

# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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## The Hope Of The Season Can Live In All Hearts

*My soul, there is a country  
 Far beyond the stars  
 Where stands a winged sentry  
 All skillful in the wars:  
 There, above noise and danger,  
 Sweet Peace is crown'd with smiles,  
 And One born in a manger  
 Commands the beauteous files.*

Henry Vaughn wrote that soothing verse in 1650, and nearly three and one-half centuries later it as much as ever exemplifies the hope of the birth of Jesus Christ to believers throughout the world.

The modern American Christmas season has evolved into a time seemingly fraught with more frenzy and envy than peace and good will. It illustrates and sharpens the paradox that exists in man's willingness to share and his capacity to covet during this season that sends both charity and crime on the rise. Maybe it's all part of the grand plan that we have this annual ritual to remind us of the best and worst we can be—that where love and hope live, cruelty and desperation may always lurk but never flourish.

These days especially it serves us to keep close in our minds the imagery of the manger and its promise that children born in even the meanest of circumstances possess the potential to rise above. If, that is, we do our best to encourage more quickly than condemn, to contemplate as enthusiastically as we preach, to take responsibility when it's easier to blame, to realize that anyone's child is everyone's child.

Therein lies a balance to the evils that divert our attention from the good deeds and good souls who exist among us, who always have and always will.

May the hope of the season live in your heart.

## Welfare Reform Must Confront Welfare Reality

BY MICHAEL L. WALDEN

As welfare reform is being considered at both the national and state levels, most parties in the debate agree on three objectives for the welfare system:

- It is generally agreed the welfare system should:
- encourage work and eventual self-sufficiency by welfare recipients;
- encourage intact two-parent families; and
- encourage personal development and entrepreneurship by recipients.

The current welfare system doesn't meet these objectives. In fact, one could scarcely design a system that does more to discourage work, intact families and entrepreneurship.

Any reform to the welfare system will have to address the following disincentives in the current system.

Today's welfare system discourages work by recipients in three ways. First is the reduction in welfare benefits that occurs when the welfare recipient works more and earns more money.

Certainly we as taxpayers would expect welfare benefits to be lower for recipients who earn more money. But a typical welfare recipient in North Carolina will net only 35 to 45 cents for every extra dollar earned when the reduction in welfare program benefits is taken into account. These numbers are derived after taking into consideration the benefits from the earned income tax credit, and they imply a "implicit tax rate" for welfare recipients as high as that for the richest taxpayer in the country.

The second way the current welfare system discourages work is by the loss of paid child care when he recipient earns "too much."

For example, in North Carolina a single mother with two children will lose Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)-paid day care after a transitional period of one year when her earnings reach \$8,000 annually. At such earnings levels, this family would clearly be better off working less and continuing to receive state-paid child care.

The third disincentive is the loss in Medicaid benefits then the welfare recipient reaches a certain earnings level. Medicaid benefits will continue for a one-year transitional period, but after that, they are abruptly ended. Again, if the job doesn't provide medical benefits, clearly the welfare recipient can be better off not working and continuing to receive Medicaid.

Intact two-parent families are discouraged by today's welfare system by the "100 hour rule." This rule says that a two-parent household is ineligible for cash welfare payments (AFDC) if one of the parents works more than 100 hours per month, regardless of how much the parent earns.

The same rule is not applied to one-parent households. Obviously, this rule can encourage the breakup of the two-parent household in order to make one of the parents, along with the children, eligible for cash welfare payments.

Finally, the current welfare system does all it can to discourage frugality, self-improvement and entrepreneurship among welfare recipients. The system does this by imposing severe limits on savings and asset accumulation for welfare families.

For example, to be eligible for the cash welfare program (AFDC), a household can't have more than \$1,000 in savings and can't have a car worth more than \$1,500. This obviously, discourages welfare families from saving for college or other training, from developing a home business, and in rural North Carolina, it inhibits their access to jobs.

The reality in welfare today is that the system encourages recipient families to remain on welfare by making it unattractive to work, simply in terms of dollars and cents.

When welfare families look at the loss of program benefits and possibly the loss of child care and Medicaid when they work more, the results frequently clearly show that working more is not financially attractive.

Reformers of the welfare system will have to address these issues. Reformers can move in two possible directions.

They can make work more attractive by making welfare less attractive, that is, by significantly reducing welfare program benefits and/or limiting them in duration.

Alternatively, reformers can make welfare less attractive by making work more attractive, by reducing welfare benefits at a slower pace when recipients work more, by extending the transitional periods for child care and Medicaid, and by expanding asset and savings limits.

The debates over these alternative directions have just begun.  
 Dr. Walden is a professor and N.C. Cooperative Extension Service specialist in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics at N.C. State University. He is also a member of the Governor's Welfare Reform Task Force.

# Of Red Christmas Bows And Refuge

This time of year, she made red bows.

The machine, which looked something like a film projector, was positioned directly in front of "As the World Turns," "The Secret Storm" and "The Edge of Night"—the "stories" my Aunt Nora watched faithfully, though never idly.

She was busy competently dispensing with hundreds of household tasks and making Christmas package bows, one at a time—not the stick-on type but the old-fashioned kind with a clear plastic pin you pushed through the wrapping paper and lid of your gift box.

It was piecemeal she did for a local department store.

The machine held spools of half-inch-wide red ribbon the diameter of a record album. First you loaded the pin and locked it in. Then you worked either a wheel or a treadle—I can't remember which—to impale lengths of ribbon on the pin in per-



Lynn Carlson

fect little arches. When the bow was big enough, you cut the ribbon with scissors, unlocked the pin and dropped the completed bow into a big cardboard carton.

The empty spools were stacked on a table. She must have been paid by the spool.

My sister and I would beg for a turn at the machine and were happy to relieve Aunt Nora so she could go about making cornbread and warming up steaming bowls of vegetable soup we'd canned from the garden

last summer. I'd feign illness to leave school early, knowing I'd be taken to her house and get a real lunch, be fussed over and bragged on for mediocre piano-playing, allowed to drink coffee with as much milk and sugar as I wanted until my parents could leave work and come for me.

If I really were sick, I'd be propped on the sofa to watch the stories, with a box of tissues and a bottomless glass of ginger ale in crushed ice while she waxed floors, fried chicken, did laundry on an old wringer washer.

She was always home, never seemed to mind that she never learned to drive. In fact, I don't think I ever heard her complain about anything.

She was a reassuring voice during the scary times when the parents were just stretched too thin—when my sister became very sick in the second grade and there was a dread-

ful brief time when the doctor thought she might have leukemia. When my mom had surgery. When two grandparents died within six months of each other.

She was there every Christmas, beaming along as my sister and I were given our first bicycles, Barbie dolls, Beatles records, panty hose and sets of car keys. On Christmas morning, we'd call her before daybreak to say what Santa had brought (as if she didn't know) and to tell her to come over and see.

The memory of her is strong this time of year, but I don't grieve. Here in the '90s, when we shuttle our young from pillar to post to accommodate our career demands and lifestyle whims, I'm grateful to have had not only a loving immediate family, but a wonderful refuge and role model in Aunt Nora.

I'm blessed to have stood in her sunshine and made red bows with her.



## Good Police Work Deserves Recognition

Ronald Hewett, Brunswick County's new sheriff, is going to great lengths to establish an atmosphere of professionalism in his department. Drop by there any time (24 hours a day) and you can smell it in the air.

There is a new coat of paint on the walls. Smoking is no longer permitted in the workplace or the jail. New phone lines are being installed. The communications officer behind the front desk now wears a uniform.

Hewett's own office has been repainted, carpeted, decorated and rearranged, with his desk and chair facing directly toward the hallway door. Once past the new security entrance, the first person a visitor will see is the man in charge.

Another of Hewett's plans for encouraging top-notch police work is the creation of a special awards program to recognize officers when their efforts go above and beyond the call of duty.

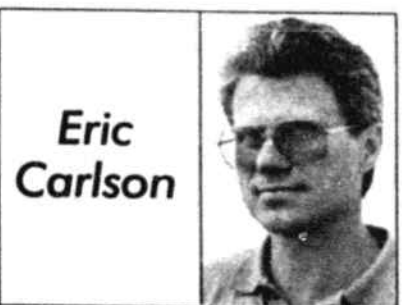
I have a nomination for the first Brunswick County Sheriff's Achievement Award: Detective Tom Hunter.

Last week, for the first time in at least 50 years, a Brunswick County jury imposed the death penalty in the trial of Daniel Cummings Jr., whom they found guilty of first-degree murder in the cold-blooded killing of Ash store owner Burns Everett Babson.

The prosecution wrapped up its entire case in less than nine hours. The defense had no case to present. Cummings convicted himself with his own words, in a series of statements made voluntarily after his arrest in Sampson County—statements made to Detective Tom Hunter.

"Without those statements, we wouldn't even be here," defense attorney Michael Ramos told the jury during his closing argument. "There's no evidence. Without his statements, they've got nothing."

District Attorney Rex Gore freely admitted there wasn't much of a case against Cummings without his statements. No eyewitnesses who could identify him as the murderer. No fingerprints. No gun. Just a few local folks who saw him driving a white Ford van around Ash that night.



Eric Carlson

Without those statements, Cummings might have gone free to kill again. There are strong indications that he would have. Police believe Cummings brutally beat an 80-year-old woman to death during a burglary in Red Springs two days before he came to Ash and killed again.

Authorities have a good case against Cummings in that murder, too because of statements he made after his arrest—statements made to Detective Tom Hunter.

Because of Detective Hunter's efforts, the family of Burns Babson saw justice work swiftly and effectively last week, the way we all want to see it work, but rarely do.

I remember a Sunday night phone conversation with Hunter less than 48 hours after the murder. He told me about processing the crime scene that Friday night, witnessing Babson's autopsy in Jacksonville on Saturday and having his first conversation with Cummings in Clinton early Sunday morning.

"He's definitely our boy," Hunter said.

Cummings had been arrested Saturday afternoon on larceny and drug charges. With almost nothing to go on except a suspicious vehicle, Hunter had issued a seemingly futile radio broadcast to be on the lookout for "a white van, driven by a white male, direction of travel unknown."

He was returning from Jacksonville late Saturday night when Sampson County Sheriff's Deputy Everett Jones remembered hearing the bulletin and notified Brunswick authorities about a theft suspect he had just arrested in a white Ford van.

Hunter immediately changed course for Clinton. He listened to enough of a Red Springs police officer's interview with the suspect to send him rushing back to Brunswick

County with a mugshot of Cummings.

Sunday morning, Hunter prepared a photo line-up and showed it to witnesses in Ash. They identified Cummings as the man in the van. The next day, Hunter and SBI Agent Janet Storms drove back to Clinton.

There, Red Springs Police officers were trying to persuade Cummings to talk about the old woman's murder. But he kept avoiding the subject, giving a rambling account of hanging out with fellow crack cocaine users, including a fictitious friend named "Joe." When the police pressed harder, Cummings began to clam up.

In Hollywood's typical "good cop, bad cop" style, Hunter presented himself to Cummings as a guy he could talk to. Instead of hounding him further about the old woman's killing, Hunter asked Cummings about "Joe," offering the suspect a chance to admit his involvement in the crimes while shifting the blame to someone else.

After several hours, Cummings finally took the bait. He told Hunter and Storms how he and "Joe" drove to Ash. How "Joe" killed the old man and took his money. How "Joe" also fired shots at Babson's wife.

He told the officers details only the murderer could know.

The next day, Hunter interviewed Cummings again, offering him a chance to clear his conscience. Hunter remembers saying, "Look,

Daniel. We know there's no Joe. Don't you want to tell us what really happened?"

In that statement, Cummings admitted entering Babson's store, demanding money, "hearing" four shots, taking a wallet from the body and shooting at Babson's wife. He didn't confess to everything. But he said enough.

"Later that night, Daniel Cummings told SBI agents who were working with Brunswick County detectives on the other homicide, that he was ready to talk about the lady in Red Springs," says the report filed by their officer, Detective E.B. Smith.

Again, Cummings didn't actually admit beating 80-year-old Lena Hales to death. But he confessed to breaking into her home the night she was murdered.

There is more to effective law enforcement than making arrests and obtaining confessions. Next, you must assure the judge that proper legal procedures were followed. Then you have to convince the jury.

Hunter was an impeccable witness, speaking directly to jurors and carefully describing the bloody crime scene, his interviews with witnesses and his conversations with Cummings.

The results speak for themselves: Two murder cases solved. A killer facing the death penalty. That's good police work.

## Worth Repeating...

■ The man who in the view of gain thinks of righteousness; who in the view of danger is prepared to give up his life; and who does not forget an old agreement however far back it extends—such a man may be reckoned a complete man.

—Confucius

■ Decay is inherent in all component things! Work out your salvation with diligence.

—The Pali Canon

■ He who is of a calm and happy nature will hardly feel the pressure of age, but to him who is of an opposite disposition youth and age are equally a burden.

—Plato