FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Self-Help

Simplify Your Christmas: 100 Ways to Reduce the Stress and Recapture the Joy of the Holidays
Elaine St. James
Andrews McMeel
Unknown $14.95 (269pp)
978-0-8362-6785-3
(August 1998)

Wouldn't it be nice if we weren't so exhausted after preparing Christmas dinner that we could actually enjoy eating it? If every time the children opened a gift, they didn't instantly grab the next one, and the next? If the guilt over seeing some family members and not others could be erased from the season forever? These are the issues that inspired St. James to simplify her own family's celebration of Christmas, and to compile her plan into a book.

Such subversive headings as "Boycott the Christmas Store," "Zap the Toy Registry" and "Rethink Your Christmas Card Tradition" convey the tone of the book. St. James is tired of holiday consumerism and she's not going to take it anymore. Christmas, she asserts, is not about having more or doing more, its about feeling more, and she offers some good solutions to replace crazed consumerism with holiday optimism. One of the best seems obvious: Write a friend and/or loved one a personal letter. Tell them how much you care and why. Another is more practical: Give away excess gifts to homeless shelters, hospitals or schools.

Simplify Your Christmas is a good guide to slowing down, spending less, relaxing more and really celebrating Christmas with your heart instead of your wallet. Paradoxically, its small size makes it a perfect stocking stuffer.