

Thursday, December 23rd, 2004
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

CHRISTMAS REMEMBRANCES

We all certainly need a little break from serious issues during the holidays. I can look back on a number of memorable Christmas holidays. Family. friends, too much rich food,, wonderful holiday music, and a celebration of a special event. Oh but there was one Christmas. Just two years ago. It was memorable alright. In a sad but special kind of way.

My friend Sam Hanna up in Ferriday, who publishes several northeast Louisiana newspapers and is the dean of political writers in Louisiana, annually repeats a Christmas column he wrote many years ago. He eloquently describes a quail hunt when he was quite young. The following in my Christmas message written while I was away at Oakdale in 2002. The memories are bitter sweet.

**December 25, 2002
Christmas Day
DAY SEVENTY-TWO
Federal Prison Camp
Oakdale, Louisiana**

NOTES FROM FEDERAL PRISON

Christmas—away from home. No matter how short my sentence (six months) and how supportive family and friends have been, it is still hard to be away from home during Christmas.

The Browns have traditionally opened up our home on Christmas Eve as the neighborhood Christmas parade passes by. Numerous friends always stop by to warm themselves and stay for holiday cheer. Our tree is loaded with gifts, lots of extra gifts, for neighbors and other friends who visit. But for me—not this year.

Gladys and James will spend Christmas morning with me and we will share a holiday meal out of the vending machines. (I always tell my visitors to bring lots of quarters.) My daughters are spread out, spending their holidays in New York, Birmingham and Argentina. All the rest of the Brown family will gather in Shreveport, then down to see me over the weekend.

I asked my four children this year to make a donation to a charity they like, instead of sending me a gift. There is certainly nothing I need, and no sacrifice on my part. Perhaps it could become a wonderful family tradition in the years to come.

I'm told each of the inmates will receive a Christmas socking later on today filled with candy. But other than this small acknowledgment, it will be just another day here at the prison camp.

Irving Berlin wrote my favorite Christmas song in 1942. Perry Como's recording made it a Christmas standard.

*I'll be home for Christmas,
You can count on me.
Please have snow and mistletoe,
And presents on the tree.*

*Christmas Eve will find me,
Where the love light gleams.
I'll be home for Christmas...
If only in my dreams.*

* * * * *

And finally. I am including a Christmas poem brought to me by one of the inmates a few days ago. Christopher Thompson is a quiet, introspective fellow from a small town outside of Jackson, Mississippi called Forrest. The New Orleans Saints star running back, Deuce McAllister went to high school with Chris in Forrest. Chris certainly expresses my feelings—I wish I were home for Christmas.

The best of holiday wishes to you and your family during this special time of the year.

Peace and justice to us all.

Jim Brown

The Absent Christmas

*Christmas is a day our family holds dear,
Sorry, I'll miss you all this year.
I will celebrate this day alone,
It brings happiness, then is quickly gone.
Our family tradition runs deep,
Being absent causes me to weep.
Family gather holiday supplies,
Preparing for young ones to rise.
For what you have done all honor is due,
Because things are different from what we once knew.
Completing the meal, you have the call,
To promptly attend the big and small.
At the table you sit down,
Shaking your head with a smirk, then a frown.
The family bows their heads to pray,
Our meal is always blessed this way.
Around the table each fills his platter,
But the look on your face, What's the matter?
In years gone by I was with you to share,
But this Christmas Day, I am not there.*

*I still give thanks unto the Lord,
Not for gifts or any reward.
I will be there in a little while,
Enjoy the holidays with a smile.*

Christopher Thompson