

What we found when we went birthday gift shopping

If ever there were an aunt who deserves to be celebrated, it's Aunt Shai. She gives her nieces and nephews her undivided attention, plays with them for hours, reads to them, and teaches them how to make up stories with their toys.

So even though it wasn't clear that she wanted to be celebrated on her birthday, we were determined to celebrate her. We set out to find a gift.



Our boys love to shop, but mostly because they like to pick out things they want. So I was firm with them. We were going shopping for Aunt Shai. We were not going to buy anything for ourselves.

They accepted that rule. But then we walked into the store. There were Pokemon cards and toys. There were books on every topic you can imagine—Transformers and World War II and all their favorites.



Still, we kept moving. And we found ourselves in the blank book section because, after all, who doesn't want a blank book for her birthday.

We picked one out for her, but then something caught Leo's eye—a book where he could write [letters to his future self](#).



Then his brother spotted a blank book with Pokemon characters on the cover. He wanted to start a diary. Please, please, please, could he start one?

And we stood in the aisle while I tried to decide what to do.

We were there to shop for Aunt Shai. We were not there to buy presents for ourselves. But I had two children telling me they wanted to start journaling. They wanted to write. Maybe, just maybe, they were about to begin to learn how to understand their experiences by embracing writing. It felt sort of like when Daniel

begs me to buy blueberries in the store. Why wouldn't I say yes?

Call me a sucker. I couldn't resist the opportunity to open this door to our children. We added the boys' choices to my pile, picked up a couple other items for Aunt Shai, and headed to the register.

They were so excited that they couldn't wait to get home to start writing. They found pencils and started putting down their thoughts as we drove.

"Mama, how do you spell family?"

"How do you spell forget?"

"How do you spell China?"

I've never seen them this excited about writing. And even though I've been told that I'm not allowed to read what they write, I am hoping that ultimately their writing will help them learn more about how to express their feelings.

And that's sort of a gift to Aunt Shai—or at least to me. Because now I get to watch our children discover the joy in finding the right words to tell their own stories.