

Men No Longer Seriously Try To Curb Wives' Christmas Spending

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Page 13

MERTZON — Some wise hombre — I believe it was either Walt Whitman or Walt Disney — once said it was much more comfortable to receive than to live constantly on the brink of going to receivership.

Regardless of which Walt it was, he had a timely message for today's Christmas shoppers.

Naturally, if the old sage was smart enough to pour out wisdom like this, he could also have told us that not even a U.S. Health Department pronouncement that red and green wrapping paper kills on contact would deter the zeal of women's attack on modern retail outlets.

Ever since Charles Dickens created Scrooge, the epitome of hard-heartedness, husbands who were disinclined to go caroling in the snow at sight of a stack of charge slips that would bankrupt General Motors have been scorned. They were cast out by every facet of society except bankers. The latter, being notoriously critical of Dickens, have long praised these captains of their own ships and, best of all, have awarded them with unlimited credit.

There was a time when a male could employ a number of techniques to keep his wife from single handedly creating a Christmas boom.

Among the most popular was a one-man dramatization titled "The March to the Poor Farm." This emotional skit was patterned after the Cherokee Indians' March of Tears, which took place over a century ago. As a rule, the act was highly effective in making the wife recall that a few sections of grassland with a mineral potential of two water wells producing five gallons per minute would not yield adequate income to jump the national consumer's buying index by a full point every Christmas.

When the march ceased producing the desired effect, husbands began feigning heart attacks to divert their mates' attention and prevent them from investing next year's lamb crop in every type of gift from a velvet pin cushion to a 14-karat ink eraser box.

But this strategy was never too successful, as the patient couldn't consistently play the role of a coronary case. He was unable to convince his spouse that he suffered seizures only when confronted with stacks of debts that the latest Irish Sweepstakes winner couldn't cover, and could then, in the next minute, be well enough to accept an invitation to an all-night hot tamale and cocktail party.

Failure of the tragic march and fake heart attack gave rise to other ploys, none very successful. Fainting was popular for a time. Some men grew so proficient at passing out at the mention of a few hundred dollars spent on an Oriental bedside wrist watch rack that medical experts couldn't tell if the sufferer was playing possum, had been drugged, or was merely stupefied by beverage alcohol. This was understandable; doctors never have been able to determine precisely which type of unconsciousness was taking place because the male holiday celebrant's physical condition is generally at such low ebb it defies diagnosis.

Man no longer battles to keep Christmas spending under control. Oh, he may occasionally bellow and shout, but for the most part he bears in silence the strain of knowing that his financial life blood is being spilled in mortal quantities.

Perhaps it's just as well that old Walt's words are unheard or forgotten in the clamor and din of modern Christmas. Christmas is the time for giving, not philosophizing or economizing.