

## Buy Nothing and get one free!

December 2009

As the rising floods closed in around the Burren last weekend and all roads to Gort were under water, I staggered home with a car full of supplies and locked myself away from the howling winds and pelting rain which promised nothing good. I cranked up the record player, baked some gourmet bread and visited the neighbours, forgetting all about my plan to go to the cinema and start the Christmas shopping. Seventy two hours later I haven't budged from my bunker, haven't driven the car anywhere and haven't spent a peso on anything. It feels damn good. Along with my discovery of a new way to survive the recession, my sudden change in consumer behaviour has warmed me up for the annual Buy Nothing Day (BND) event which occurs this Saturday, November 28th.

BND started out in the USA in 1993 as an antidote to the shopping frenzy which marks the build up to Thanksgiving Day but since then countries like Sweden have embraced it on a national level, with many shops closing for the day to reflect on our addiction to buying things we don't need. BND is a symbolic response to the onslaught of consumer capitalism which targets us in our beds (radio ads), blights the open fields of the countryside (billboards), and even gets inside our postboxes (junk mail), urging us to buy something, anything, preferably useless and which will be quickly forgotten and replaced. The challenge behind Buy Nothing Day is to see if we can go about our lives for a whole 24 hour period without buying anything. It may not sound that difficult but if you watch your pockets for a week, it quickly becomes apparent how each day brings a steady sucking sound as petrol, coffee, treats, newspapers, parking and foodstuffs drain our wallets and keep us busy working to keep the consumer beast alive. If you have children, the spending pressure is even greater but kids also enjoy a challenge and once they get the gist of the game they tend to join in with gusto.

At a previous BND event in Galway, participants celebrated with a barter fair at the One World Centre in which people were invited to bring something along to swap. There was complimentary tea and biscuits and a ceremony to rename the doomed Shop Street while the festive atmosphere prompted people to chat and get to know each other. This year organizers are planning an even bigger event with street theatre at 1pm, (watch out for the zombie shoppers), film screenings at the Social

Space (5pm, Middle St) and a spontaneous picnic along the pedestrianized zone formerly known as Shop St.

The impulse behind BND does not have to disappear after Saturday and the end of shopping does not imply the victory of Scrooge over Christmas. Organizers have encouraged people to think differently about gifts, offering 'vouchers' for a personal massage, a homemade dinner for two, a walk in the hills or a dozen hugs. A young friend of mine, Grace, makes the best calendars ever seen, all from her own drawings, creating a work of art which has become the most sought after Christmas gift in the Burren. The campaign to send appropriate and useful gifts to other nations, (Trocaire) in lieu of gifts to loved ones, shows how a little planning on our part can go a long way in benefitting people who really could use some unusual consumer items. The mad shopping frenzy which characterized the Tiger years, in which size and price became more important than mindfulness and compassion, may well be in decline.