



PHOTO BY BILL FAVER

TAKING STOCK at Christmas might help us appreciate our place in the natural world.

## Taking Stock At Christmas

BY BILL FAVER

We usually think of the New Year as the time to assess how well we did in the past year and to think about what we want to do in the year to come. Or we think of January 1 as the annual date to take a business inventory and see how we stand. Maybe we are missing some of the real meaning of Christmas if we fail to "take stock" at Christmastime!



FAVER

Start by thinking about what Christmas memories you have and what Christmas means to you. What are the traditions you feel are a part of the holiday season? How do you like to celebrate? Do you want an intimate closeness with those closest to you, or do you crave being around lots of people? What music do you like and where do you find it? Do you expect too much at Christmas, when our fond memories of childhood and loved ones might tend to make us sad rather than joyful?

We can "take stock" at Christmas by thinking about the real meaning of a season that for many has become a commercial extravaganza. Does the gift of Christ as Christmas mean anything in our daily living? How does it affect the way we do business or the way we treat our neighbors? Do we want to share because of what has been given to us and done for us?

Has Christmas anything to do with how we treat our natural world? Do we try to understand the necessity for saving habitat or preserving wilderness to share with other creatures and other humans? Or do we only look at what profit might be there for us?

A deep understanding of the Christmas story will lead us to see the need to care, and the need to share, as we seek to live in this special place. We can "act out" the Christmas story not only by staging a pageant in our churches, but by trying to live the kind of lives revealed by the Babe in a manger. Taking stock at Christmas might help us put ourselves in perspective and might make us better persons for the coming years.

## Music Opens Hearts To Wonder Of Christmas

For most of us, music does magically "soothe the savage breast" within.

This time of year I'm especially grateful for that small miracle.

The season has a noticeable effect on people. Most of us are nicer to each other. We tip better, we gripe less, we volunteer more readily, we smile more often, we give more generously. If it could only be Christmas all year round...

However, we may also cry more, become angered more easily and strike out and hurt the very ones we love, sometimes because we can't do or be all we think they expect of us.

December can turn into a giant merry-go-round, one we don't seem to know how to slow down or stop. It keeps whirring us about, faster and faster, going nowhere. Piling up all around are all the things we feel we need to do and want to do—our regular obligations plus holiday gift buying or making, baking, writing, visiting.

Sometimes it gets a little overwhelming, especially for the families whose budgets and wish lists are



Susan Usher

far, far apart, or who are experiencing other stresses and strains. The holidays are also difficult for those far away from loved ones, those who are juggling pieces of families broken by divorce, or for whom the holiday is a time of renewed mourning of the loss of a spouse or other loved one, or even a job.

Christmas is too precious to lose in the middle of all this.

We can step back and pause long enough to set priorities straight and unskew soured perspectives, making Christmas not only bearable, but the true joy and source of hope it was meant to be.

For you the key to keeping the joy in Christmas may be quiet time

alone, prayer and meditation, reading, worship or spending time with family.

All of these add to my joy in this season, but it is the music—religious and secular—that reaches me deep down inside, that unlocks all those hard spots and opens me to the full wonder of Christmas.

So that the music will be fresh, I make a point of not listening to it on the radio or elsewhere until about two weeks before Christmas. It's hard not to hum or sing my favorites at work (though they might prefer it to the coughs, sniffles and wheezings of my perennial December cold). But nothing stops me other times—on the road, at the dinner table, in the tub, even on the telephone.

Familiar songs like "Silver Bells," "Joy To The World," "Away In A Manger," and even The Chipmunks singing "I Saw Mommy..." bring back a slew of memories and set the stage for new ones.

May the music of the season help soothe your "savage breast" and usher in another Christmas season filled with joy and hope.

### GUEST COLUMN

## Giving New Meaning To 'Hope'

BY JOHN SELLERS

In the fast-paced life that we live today, it seems that each Christmas season brings more frustration as we all rush from store to store searching for just the right gift, finding just the right decorations for the tree and planning for just the right party.

Somehow, in the midst of all this frenzy, we have forgotten what the celebration of Christmas is all about. The birth of a child almost 2,000 years ago has been pushed back into the back of our minds as we scurry about "getting ready."

We see manger scenes large and small, wooden, ceramic and plastic, and remark, "How cute; I'll buy one for the mantle." But we really imagine how a poor couple felt that night when they were told to sleep in a barn? Can we share the dismay that they must have felt knowing that their child was to be born

among animals in a cold stable with nothing but a manger to lay him in?

I am sure they were surprised when visitors called on them before they had a chance to "decorate the tree and cook the turkey."

Some of the visitors had no money with which to "run to Wal-Mart and pick up a little something," but they came anyway, because Angels had told them about this, and a star had led them. Others, more wealthy, came and shared a portion of their wealth instead of buying some snack.

How many of us today would travel this far into a strange land to see a baby whose parents were so

poor that he was born in a barn instead of a comfortable hospital? "Get real," we would say. "There are only a few shopping days left and, besides, we haven't bought him anything yet."

Webster defines hope as "a feeling that what is wanted will happen; desire accompanied by expectation." Just maybe, if we all would "desire and expect," the feelings of peace and joy that we experience at Christmastime would last throughout the year, and these feelings would give new meaning to the four-letter word "hope."

John Sellers lives at Sunset Beach.

## Happy Holidays

Our offices will be closed at 3 P.M. Friday, Dec. 24. We will re-open Tuesday, Dec. 28



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### MORE LETTERS

## Best Gifts For Children: Education, Encouragement And Opportunities

To the editor:

The Christmas and New Year's holidays are times for gift-giving, reflections on the past and commitment to the future. The best gift a parent can give a child is a good education.

We can't all be superstars in mathematics, science, music or sports but we can earn a respectable living if we are given adequate preparation by our parents, teachers, role models and life experiences. As parents, we like to appear to our children to know everything and to be able to solve all problems. In today's complex world we cannot possibly meet that expectation but fortunately there are others to help us.

What we can do as parents, grandparents and friends of children is to encourage education, reward good performance and provide opportunities for learning experiences. Most of the time, being a cheerleader for learning is more important than being able to help with algebra homework. Students and their teachers respond to interested parents.

Despite the fact that we are busy providing for our families, we must take time to get involved in our children's education. Talk to them about what they are doing in school, reinforce the relationship between education and a job, be a "cheerleader" for your children's education, volunteer to help in schools, attend parent conferences and other parent/teacher meetings and contact teachers if your child is having academic problems.

Have a merry Christmas and enjoy the new year with a fresh commitment to the education of our children.

Wayne Hanson  
N.C. Science/Math Alliance  
UNC-Wilmington

### Hardball Politics

To the editor:

Phew! And just in time for Christmas the super-melodramatic conflict between Brunswick County hysterical citizens and the Martin Marietta people has reached an apparent denouement, thanks to hardball politics behind the scenes.

Suddenly there came an official report from Carolina Power and Light Company listing threats to the safety of the nuclear plant operations guaranteed to scare the bejabbers out of anybody. But surely CP&L officials, if concerned, would have (like the good neighbor they are) notified MM many weeks ago before the citizens got hysterical.

Then an engineer on the public payroll of Wilmington contacted the State Commissar for mining and alleged that the potential harm to rare plants and archaeological sites was sufficient to deny permission to mine limestone.

Doubtless this opinion was produced after some arm-twisting, but since no such restrictions on land use appeared in deed or by legislation, such a decision would be *ex post facto* law. And the pundits tell us Communism is dead!

Only one thing remains to be done by the politicians who rode into the fray on white horses to save

their constituents from the evils of private enterprise. They need to pass a law prohibiting anybody from smelling a pole cat at five paces.

Karl E. Brandt  
Shallotte

### Good Samaritan

To the editor:

Isn't it good to know there are people who care and are concerned for one another, even in the busiest season of the year?

We want to express our deep appreciation to whoever found our envelope to be mailed to First Baptist Church, Ahoskie, last Tuesday morning in Wilson's parking lot and turned it in to the office at Wilson's; also to the lady in the office who called saying it had been found and we could pick it up.

It is people like this who make Christmas what it is really meant to be. We wish for you a merry Christmas and God's blessings.

Mylan and Ruby Pressnell  
Supply

### Liked NRA Letter

To the editor:

I wish to congratulate and thank Eric Carlson for sharing with us his letter to the National Rifle Association in the *Beacon* dated Dec. 16.

His letter points out many truths that are being distorted and covered up by the national media. Gun-grabbing politicians are lying to us; they are doing everything they can to disarm law-abiding citizens, especially any and all automatic weapons. (This is) the very weapon that people need to defend themselves against a government that no longer upholds the supreme law of the land, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights of we the people.

One good example of government agents violating American law happened in August last year when Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agents murdered two members of the Randy Weaver family in northern Idaho. They shot Randy's 14-year-old boy in the back

while he was running away from them. Then they shot Randy's wife in the head while she was nursing her newborn baby, killing both instantly.

The whole story can be found in the November 1993 issue of *Hunters* magazine. Read it and weep.

Thanks again, Eric, for sharing your letter with us. I could not have said it better myself.

W. H. Stanley  
Calabash

### More Punishment

To the editor:

I think John Carlisle's theory about more prisons reducing crime is ridiculous. He has given us facts and figures until they come out of our ears but doesn't come close to the real problem.

What is needed is more severe punishment to deter crime.

For instance, how many times do you see a murderer get life and then get paroled in ten years or less? That's no deterrent.

How many are on death row for years and years? What we need is more capital punishment and fewer lawyers.

I'm for public hangings. Now this is a real deterrent.

This will make the criminals realize that crime doesn't pay. Then we will need fewer jails and more cemeteries.

Edward J. Boyer  
Calabash

### Enjoys Column

To the editor:

We always look forward to Thursdays when the *Beacon* brings Lynn Carlson's colorful columns. More than once we've come away from reading her work with a belly laugh or a tear in our eye.

She has a remarkable gift and we are delighted to share in it once a week. We live in High Point, but our hearts are at our beach cottage at Sunset.

Sharon and Todd Mommsen  
High Point

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## Season's Greetings

to all our two and four legged friends!

We thank you for your patronage and wish you the very best in the coming new year...

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