

The Rockwell perspective...

When it comes to being ready for Christmas, I'm usually pretty organized.

I generally have the outdoor lights up at the end of November, I have indoor decorations up by the first of December and my shopping is usually well under way by this point in the countdown.

I said 'usually'— that is the key word here.

For some unknown reason, I'm dragging miles behind on shopping, decorating, and social commitments. Just this week, I felt horribly unprepared for any aspect of the coming of Christmas.

It was beginning to stress me.

Same with my decorations.

Wednesday night I finally hauled a few out of storage, and spent some time setting them up.

First, I pulled out my old nativity scene, which I built as a kid more than 40 years ago. I patiently unwrapped the little people and animals, and thought how they have weathered more than four decades, with memories of when this one fell and had to be glued, when that one was lost for a year, and how the squirrel got into the attic one year and chewed the back wall of the stable.

As I placed the little figurines in place, I felt a bit better. Christmas was coming— my nativity was set up. I then moved on to set up the 'village'.

My 'village' consists of a half-dozen little lighted houses from the Norman Rockwell Christmas Collection, depicting famous Rockwell prints published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, years ago.

I've been collecting them, and now have a complete village which graces the top of my entertainment unit during the month of December.

Each house has a different theme, and all bring a smile to my face whenever I look into the little windows to see the three-dimensional scene unfolding in the little ceramic world, compliments of Rockwell's vivid and comic imagination.

There's the post office, with the old postmaster scratching his head, sorting his letters, inundated with mail from the Christmas rush.

There's the clockmaker's shop, with the old clockmaker checking the times on the faces of the

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many clocks, in the shop.

And everyone loves the old toy maker, toiling into the evening, in the magical toy shop.

There's the family gathered around the Christmas feast, in the "Freedom from Want" house, which was one of a series of four "freedom from" paintings he did during the Second World War. (The other three were Freedom from Fear, Freedom of Worship and Freedom of Speech.)

But my favourite is the house that sits in the centre of the 'street' of the village on my magical little community, atop the entertainment unit.

It's Santa's house, with the jolly old elf seated at his stool, a huge magnifying glass in hand, looking at an equally huge globe in front of him.

As the little lights illuminated the tiny worlds inside of my village, I suddenly felt a little less stressed and pressured about being late.

My nativity scene gave me a sense of peace, while my village gave me a sense of nostalgia—and priority. As I thought about the messages that Rockwell incorporated into his art years ago, I realized little has changed.

The family will again enjoy 'freedom from want', the toy maker will get the toys finished in time, and the postmaster will get all those Christmas cards sorted before Christmas.

And above all, Santa will still arrive on time Christmas Eve, in some way, shape or form.

No matter how unprepared I may be...

(Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@independentfreepress.com)



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and staff
would like to extend
Happy Holiday wishes to
all our patients & their families.**

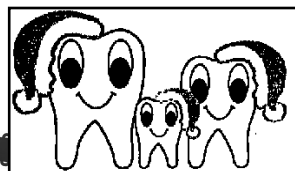


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As you shop for the youngest names on your list, keep in mind that many toys can become potential safety hazards to children. Here are a few important guidelines to help you select the best gifts:

Choose age-appropriate toys. Many toys have labels with age recommendations on them.

Avoid toys with sharp edges and points or small parts. Also avoid toys that fly, shoot projectiles or produce loud noises.

Look for toys that are durable, well-constructed and easy to clean.

When choosing a fabric toy, make sure it is labeled flame-retardant or nonflammable.

Check stuffed toys for secure stitching of eyes and other small parts.