

'Don't buy me a bread machine for Christmas'

By Larry I. Palmer

Making bread inspires me. While making bread for Christmas presents last week, I was reminded of that popular holiday time-saving gift idea: the breadmaking machine.

Many people have suggested that, given how busy I am, I should ask for a breadmaking machine for Christmas. I try ever so gently to point out that I don't make bread for a living. I don't need to do it more efficiently. Making bread is something I simply enjoy doing. Enjoyment takes time, my time, my engagement, and thus my making the space in my life for making bread. Modern folk don't understand that response, so I usually end up having the following conversation:

"Do you like fresh bread?" asks the breadmaking machine salesperson.

"Of course," I reply.

"Well, if you had a breadmaking machine, you could put the ingredients in the machine at night and have fresh bread by morning."

"If I wanted fresh bread from a bread machine, I'd buy some at the grocery store," I say, hoping to make my point clear.

Of course the industrial breadmaker is not "bad technology": It's the home version that's flawed. If the essence of the experience is making bread, one must just do it. The fact that I don't make bread every week is not an indictment of my life, it's simply a reminder to me that I must make time in my life for making bread, making a home and doing things that inspire me. Technology is a great tool, but it must be used wisely.

The big challenge—especially during this holiday season—is to find those simple things that inspire us, and to make room for those experiences in our lives. I'm not talking about "time management"—a technological metaphor for ourselves—but about how we "invest" our time. I look upon the time I take to make bread for my friends as an investment in me.

I began making bread when my boys were young, as a way of being home on Saturdays. Kneading bread with my small sons was fun for all of us, an early exploration of using our hands and minds. As I make bread now, I recall those early days of fatherhood (my sons are teenagers now), my own childhood experiences of baking and cooking with my father, mother, brothers and sisters.

Our present culture, with its so-called "busy lifestyle," does not encourage or support our desires to find that inner space to commune with oneself. Hotels replace a sense of space called home; Walkmans replace the music within us; treadmills replace a walk in the woods; audio tapes replace the adventure of reading; and breadmaking machines replace making bread.

When people ask me, "How do you find time to make bread?" I say my goal is to have a full life, not a busy life. Making bread is part of my journey towards a full and meaningful life in the midst of conflicting demands of work, family and community.

We all need to find those experiences that inspire us. If it happens to be making bread, get started—but don't buy a breadmaking machine.

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