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Charitable Giving

Every year we hear the phrase, *it's better to give than to receive*. This is our chance to give it some real meaning. It's an opportunity to make a piece of film that helps people see the spirit of giving in action, by offering them the simplest and most heartwarming examples of someone truly making that choice. One of the things that makes this concept even stronger is the fact that we will be witnessing the choice between giving and getting playing out right in front of our eyes through the actions of children.

I can't imagine a better, stronger, more endearing or more engaging concept. It's the type of project that I love to do, and would love to put my whole heart and soul into. Will there be challenges, limitations, and obstacles to overcome? Of course there will. We have hurdles placed in our way in absolutely every project we take on. The difference in this case is that the product we're promoting is one that is worth every effort we make. It's our chance to truly make a difference, and what follows are some ideas on how I would like to do just that.

The Look & Feel

This is the type of project that calls for a look that is photogenic, but real. We want to use the camera to lend these scenes a very simple and understated honesty that feels captured in the moment. There's no need for it to feel overly slick or polished. What we're after is a slightly sophisticated look that combines a filmic sensibility with the unquestioned authenticity of documentary filmmaking.

To achieve this I always work with a lean and expert crew, which I think will be key. We want to be as unobtrusive as possible while still being able to capture a wide variety of footage that is rich with beautiful realness. Ideally, that would include a variety of shots that can be used to bring some added texture to the film. Intimate shots of hands, eyes, and faces, and kids thinking about their choice and the smiles that express how good they feel — all are part of the story we want to tell. The overall idea is to go into this with a well-thought out and organized plan that ensures we'll get everything we need — and much, much more.

The Search

I have all the confidence in the world that this is going to be amazing — and that the kids we speak to will exceed any and all of our greatest expectations. At this point, what matters most is that we design an approach that allows these moments to happen. As we discussed, one of the things that I think might be well worth

considering is to take some time prior to the actual shoot to walk the aisles of the Walmart we'll be shooting in. This would give us the chance to pre-interview some kids shopping with parents who celebrate Christmas.

By having a short conversation with them we'll get a good idea of each child's personality and their comfort level. Their willingness to be honest and speak candidly is really one of the things that I've always found kids are more than eager to do. Nonetheless, I think it will be very helpful to identify as many as we can ahead of time, and to arrange for their parents to bring them back to the store on the shoot day.

That way, rather than spend time hoping someone will come, or hunting for people on the day we're filming, we'll at least have a few kids that we feel will give us what we're after. The only other logistical detail we'll want to keep in mind is that it will probably be smart to schedule our shoot on a weekend — so that we don't have conflicts with school days.

The Setup

Since we will be shooting in a Walmart store it will be advisable to create a situation in which we can control the surroundings as much as possible. To do this I would set up a staging area where we will be able to film these interviews using a long lens. This will enable us to capture intimately detailed shots of the kids speaking, while allowing the backgrounds to fall off to soft focus. Similar in style to what I did with the NAB film, I would also like to change the backgrounds slightly throughout — just to give this a bit of visual variety, which I think will ultimately add to its authenticity.

When first speaking to these kids, it might work better to have them in an area that isn't too busy or distracting. Somewhere that is off the beaten path that offers a little privacy would let the kids relax and engage in a one-on-one conversation. And that casual but very honest feeling is very important. We want to be able to see this question sink in and capture all the little nuances on their faces, and in their physicality, that are evocative of considering this choice between getting — or giving.

Kids are so wonderfully transparent. They wear their emotions on their sleeve, and these early moments of seeing them dealing with this moral choice can be absolutely compelling — and heartwarming. So, it's critical that we do everything we can to create an environment in which these moments are free to happen.

During these conversations, I'll want to establish the gift that they would love to get for Christmas. One of the things that intrigues me about this is that it's very likely that will be speaking to some people who really can't afford to get their kids everything they want — which will make these moments all the more moving. And we can explore that by asking the kids how many toys they have or think they might get for Christmas.

This offers us a perfect lead into asking if they know of any kids who don't get anything for Christmas — and how those kids must feel. We can follow that by asking what they would choose if they could pick any one toy in the store. Their responses can really make these moments, and those that come, amazingly powerful, and I want to make sure that we capture them as simply, intimately, and honestly as possible.

The Choice

After speaking with the kids, I'd like to film them interacting with items in the toy aisle, and selecting their toy of choice. Once they've found their toy, we'll come to that all important moment of choice by telling them they can keep that toy — or give it is a gift to a child who doesn't get that much for Christmas.

Although we didn't discuss this, I'm assuming that the kids who decide to keep the toy will actually be allowed to keep it...? It's something that I think we'll want to clear up, because the possibility does exist and we don't want to create any hurt feelings.

Regardless of that, I honestly feel that this moment of choice will have people absolutely riveted to the screen, and we want to be certain to give time for those moments to breath. We don't want to rush them. Chances are the kids will give it some thought... We want to let those moments play out, and linger on the thought process and the struggle that these kids might have to go through. And if they don't need to think about it all. If they decide to give another child their gift right off the bat — all the better.

As a way of personalizing this — which I always think helps — we might consider having some photos of kids or families that benefit from Walmart's *Fill The Truck* program. It's not something that we discussed during our call, but if these kids could see others who are in need, I think it would help them feel more willing and happy to give. We certainly don't want to be manipulative, and it's not something that we wouldt include in the finished film. But it's something to keep in mind.

For those kids who decide to give, we can then take time to observe them taking the toy or gift they've chosen to the *Fill the Truck* bin — while making sure that we have cameras there to capture those moments of actual giving in all their beautiful detail.

The Post Giving Interview

My honest feeling is that seeing these kids making this decision to give — and then actually giving — is going to bring tears to people's eyes. And I feel like it would be cheating the audience to leave before giving people an opportunity to enjoy the looks on these kids' faces, the smiles, the hugs from their parents, the reactions of others who might be in the store, and even a few comments about how this makes them feel.

As a way putting a metaphorical ribbon on this, we can finalize each moment of giving by asking each child what they would like to say to the kids who receive their gift. Just capturing a simple “Merry Christmas,” a nice little “Hope you enjoy your gift,” or an “I love you,” can provide us with a wonderfully simple and beautiful series of moments to bring this film to and end.

Summing up...

This is exactly the kind of project that I would love to be involved in. It's a wonderful message that can be so simple, so innocent, and yet so profoundly moving and meaningful. It's focus is on the inherent goodness of children. It's a beautiful way of illustrating that Walmart cares. And my hope is that this will be the first step of an open and collaborative partnership that will help in bringing this to life.

Thanks again for thinking of me, and I look forward to speaking with all of you further.