

CHRISTMAS

Christmas is time for helping others

While flying home from Ottawa to be with my children for the holidays, I reviewed my previous Christmas columns and re-discovered one which sums up my feelings for this holiday season, and so I thought a reprint would be appropriate.

Christmas signifies a special time for family. Like the long trek undertaken by three wise men over 2,000 years ago, family members travel great distances to get together over the "holiday season". Unfortunately for many in our overly commercialized, consumer-driven society, there seems to be more emphasis on Santa Claus than on celebrating the birth of Christ. This in itself is not necessarily all bad. If people come to understand it really is "better to give than to receive" through exchanging gifts and knowing the joy of giving, then undoubtedly a great lesson will have been learned.

For me, Christmas is definitely the one time of year to count our blessings. Just to be fortunate enough to be Canadian, or even merely to be here, safe from war, starvation or persecution, is more than enough reason to give thanks.

One of the more rewarding aspects



MP REPORT

by JAY HILL
Reform Party
Prince George-Peace River

of my job is coming into contact with so many new Canadians, recent immigrants who are overjoyed to be in Canada, especially at this time of year. Meeting them, and listening to what they've endured, constantly restores my appreciation for our country. Despite all the problems and unresolved issues facing us today, I'll never tire of repeating that Canada remains the best country in the world!

However, we must still remember there are those in our midst who need our help. No matter how small your individual effort, reach out whenever you can to those less fortunate. You can make a difference in someone's life this Christmas.

It doesn't have to be something big or expensive. It can be as simple as offer-

ing to carry groceries to someone's car. Or perhaps you could take your small children down to a local seniors centre to visit with those who don't have grandchildren of their own. It would surely bring a smile to many a face. You could shovel the driveway for a neighbour up the street, or deliver a Christmas hamper to a family where the income earner has been unexpectedly laid off. Or you can take clothing, toys or other items to the Salvation Army or other charity organizations. If you are filled with the spirit of giving, you will find something special to do to make someone's day a little brighter.

Since it is Christmas, and appropriate to be giving thanks, I would like to express my most sincere appreciation to all of you who have supported me over

the past five years. Many days in Ottawa, far from home and family, your phone calls, letters and faxes conveying words of encouragement brightened an otherwise frustrating day.

Thank you.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the newspapers in our constituency, which carry this column. Some have unfailingly done so from the very beginning, and this has allowed me to keep you informed about my perspective on the important issues facing Canadians.

On behalf of myself, my children and staff, I wish you all a very merry Christmas, and may the spirit of this special day be yours to enjoy and share all year long.



May you enjoy all the best of the season, with those near and dear to you. It was our great pleasure helping you find your way home!



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Heroic act lingers in memory

TORONTO — Shortly before Christmas last year, Victor Crawl saved a small boy from almost certain death on a Toronto subway train.

The event has resonated with him ever since.

He still thinks about how traumatized the boy and the brother who was with him must have felt, Crawl says, conscious of his own violent childhood.

And he still thinks about the positive aftermath of the rescue — the instant celebrity status that suddenly gave Crawl a platform from which to spread a message of goodwill.

"I think it brought the city together," he says of the public interest that lasted throughout the Christmas season.

"On some of the television shows I was on, teachers and university professors were calling in and saying things like, 'Our man-in-society class has been discussing this for the last two weeks.'

"This is an inspiration. Some of these kids are formulating ideas about what they might do in this situation."

The drama began four weeks before Christmas Day, shortly after 4 p.m.

Crawl, 30 at the time, stood waiting for a subway train at St. Clair West station. He was heading home after being laid off from his seasonal job as a parks-maintenance worker with the City of Toronto but was feeling optimistic.

In his spare time, Crawl pursues a singing career and had just finished the video to a new song he had independently recorded, called Save Me, about stopping urban violence.

When the train arrived and the doors opened, Crawl spotted an emergency.

He saw a man inside the car struggling to force open the track-side doors. With him were two small boys, both screaming, tears rolling down their faces. "We'll go together. Come on, we'll go together," Crawl heard the man say.

Crawl ran directly towards them. "As I got to them, the man was literally throwing the youngest boy out the door," he recalls evenly.

"I caught him literally in midair. Then the man grabbed me from behind — I was half outside the car — and tried to shake the boy out of my hands."

Crawl screamed for help.

The boy was dangling over an electrified rail that would have electrocuted him if he had fallen. Until that moment, Crawl says, other passengers were either running off the train or sitting in their seats, staring.

The first to respond was Melvin Murchie, a screen printer by trade, who grabbed the offender from behind, allowing Crawl to pull the child to safety.

Quickly, others pitched in. Bela Vados, a recent economics graduate, pressed the emergency strip, alerting police. Ann Marie Keating, a psychology student, guided the children off the train to the platform.

Then the man tried to throw himself onto the rail.

"I was still half outside the car, and Melvin and I were struggling with him," Crawl recalls.

Finally, the police arrived and subdued the man. Crawl started to walk away when he heard somebody say, "Hi, Victor."

"I looked into (the offender's) face for the first time and realized I had gone to church with him," Crawl says. "We were in a youth group together."

The man turned out to be Michael Smith, 31, later described by police as a "jobless drifter" who had been diagnosed 13 years earlier as a schizophrenic.

He had lived in the same public-housing complex as the boys, had become friends with the family, and had picked up the boys from school that day without permission. Police charged him on two counts of abduction.

The boys were James, 5, the one almost thrown onto the tracks, and his brother Jordan, 6.

Their father, Peter, was unemployed at the time and their mother had died two years before. The boys told police that Smith had said he was going to kill them.

"There were a lot of psychological leftovers," Crawl says. "The boys were concerned they had done something wrong and got him in trouble."

Crawl knows about psychological leftovers. His quick response to emergencies, he says, comes from a hyper-awareness honed in the terror of his own childhood.

"Being slow to respond could mean anything from missing out on dinner to getting a cheap shot in the head," he says.

Crawl was born in Kingston, Jamaica. His father abandoned him when he was 10 months old. His mother left for Canada when he was three.

When he was six, she returned for him, moving to the notorious Jamaican-immigrant neighbourhood at Toronto's Jane and Finch streets.

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