with us longer than when our money is spent buying products, says this study (http://bit.ly/ch1Wi8) from Cornell University. In addition, experiential purchases often cause less damage to the environment. This year, try giving a few gifts of experiences and see how they are received by your family and friends.

Ten starter ideas:

1. **Give tickets to a show**—Iowa is home to a vibrant theatre scene, with major productions taking in place in many towns and cities, such as Cedar Rapids, Waterloo/Cedar Falls, Iowa City, Des Moines, Sioux City and Council Bluffs. Concerts, community fine arts events, and tickets to museums are other options in communities of all sizes across Iowa.

2. **Use a skill**—Whether you know it or not, you have abilities of value to others. You may be able to help your aunt by providing computer support or create unbaked-made-from-scratch cookie kits (http://bit.ly/co25ks) for nephews. (But wouldn’t anyone love a cookie kit?) Whether you are into cooking or carpentry or cleaning—there are a host of possible ways you can give of yourself. Other excellent ideas may be found at Get Rich Slowly (http://bit.ly/8WSgg).

3. **Build talents by giving a present of lessons**—If you want to help someone you love learn how to play the piano, develop flexibility through yoga, or speak another language, give a series of personally taught lessons. But—if you have plans to give these lessons to kids other than your own—consult with parents first to get their buy-in.

4. **Give other skill-building experiences such as funding a day at camp**—Similar to giving a gift of lessons, day camps can also build skills. Google “day camps for kids in (your town)” and browse the possibilities! Many may not allow you to register six months in advance (for those wanting to give a summer day camp gift as a winter holiday gift), but see below under “Coupons” for ways to handle that. Again, consult with parents to get buy-in.

5. **Give the gift of child care**—If you’re looking for a gift for friends or neighbors who have kids, offer childcare for a night.
6. **Create coupons**—You could design a book of coupons to be redeemed at a later date to give gifts like those mentioned in #2-5 above; check out the coupons we’ve prepared for you [here](http://www.uni.edu/ceee/hometown/reclaim-your-holidays/resources) under Printable Gift Certificates.

7. **Give an eco-experience**—Canoeing, kayaking, hiking, biking, and nature walks are all possibilities. You may give supplies, so that loved ones have the needed equipment to take part in an activity, or you may give a gift certificate so they can have a day-long experience. Canoe outfitters, for example, are located by nearly every Iowa river. Even better still, if you have outdoor skills and friends who want to learn more, share your talents, whether they be bird or prairie plant identification or teaching a friend to kayak.

8. **Make a meal**—Celebrate the holidays by setting aside a night to cook for friends or family. Make it extra special by using Iowa-grown or Iowa-raised products.

9. **Or... go out for the night**—On the flip side, treat your friends or family to a night on the town. If you decide to go to a premier restaurant, you and everyone with you will likely remember the experience for a long time.

10. **Give a gift of cabin rental**—The Iowa Department of Natural Resources allows you to [reserve a cabin or lodge](http://bit.ly/9dsgkP) online up to a year in advance. Many state cabins and lodges are modern and comfortable, with hiking trails right out the back door. For an extended family holiday, another bonus is that cabins are ‘neutral territory,’ so no one gets stuck with all of the cooking chores.

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