



'TIS THE SEASON... FOR STUFF

🕒 December 9, 2015 👤 Bradley Jacobs Sigismund 📁 Bloggers

Hanukkah started this Sunday night. That means Lucas' grandmothers, my partner Jack's sister, and various friends have asked what to get our 4-year-old. My answer: NOTHING!

New York City apartments are already as small as Christmas stockings. But with a child, the space gets consumed by zoos of plush animals, armies of plastic vehicles, and towers of board games with missing pieces — and that's before you even get to the kid's room.

Lucas' birthday this October led to a new onslaught of colorful boxes (one from each of the dozen kids in his preschool class and a handful more from relatives and Daddy and Papa's friends). It's the same maddening routine every year: He tears open the gifts, goes into toddler ecstasy with all the new whirligigs and whatnots, gets overwhelmed by all that surrounds him, collapses into bed that night, and promptly forgets about all but one or two offerings. Days later, he walks by a toy store and insists on dragging us inside — then mopes when he can't get a Diggin Box Set Airplane.

I tried a different tactic this time around. When we got home from his birthday party, I put each present on a high shelf in his room and we opened one every day for the next couple weeks. In the end, we still had to make room for the Lego Juniors "Easy to Build" horse and buggy set, the Play-Doh Super Tools, and a Playmobil ambulance. But did I just make matters worse? Now Lucas thinks that every day is his birthday.

One year, I made a special request to loved ones. "Can you give him books, Mom? What do you remember most from when you were little?" I asked, secretly wishing for a slim volume I could tuck away until circa 2020. On the first pages of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," she wrote, "I enjoyed this when I was young, especially the fence-painting scene." But I guess grandmothers want immediate gratification as much as their progeny. The next year, she gave him two pairs of "Star Wars" pajamas, which while wearable, ignited a new longing within Lucas for Darth Vader action figures.

Then there were the times when I asked friends to give Lucas experiences. "Maybe take him on the subway to Brooklyn for a slice of Grimaldi's?" I offered. Occupying this active boy for a few hours would be a present to him *and* us. "How about a visit to the dinosaurs at the Natural History Museum?" I mentioned to one friend when she inquired about a gift. Instead, I arrived home to find an Amazon.com package containing a giant plastic Tyrannosaurus Rex!

We want Lucas to be a man of the world — not of possessions. We want him to develop a passion for building skyscrapers or travel writing, to get pleasure from connecting with people of all types and trades, to find a purpose in his life that is more than gunning for the next device by Apple. Jack and I recently sat him down to show him the Veruca Salt scene from "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory" (the 1971 Gene Wilder version, not the tone-deaf Johnny Depp remake). In that sequence, the bratty British tween sings to her buffoon dad, "I want the works / I want the whole works / Presents and prizes and sweets and surprises / Of all shapes and sizes / And noooooow / I don't care how / I want it now!" It was a chest-puffing Papa moment when it seemed that Lucas got it. Writing this column, I watched that section again and he said, "that's the Selfish song."

So I had newfound hope when I thought I had landed on the best solution to the staggering piles of stuff. A church in our neighborhood, St. Luke's, was accepting "gently used" playthings for its annual Christmas toy drive. We brought over three bags of books and past presents — he carried one himself — including a Fisher-Price school bus he personally selected even though I saw him playing with it just weeks ago. "Are you sure you want to donate it?" I asked him. "Yes, we can give it away," he replied.

I was proud of myself — and him. But after we dropped everything off, Lucas said, "Papa, *now* can we go to the toy store?"



Bradley with his son Lucas



BRADLEY JACOBS SIGESMUND

Bradley and his partner Jack live in downtown NYC with two VIPs: their son Lucas, 4, and their pooch, Dex Dexter (named after the Dynasty badass, Bradley's first crush). He loves movies, martinis, and mint chocolate anything.