

## Memories of Christmas Past (Due?)

Aaah...January. The quiet time of the year. The hustle and bustle of the holidays is over, things have settled back into their normal routines, and Pam and I have a chance to catch our breath and relax a little bit. Of course January is also when the Christmas bills start coming in.

*Gee, thanks, Budget Guy! I was starting to get all mellowed out and then you had to go and remind me that I've got some pretty hefty bills coming in soon.*

But think of all the memories! When I go through our Christmas bills, it brings back memories of the gifts we bought and the special people we bought them for. So paying our Christmas bills is kind of like watching a "Highlights of Christmas" tape.

*Yeah, well, for me it's more like the "Horrors of Halloween." I'm dreading my credit card bills. I'm afraid to see how much my balances have grown. And the minimum payment has gone up on one of my cards, so this year it's gonna be a double whammy!*

Ah... you're one of the 60% of credit card holders who carry a balance each month. But just think of all the extra memories you will have when you go through your credit card statement! Not just Christmas, but also those dinners at all of those great restaurants last year, last summer's vacation, that cool MP3 player you had to have last spring (did you ever get that thing fixed?). I'll bet Christmas 2004 and maybe even Christmas 2003 are still on there, too!

*Get real! I don't remember all the places we ate out at last year, let alone WHAT we ate. Do YOU even remember what you bought for Christmas 2003 or where you ate last year??*

Nooo... but then I'm not still paying for those things, either. It just seems to me that since you're still paying for all those long ago purchases, and paying more than they really cost because of the interest, they must have been pretty special. So there must at least be some great memories there somewhere. If not, why

don't you do something about it so you're not in this same boat next year?

*Get real – there's no way I could get my credit card debt all paid off in just one year!*

Maybe, maybe not. Depends on how much debt you have and how badly you want to get rid of it. At the very least you could make a significant dent in it this year.

*Not unless you've got some great ideas. I've tried before, but it hasn't worked. I've pretty well given up.*

Don't give up! That just makes you a cash cow for the credit card companies. **Look, take it a step at a time.** First step? Stop using your credit cards. And you do that by dropping them all into a baggie, filling the baggie with water and then putting it into your freezer. That way you can still get at your credit cards if an emergency comes along, but they won't be sitting in your wallet tempting you when that big screen TV catches your eye while you're out shopping for school clothes for the kids.

Next, quit trying to make your money fit the lifestyle you *think* you'd like to have – make your lifestyle fit your money. You'll actually be much happier. For some help with that, take a look at "[Balance and Rotate](#)" from last October's newsletter (go to [www.SHPC.org](http://www.SHPC.org), click on "Adult Ministry" and then scroll down to "Special Items and Helps"). And while you're there, read "[Set 'Em Up and Knock 'Em Down](#)" and "[Swapping Interest Rates](#)" for strategies on how to get those credit cards paid off in the fastest and cheapest way.

So go for it! And when the bills come in next January, you'll have some great memories of what your debt used to be!!

Part of my job at SHPC is helping people get out of debt. It's free and it's confidential. Just call the Budget Guy, Allen Gunter, at 292-4035 or send an email to [BudgetGuy@SHPC.org](mailto:BudgetGuy@SHPC.org). And check out the Crown Financial Ministries Small Study Groups – call Margaret Fetty at 288-9034 for more information.