

Gift Shopping By Any Other Name Would Still Stamped A Husband

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If pedestrian and automobile traffic don't wreck the streets and sidewalks of San Angelo during this season's Christmas rush, the remains of the city should outlast the ruins of ancient Rome. People and cars are thicker than boot camp sailors around a tattoo parlor. Spain, in her grandest day, never fielded a matador who could dodge the onslaught of females tearing in and out of the stores.

By custom, my wife is allowed the privilege of doing the actual shopping for our family. I tag along merely to arbitrate in head-on collisions and scowl at sunny-faced credit managers. We decided a long time ago that a mother of eight kids had so much more leisure than the father that it would be unfair for him to assume additional responsibilities.

Also, by the time I do the chauffeuring, direct the clerks with the packages to the car, and loose-herd the younger children, I've done my share. Just standing on the sidelines in department stores is enough to wreck the nerves of a veteran subway conductor. And it's tenfold easier to work cattle all day than to pass from the foyer of a store to the rest room. In fact, the strain of negotiating the main entrance is sufficient to knock over men half my age.

The hubbub of Christmas does some strange things to shoppers and their escorts. Forty-year-old men get to looking as if they were ready for the Old Folks Homes. Sprightly young brides often fall to pieces worse than a hostess in a seaport saloon. With my own eyes I've watched some mighty bronco eight-year-old boys transformed into fairly manageable individuals.

The shopper's judgment seems to be affected first. For example, late yesterday, out at a supermarket, I witnessed an incredible scene:

A county agent was trying to pick out a Christmas turkey. He'd back off and eye the frozen birds. Then he'd pick one up and judge the back and legs. Finally, he had to summon a young clerk to make the decision.

Now ordinarily this fellow is a virtual archive of advice on how to select and prepare every type of holiday food from baked gander pie to stringless reindeer pudding. For years he has been delivering expert counsel on how to do everything possible to a turkey. His comments on turkey has alone would fill a large section of a comprehensive cookbook. His treatise on freezer burn should someday win him national fame.

Yet there he was, so exhausted from following his spouse through the crowds that a barely-whiskered lad had to choose his turkey.

Two aisles over, a banker's wife was equally disturbed. She was throwing groceries in her wagon with the wild abandon of a hot check writer. The pressure of the season had made her forget how her husband felt about spending money, especially his own. It was all I could do to keep from interfering, and I am yet worried about her fate.

Here in the Shortgrass Country we do have a lot of reasons to celebrate Christ's birthday. I guess the Maker wishes we would live in some other land where it didn't take so much time to look after us, but if it ever bothers Him in the least, He never shows it.

So, regardless of the rush and bustle, it's only right that we try to find some way to repay the One who has done so much for us.

Merry Christmas!