

Lifestyles

Nip holiday season stress in the bud now

To prevent blowing the budget, remember that relationships aren't made or broken on the strength of a gift-wrapped box.

By **IRENE GENTLE**
The Champion

For a holiday that started with an emphasis on things Heavenly, Christmas can sure feel like Hell.

Big bills, blown budgets and ballooning expectations can lead to big-time stress during the Yuletide season.

To take a breather from the hustle and bustle, registered social worker and private counsellor in psychotherapy Elayne Tanner recommends focusing on acceptance along with the traditional giving and receiving.

"We have to accept ourselves the way we are, and accept our family for who they are," said Ms Tanner.

That means don't think your family will act like something out of a Hallmark card if they more closely resemble those found on a daytime TV talk show.

"If you've never gotten along with them before, don't expect this is the time you're all going to get along perfectly," said Ms Tanner. "And decide how much time can you spend with these people and still stand them."

Leave problems behind

Then don't spend the day trying to air dirty laundry. "This probably isn't the time to deal with all the issues," advised Ms Tanner.

To prevent blowing the budget, remember that relationships aren't made or broken on the strength of a gift-wrapped box.

"Don't be competitive," said Ms Tanner. "If you're going to compete to be the best sister or daughter, you're going to be over budget."

Also know that overloading offspring with gifts won't heal old wounds.

"You're not going to make up for your whole life of hurts by making your kids happy at Christmas," said Ms Tanner.

"People can still be well-adjusted and live well without every toy on the block."

To keep things simple, keep the holiday in perspective. That means everything doesn't have to be perfect.

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ELAYNE TANNER

Buy dessert instead of making it. Delegate tasks such as vacuuming, cooking or gift-buying to someone else.

"Everyone wants to have the Martha Stewart Christmas, but Martha Stewart spends her whole life doing just that," said Ms Tanner. "That's her job. It isn't what she does after her job. And she has a staff of hundreds."

Since most people don't, it's important to book some alone time to relax and rejuvenate.

"We often forget to allow time for ourselves along the way," said Ms Tanner. "We don't watch our diet, we don't make sure we get enough sleep. We don't make sure we exercise."

On the contrary, the holiday season can prompt some to drink too much, take too many pills or expend too much energy.

"Then stress has an easier door to get through because you're run down," said Ms Tanner.

"You're better off to take a bubble bath or go for a walk."

Keep open-minded

A fact sheet from the Halton Regional Health Department entitled Thinking of the Holidays? Stress!!! offered similar advice.

It suggested prioritizing what's vital to make this Christmas a success.

That means letting go of old expectations and even old traditions in favour of new choices.

Another way to de-stress is to give either time, money or food to someone who really needs it.

Ms Tanner suggests donating to a favourite charity in lieu of a gift to keep the true meaning of Christmas alive.

"You might want to remember the purpose," she said.

"If you're going to do this, you might want to remember the charitable part."

And reconnecting with a friend or family member who has been out of touch can also keep spirits soaring throughout the season.

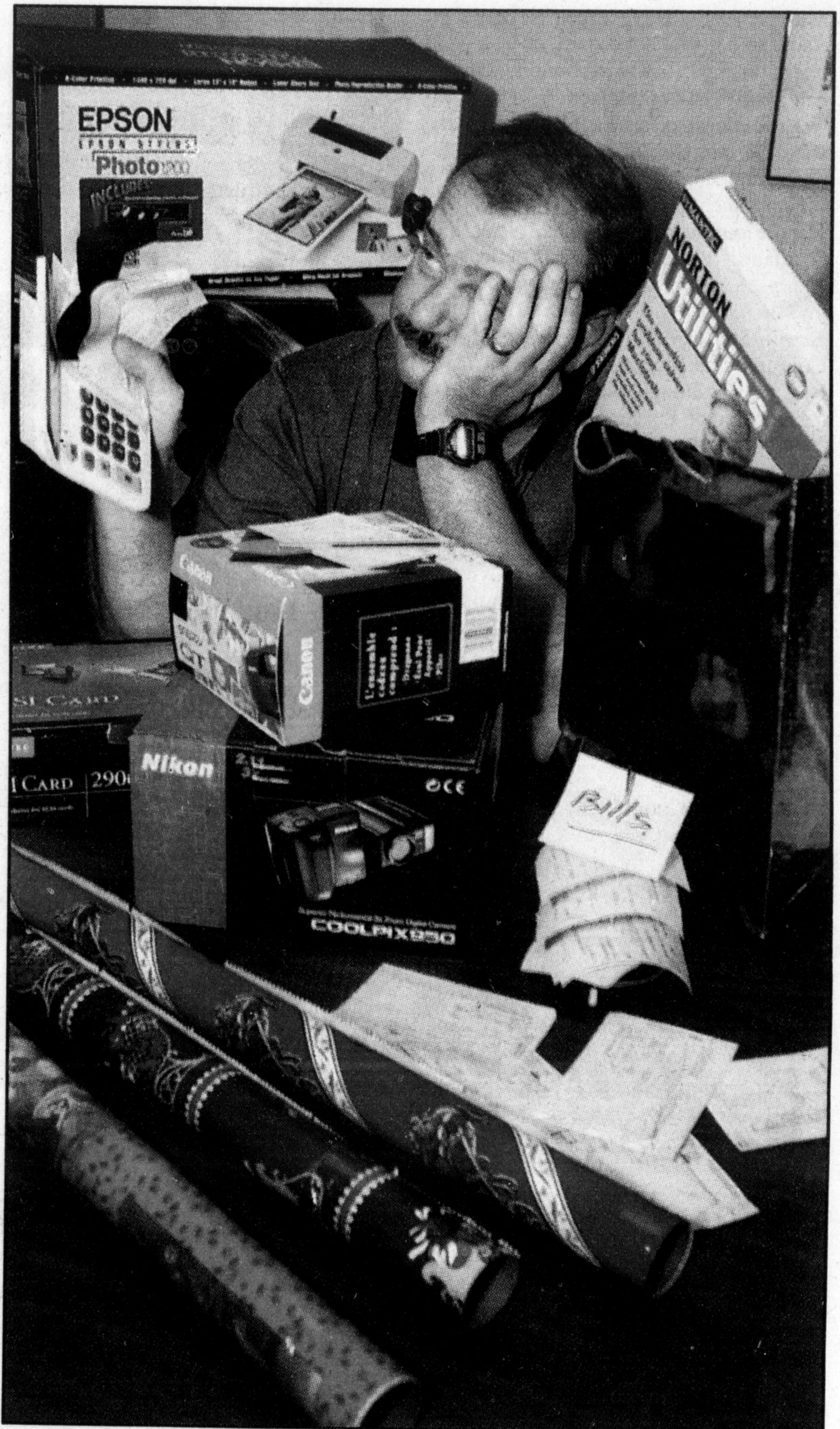


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Blowing the budget can lead to big-time stress during the holiday season.

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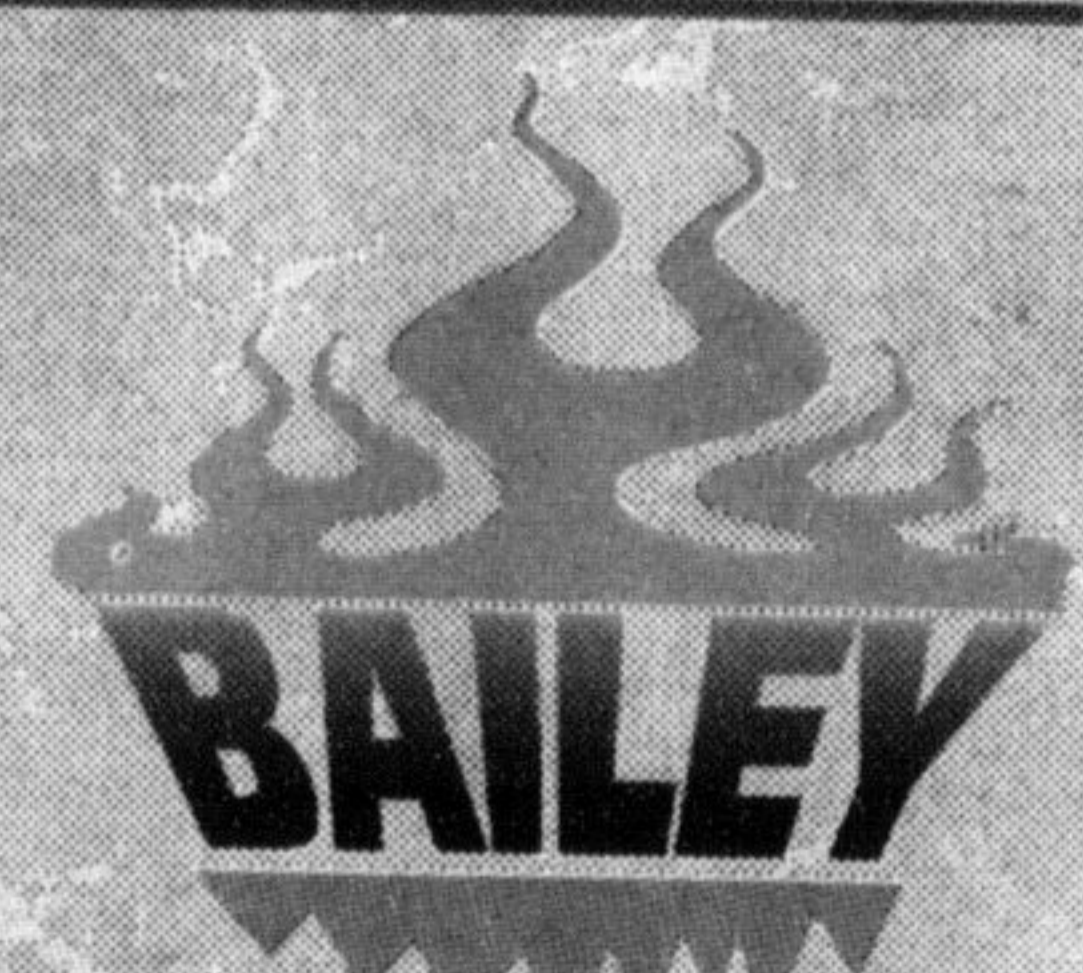
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