

I love Christmas. I love all of it - the atmosphere, the traditions, the food - but the thing that separates Christmas from every other holiday is the gift giving. I know, I know, how shallow of me. But it's not so much the gifts that I love, it's seeing how much love and attention your family put into getting you just the right thing.

See, my Dad's side of the family is very meticulous about Christmas. We give them a list about a month in advance and everything we get is from that list, with one or two exceptions they're sure we will love. It's very orderly and I can be certain that I'm getting exactly what I want and need. The order and carefulness put into each gift is a sweet reminder of how important you are to your family. They want to make sure you are taken care of in a way that means the most to you.

My Mom's side of the family had a different idea about gift-giving though. See, my Grandma Faith was what you might consider a free spirit. She would see something interesting and think "oh I bet someone would like this" and thus, a 16-year-old would get a feather boa or some elephant earmuff to cover her ears in sunny that San Jose California winter. There was, of course, the Christmas when I was 5 years old and Grandma got me a pot-bellied pig without my mother's approval, and then the year Grandma put the wrong name tags on the gifts so it was really a free for all, guessing which gift was intended for which person.

By far the best example of this in my mind, though, was the Year of the Rabbit. Grandma decided my cousin and me, both children living in pet-free apartments, needed rabbits. She set up a scavenger hunt around the house which felt like it took ages. We went all around the house and yard until finally, we were led to the bathtub, where two tiny rabbit babies sat quietly munching on lettuce. Of course 6 year old me basically pooped my pants in excitement, and I promptly name my rabbit Julianna Rebecca, because I was a true drama queen. My cousin, excited but slightly less so that I was, named his rabbit Donatello after his favorite Ninja Turtle and set our pets to racing. This was the day that I learned rabbits poop in tiny pellets, and that a rabbit going down the stairs can poop on each individual step at least once. This is also the day I leave that rabbits can scratch, but it didn't stop me from suffocating the poor creature with my tiny affections.

A few months went by, and the rabbits had been relegated to living in the backyard of my grandma's house. See, these rabbits were getting bigger by the day, and meaner too. It didn't take long until they got noticed by the friendly neighborhood murder hawk, and Donatello met his untimely death in his talons.

Julianna Rebecca was still going strong though. This rabbit, according to my recollection, was now the size of a Pomeranian, and three times as mean. She hid mostly, but when she did emerge, it was like some murderous demon had overtaken her. Did you know that rabbits' front teeth are dull, not sharp? It makes for twice the pain in a bite, I can tell you that. Ultimately, our Murder Hawk did get Julianna Rebecca, but it took him several tries. She was just too fat to pick up the first time. I think everyone was secretly relieved when Julianna Rebecca was gone and we could once again go in the backyard without fearing for our ankles.

As I've grown older, I have come to cherish the memories I have of Christmases both orderly and chaotic, and I'm working hard to implement just a little of both into my own life. Maybe someday my own child will find a rabbit in his own bathtub.