

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1993

Asking For A Little More In The Season Of Giving

It really is all about giving, this season when we celebrate the birth of the ultimate gift.

There are many in our community who can gratefully say that it's not just a holiday phenomenon, this willingness of neighbors to rally for others who need their help.

Just ask the family of Detective David Crocker, or baby Brett Flaccavento or little Jessica Clemmons, the two-year-old born without eyes.

Ask Amanda Scoggins, the Supply teen whose legs were crushed and later repaired after a school bus accident in March.

Or every client of Lower Cape Fear Hospice, or the hundreds of families who have received a little help from neighbors they don't even know, through the Brunswick County Volunteer and Information Center.

Ask the children treated to toys and shoes and coats and a special restaurant meal, courtesy of groups as diverse as a loosely organized group of motorcyclists and the Fraternal Order of Police.

Or the rape victims of Bosnia, taken on as a project by a group of Brunswick County women who knitted and sewed baby blankets and clothes, filled "ditty bags" and wrote checks to send to a safe home operated by an apolitical North Carolina missionary ministry.

Ask the residents of the Mississippi River floodplain who, through the efforts of a local woman, received boxes of goods from Brunswick County givers to replace some of what they lost in the summer's devastating floods.

Or every adult or child treated to the gift of learning through a volunteer literacy tutor. Or any hospital patient or nursing home resident who had a volunteer stop by for a game of checkers or a chat.

Ask any woman who found shelter and comfort at Hope Harbor Home.

There were dozens more efforts through churches, clubs and individuals, serving thousands more people in need. These are simply the ones that got attention and that come to this writer's mind.

As the season of giving reaches its peak and the new year approaches, we wish for that generous spirit to spread, to find its way into our politics, race relations and even into our own homes, where it is sometimes lacking the most, despite our willingness to express kindness to strangers.

It's a lot to ask, and much too much to expect, but that's the beauty of the Christmas season. It makes us feel obliged to hope, to replace our cynicism with at least momentary faith.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shalotte School Bell Choir 'Remarkable Joy'

To the editor:
 Have you heard the bell choir from Shalotte Middle School under the direction of Mrs. Atheda Lusk-Watson? If not, you have missed one of the remarkable musical joys of the Christmas season.

My wife and I were delighted by this talented, well-trained group of 7th and 8th-grade students recently when they performed at Seaside United Methodist Church. After they had played several selections, one man in the audience exclaimed, "Does your school know how good you are?"

As a former public school educator I've heard many musical performing groups at this grade level, but none better. This bell choir is an excellent example of what young people can accomplish under the guidance of an exceptional, dedicated teacher who is given the resources and time she needs to do her work.

Congratulations to each of the students, to Mrs. Watson, the Shalotte Middle School and the Brunswick schools.

Richard Good
 Sunset Beach

'Sanity At Stake'

To the editor:
 (Brunswick County Planning Director) John Harvey put together a noise ordinance bill. It was presented to the commissioners to be acted on at the Aug. 16, 1993, meeting.

I strongly support the noise ordi-

nance bill. I am not alone in my feelings about noise pollution. Something must be done about the unreasonable noise in Brunswick County.

I live in a senior citizens' mobile home development in the Seaside area. Sometime in November, a sports club and bar was opened in this area. The band starts to play at 9:30 p.m. until 1:30 a.m. The place of business is 120 yards from my mobile home.

Needless to say, my sanity is at stake because of the unreasonable noise.

With this in mind I would like to know what the status is on the proposed noise ordinance. I was informed it was tabled at the Aug. 16 commissioners' meeting.

Tom Singleton
 Seaside

(More Letters, Following Page)

Write Us

We welcome your letters to the editor. Letters must include your address and telephone number. (This information is for verification purposes only; we will not publish your street/mailling address or phone number.) Letters must be typed or written legibly. Address letters to:
The Brunswick Beacon
 P.O. Box 2558
 Shalotte NC 28459
 Anonymous letters will not be published.

The Christmas That Shouldn't Have Happened

Here's a different kind of Christmas story. It's tragic and grisly and, in a perversely comforting kind of way, it serves to remind us that despite all appearances, the world isn't going insane. It's always been that way; maybe it's part of the grand plan.

It was Christmas Day 1929 and blood stained the snow at the Lawson farm at Germanton, a community on the Forsyth-Stokes county line north of Winston-Salem. Before the sun would set, eight people would be dead in an act of insane rage, the kind of behavior we too often mischaracterized as a post-1960s phenomenon.

There were no Christmas decorations and no gifts in the Lawson farmhouse that holiday. But a week before, 43-year-old Charlie Lawson had taken his wife and eight children to Winston-Salem to buy them new clothes and have a family portrait made.

If you saw that photograph without knowing what Charlie did, perhaps you wouldn't notice the tentative look in the eyes of the Lawson family. Perhaps you'd mistake it for the stoic expression common in photographs made back when people had to sit still without even breathing to have their picture taken.

Charlie Lawson cracked on Christmas Day 1929. Sometime in the early afternoon he chased 12-year-old Carrie and 7-year-old Maybell through the snow with a rifle



Lynn Carlson

and a shotgun. He shot Carrie in the head and Maybell in the side, then battered their heads until they stopped moving.

He shot his 37-year-old wife Fannie through the heart as she stepped onto the front porch to bring in some firewood; then he shot his 17-year-old daughter Marie.

He crushed the skulls of his babies—4-year-old James, 2-year-old Raymond and 4-month-old Mary Lou.

Relatives who stopped by after a hunting trip later that day would find the bodies of Fannie and four of the children inside the house. The other two would be discovered in a tobacco barn, where Charlie either chased them from the house or placed them after an ambush.

Their corpses were arranged in a ghastly gesture of affection, their hands folded, eyes closed and heads resting on rocks.

As the horrific news spread to neighboring homes and farms, Charlie Lawson paced in a circle in the snowy woods, working up the

nerve to shoot himself in the chest before he was caught.

By the time investigators and undertakers started moving the bodies down the icy hill on a makeshift sled toward the waiting hearses, the curious and incredulous had begun arriving on the scene. One onlooker scooped up a handful of snow laced with Fannie's blood.

Over kitchen tables and in newspapers across North Carolina, and then the country, neighbors and strangers would try to figure out what sent a sober, reliable tobacco farmer around the bend that way.

Folks remembered that Charlie had accidentally struck himself in the head with a mattock the year before and had complained of headaches and acted weirdly for a while afterward. His autopsy reported no evidence of the wound, but indicated some low-grade degeneration in the middle of his brain.

Another possible motive stayed a secret for almost 60 years until Charlie Lawson's niece revealed it. Seventeen-year-old Marie was pregnant with her father's child, and her mother had found out. The niece speculated that Charlie killed his family and himself to avoid the disgrace.

The immediate family's only survivor was 19-year-old Arthur, who had gone to town to buy shotgun shells when his papa started shooting.

The eight dead Lawsons were

buried in a mass grave Dec. 27 after a funeral which was reported to have attracted 5,000 mourners and gawkers. The caskets were left open so that the crowd could view the bodies. The infant Mary Lou was lying in her mother's arms.

Even more people showed up at the murder scene than the funeral. And they just kept coming, day after month after year, in such numbers that Charlie's Uncle Marion began charging 25 cents admission for each visitor. He did so for four or five years.

Marion's defenders said he wasn't being opportunistic; people were trespassing, trying to steal things, and the surviving son Arthur needed help paying off the debts his father left.

The killings soon inspired a song, "The Murder of the Lawson Family," and in 1990 a book, *White Christmas, Bloody Christmas* by M. Bruce Jones and his daughter Trudy J. Smith. Jones was 8 and living in nearby Jamestown when the murders took place. He remembers being afraid his own dad would snap.

The story was brought to me by a Holden Beach resident who grew up near Germanton. He can remember his teacher making him sing "The Murder of the Lawson Family" in class when he was 11 or so.

"Don't use my name," he asked, mindful that even 64 Christmases later, he knows people who'd prefer that the story never be told again.



Carolina Christmas

A Biker Makes A Difference In His World

Next time you feel like there's not much one person can do to make a difference in the world, consider what Jerome Munna accomplished in just two-and-a-half weeks.

Jerome has a sign business in Supply. He also has a big, shiny Harley-Davidson motorcycle that he likes to take cruising down the highway on nice, sunny days. Sometimes he goes alone. Other times he joins other bikers for a group ride (commonly known in cycle circles as a "run").

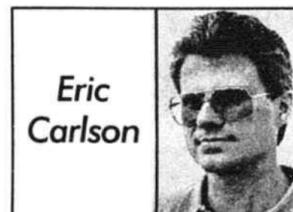
We motorcyclists are like that. We all carry around wonderful mental videos of solitary rides through wonderful places:

Just you and your rumbling machine, watching the world go by, scanning the scenery, smelling the smells, feeling the little pockets of warm and cool wind as you pass from sunlight to shade. Experiencing things you never notice in a car.

On the other hand, most motorcyclists also like to ride in huge traffic jams. As long as none of the vehicles have more than two wheels (with allowances made for sidecars and trikes).

The only trouble is, the non-riding public sometimes gets unsettled by the sight and sound of a few hundred motorcycles rumbling past with riders clad in heavy boots and black leather and their faces hidden behind helmets and dark glasses. (All of which are very handy in a 60 mph wind or an unscheduled encounter with the pavement.)

Years back, in an effort to improve their image, motorcycle clubs across the country started having charity "runs" to raise money for



Eric Carlson

worthy causes. For some reason, the annual Christmas "Toys For Tots" drives, frequently co-sponsored by the U.S. Marine Corps, became the most popular.

Right around Thanksgiving, Jerome Munna got to thinking that he'd like to ride in a toy run this year. He knew they had one in Florence, S.C., and Wilmington and was making plans to go when his friend Tina Holden posed a simple question.

"Why don't we have a toy run here?" she asked.

Most guys would have shrugged their shoulders and said, "I don't know." But Jerome took it as a challenge. He rolled up his sleeves and said, "Yeah. Why don't we?"

He started calling local bikers. They liked the idea and called others. They started calling local businesses to look for sponsors. They also liked the idea and agreed to donate money. A graphic artist friend offered to design a T-shirt to raise more money.

Jerome got in touch with the Brunswick County Department of Social Services, where he learned that about 25 local children would be spending Christmas in foster care this year. The DSS folks had never heard of a toy run, but they liked the

idea and agreed to see that any proceeds got into the hands of those in need.

In no time, Jerome found himself holding the handlebars of a major fund raising effort. Throughout Brunswick County and beyond, bikers came out of the woodwork to offer their support.

"I met people from all over the county that had bikes," he said. "I found out that my exterminator owns a Harley. I never met Thurman Gause before. He gave us a lot of help arranging for traffic control and got a lot of his touring bike friends involved."

As the day of the ride approached, enthusiasm for the toy run snowballed. Businesses from all over donated door prizes for the riders. Mickie's Doughnuts in Shalotte agreed to open on Sunday to provide free coffee and a base of operations. Lowe's in Southport asked that the riders stop by to pick up more toys.

Then Sunday morning arrived, bringing the coldest temperatures since last winter. With the mercury barely touching 40 degrees, the riders knew that, at 55 mph, they would be facing a wind chill factor of about 3 billion degrees below zero.

But still they came, 33 bikes carrying about 50 riders and passengers. Some had toys and stuffed animals strapped to their handlebars. Others gladly paid their \$10 contribution. Most kicked in another \$8 for a T-shirt. In all, more than \$2,000 and numerous toys were donated.

The ride went as smoothly as can be imagined. Officers of the Shalotte Police Department, the Brunswick County Sheriff's Department,

the Southport Police and the N.C. Highway Patrol stationed themselves along the 65-mile parade route and allowed the long line of bikes to pass unbroken through the intersections.

It was a cold and cheerful crowd that assembled in the Wal-Mart parking lot after the run. The foster children who came to meet the group ran from bike to bike, inspecting the polished paint and shiny chrome pipes. They swarmed over Jerome's pickup truck as he reached over the side and put toys into eager little hands.

Then each child was paired with a biker for a \$100 shopping spree. They ran eagerly up and down the store aisles loading up shopping carts while their chaperones tried to keep track of the totals (and the battery requirements). The store manager set up a special cash register to give the kids a discount on their selections.

The chill of the ride quickly faded in the warmth of the moment as the riders watched their efforts bring a little extra joy into lives those children.

"I've never been said 'thank you' to so many times in my life," said Jerome. "It really opened up and warmed a lot of people's hearts. It just goes to show that you don't need to go somewhere else to help someone. You can do it right here."

"We were all touched by it and I think everybody gained something. I know I don't need anything more for Christmas."

Perhaps not, Jerome. But you deserve at least one more "thank you." And another wish for a Merry Christmas.

Worth Repeating...

Glory to God in the highest, and earth peace, good will toward men.

—Luke 2:14