

January 4 1973

The Shortgrass holiday season was marked by the good times of 1972. Citizens piled into the stores to buy presents. Goodwill flourished everywhere. Hombres who wouldn't buy their lame grandma a walking stick were observed in a very charitable humor.

The main part of my Christmas shopping was ended in 1950. When I married my Indian wife. I stopped making the necktie and handkerchief circuit.

Indian women like to Christmas shop more than the whiteeyed models do. Large crowd violence stirs the wildness that still lingers in them. The more frantic the mayhem becomes, the more they like it. Kids bawling and tires screaming is as near as they can come to the days of battle dances and warpath get-togethers.

The only gift I had to get was for my wife and she made that decision easy. One evening when I came in from the ranch, she'd stuck her grandfather's scalping knife in the picture of a dress from a mail order book.

Husbands say all the time that they have a hard time remembering to buy their wives a present. If they'd contract for an Indian woman. their memory gland would become the most active part of their body.

She's been pulling her knife more lately than ever before.

The other night we had company for supper. In the course of the meal, I just mentioned that turtles 'grew' shells softer than the biscuits we were eating. What I was thinking of was those old soft shell turtles that once abounded along the rivers.

Before I'd finished the word "biscuit" she'd jabbed a long thin boning knife right through a piece of bread.

The room got so quiet that her tomcat grew self conscious of his breathing. I had to hum three verses of an Indian version of "Happy Birthday to You" before she was calm enough for me to knock the breadplate off the table. I don't have to add that the guests didn't stay for dessert.

Women seem to get more upset during the holidays. I don't know how many hombres I saw being led from punch bowls by one ear. It seemed every time a group would get a bowl properly surrounded, a wife would show up and break down the circle.

You could feel the tension over the wire service. On Christmas Eve, I called an old compadre of mine that I hadn't seen in three months. For no reason, his wife told long distance that she was the downstairs maid. and that the family was moving to a mining camp in the northern part of Alaska.

As I said, it'd been three months since I'd even seen her husband. Zoologists say that a mean tempered elephant doesn't bear a grudge for over six weeks. She must have started

an overall policy of announcing they'd moved. I don't think any wife ought to stay mad for more than 60 days at a time.

But as I started out to tell you, the people were in a generous humor. An old boy peddling Christmas trees said he was so overcome by the spirit that after Christmas he was going to donate all his left over trees to the church.

Unless that was merely a tax dodge, it's touching to know that a man will flat give away everything he has left to sell to the church. In this age of rank commercialism, people like that salesman should be given medals.

When Christmas did arrive, what I've been telling you about passed out of sight. The day dawned as lovely as every other Christmas morning. Sunrays spiraled across a blue-grey horizon. A stillness reigned as if all man's frustrations had been dissolved in the night.

The stage was set for Him whose birthday we never can properly celebrate. All our pettiness seemed forgotten and forgiven.

I wish that dawn had never ended.