

A balloon for grandma

One day last week Leo and I set off on a hunt together to find St. Patrick's Day cards. We didn't have much luck. The dollar store was out of them - though we found some irresistible foam swords. Then we headed over to a card store. Their St. Patrick's Day card selection was sparse, and we found ourselves looking at their other Irish items instead.

"Maybe we should get a pair of shamrock socks for Grandma," I said.

"No, she already has some," said my 4-year-old son. "And those are very expensive."

We settled on a plastic "Kiss me, I'm Irish" necklace and took it to the cash register.

As the salesclerk was ringing up our meager purchase, she offered Leo a free balloon. She meant one of the latex balloons. Leo's eye, of course, went immediately to the Mylar ones.

"I like the rainbow one," he said, pointing to one covered with shamrocks, a rainbow, and a pot of gold.

I hesitated. We didn't need a St. Patrick's Day balloon - or any balloon, for that matter - but we were headed to Grandma's house to pick up Daniel, and it might be nice to bring one to her.

"Maybe we could buy it for Grandma," I said. "She might like a balloon."

Leo paused to consider.

"No, Grandma won't like that one. She'd like that one because she likes pretty flowers."

And Leo pointed to a balloon I hadn't noticed and never would have chosen. It was probably designed for a 1960s-themed party, with colorful pink and orange flowers and a prominent peace sign in the center. The salesclerk saw my face and started

pulling out other floral balloons – all of which were lovely, if a bit bland. Leo stood firm. He wasn't insisting that we buy Grandma a balloon, but if we bought one, it had to be that one.

“And it needs an orange ribbon, because Grandma likes orange.”

Who am I to question my son? He spends more time with my mother than I do. At Christmas when I ordered a book-shaped cake pan for my sister and it arrived, Leo told me that it was just what Grandma wanted. We gave it to her – and he was apparently right. And besides, she would know the peace-sign balloon wasn't my choice – but her grandson's.

So I shrugged, handed over a few dollars, and we carried the balloon out to the car.

When we got to Grandma's house, we gave her the balloon. And Leo was right. She loved it. It wasn't a handful of wilted dandelions or a crayon drawing of his favorite train, but it was Leo's gift to her, given with her in mind and because he knew she liked pretty flowers.

