



**The Gift That Keeps On Living by Pat Blocker,
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Giving a pet as a holiday gift elicits visions of the happy recipient welcoming puppy kisses or kitten purrs after unwrapping the bundle of furry joy. But, the truth is, a well-intentioned holiday gift

could go terribly wrong for the animal.

Adopting a cat or dog is certainly more complicated than purchasing a tie. And, pets cannot be tossed into the closet to be forgotten along with that ugly tie or electronic gadget.

It is particularly tempting to grant the holiday wish of the child who has been petitioning for a dog or a cat. But, giving pets as gifts can send the wrong message to children. It says that pets are nothing more than playthings. Remember too, that a puppy or a kitten is a 10 to 15-year commitment. Where will the child be then?

The holidays are extremely busy and chaotic for most people, a season when time and patience are limited. A new dog or cat needs close supervision and a quiet routine while adjusting to the new home.

Many hazards exist for curious pets during the holidays, such as decorations, burning candles, electrical cords, chocolate, and holiday food. Large groups of people also can be stressful for the new arrival. The hustle and bustle may lead to doors accidentally left open and pets being stepped on or tripped over.

Some shelters offer gift cards that patrons are encouraged to give, so recipients can then select the pet of their own choosing.

After considering the above advice, if you still want to give a pet as a gift, try this creative alternative. Wrap up a "new pet starter kit." Fill a box with pet essentials. Include a collar, leash or litter box, toys, instructional books or videos, a gift card for training classes – and a solid promise to help find the perfect new friend when life is back to normal.

Remember that quality time spent with a new pet is the best gift of all.