

# Values: The holiday gift that never goes out of style

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The holiday season is typically marked by parents and kids trying to be on their best behavior. Parents are more charitable, and kids are busy not pouting and not crying because they are afraid of the jolly fat man catching them.

While all these good thoughts and good deeds are, well, good, the question that Mary Jane McKittrick wants to ask is, “Why can’t people be kind and caring all year ‘round?” McKittrick, creator of the children’s book world of Boomer and Halley, wants to encourage holiday do-gooders to act the same way whether they are preparing for winter solstice or summer vacation.

“It’s time for Americans to blaze a trail back to a culture of kindness that actually works,” she said. “Kids need a roadmap to follow. The last few generations have lost their way, and the results are crippling this country. Kids are raised with a sense of entitlement that leaves them unprepared to cope with the hard work of economic recovery. When the economy was booming, we focused on material things to such an extent that something really important got lost. We forgot how to teach youngsters the basic values of kindness, consideration, self-sacrifice and hard work – the ingredients that built America and made it strong. So, as we approach this season of goodwill, here’s what I propose: Let’s extend good will to all days and months of the year. I challenge each one of us to live the values we want to see in others instead of just talking about them, or complaining about the lack of them.”

McKittrick’s response to the lack of these traditional values was to use her fictional small town of Shady Pines, with her lead dog and cat characters, Boomer and Halley, to introduce children to a wide range of values including respect, common courtesy, parental respect and personal responsibility.

McKittrick’s tips include:

- **Extending common courtesy.** This includes being

on time, holding the door for someone, saying please and thank you, writing a ‘thank you’ note, paying someone a compliment and helping someone in need.

- **Cleaning up messes.** This starts with encouraging kids to keep their bedrooms clean, and continues through their daily lives. It carries through to cleaning up the spilled milk in the kitchen, and it’s the foundation of teaching a child about personal responsibility.

- **Setting expectations.** If the bar is set low by parents



who set a poor example, then why should parents expect good grades, good behavior or anything else? If excellence is the goal, and parents live that goal daily, then their children will strive to achieve it.

- **Modeling healthful eating.** Making breakfast for your child shows that you care what goes into their bodies. Packing their lunch demonstrates healthy selections and sitting down for dinner together as a family combines nutritional intake with emotionally connecting. We eat three meals a day, and parents can teach good behaviors and values by making the most of those meals and the choices behind them.

- **Teaching honesty.** This is a tough one with parents, because it’s easy to tell a little white lie to make the day go easier, but then children begin to learn about dishonesty as a tool of convenience. Parents should always be honest about their thoughts, feelings, actions and mistakes. When parents are honest about their mistakes, it encourages kids to follow suit, and it keeps lines of communication open. 📺