year since 1923. Each year, thousands of visitors come to visit the tree and to see the life-sized Nativity scene that even the Scrooges at the ACLU have been unable to dislodge.

On one occasion our National Christmas Tree was nearly darkened -- not by church-and-state lawyers, but by the nightmare of a nation at war. On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor. America entered the war and Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy declared war upon us. In those first days of the conflict blackouts were declared along the East Coast as American leaders feared the worst.

In Washington, too, a blackout was ordered. Our military and the Secret Service compiled a list of actions they wanted taken to protect the Executive Mansion and the Congress, including even the repainting of the White House in standard Army Air Corps camouflage. President Franklin Roosevelt resisted many of their recommendations, rightly sensing that they would seriously depress the indomitable American spirit. But one security demand made him bristle the most: *no Christmas tree on the Ellipse,* the agencies said, *it would be too obvious a target.*

But Roosevelt refused to give in, and on Christmas Eve, 1941, President and Mrs. Roosevelt stood on the south portico of the White House and threw a switch to light the National Christmas Tree, as a national radio audience tuned their receivers. In the midst of the blackout, the tree provided the only light for miles around. Beside the Roosevelts on the portico stood Winston Churchill, who had traveled secretly to Washington and arrived only that morning to encourage his American partners. That night, the British leader delivered a message that captured the essence of the symbol Roosevelt was defending in lighting the tree. Churchill spoke to (and for) all Americans when he said:

> *Let the children have their night of laughter ... Let us grown-ups share ... in their unstinted pleasures before we turn again to the stern tasks and the formidable years that lie before us, resolved that by our sacrifice and daring these same children shall not be robbed of their inheritance or denied their right to live in a free and decent world.*

Today, of course, the clouds of war are not gathered on every side. But Churchill's words, and the meaning of Christmas, retain all of their urgency. Sacrifice and daring are still needed in this fight, fought with words of persuasion and prayers of petition, for the right of our children and our grandchildren to live in a free and decent world. If I have any goal at the Family Research Council, it is to continue to frustrate the Scrooges and the nay-sayers by keeping the lights burning brightly on the Christmas trees of family, faith and freedom all throughout this great land.

Christmas truly is the feast of childhood. On this holy day, we mark the event where our God in heaven came to us as a child, with a message that we must come to Him as children if we want to see His face. The words of Teddy Roosevelt that I quoted at the beginning of this letter offer us another reminder of the meaning of our work in this life. Teddy was a remarkable president, but an excellent book about him called *A Bully Father* reminds us of the priorities that ruled his life even in the midst of political turmoil. Teddy Roosevelt placed his family first, no matter what the season.

His ardent devotion to conservation led him to refuse to place a freshly cut Christmas tree in the White House. But during his White House years he turned a blind eye when his sons carried a tree up into the residence and hid it in their closet. On Christmas morning, his letters to his children reveal, he rejoiced in the family custom of gathering in his and Edith's bedroom as the six children romped and peered into their stockings and opened their presents. These events recalled for TR "just such a Christmas" as he had known in his youth, and it was "just such a Christmas" he endeavored to reproduce exactly for his own family.

This Christmas season, I'm sure your family has its own traditions to relive, customs you seek to renew time and time again. It doesn't really seem to matter what they are: large or small, children remember and treasure each one. My prayer is that you will enjoy each and every moment that you have together.

For my family, Christmas will be particularly special this year. For a short while, life once again will be exactly as it was ... Carol and me coming down the stairs each morning to find all of our children under our roof. Our daughter Elyse will be home from college after a long semester. She hasn't chosen a major yet, but increasingly she feels drawn toward political science and law. On campus, she really enjoys her involvement in the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Our high school sophomore, Sarah, is learning to drive. In addition to that excitement, every Tuesday she and a dozen classmates gather at our house at 6:30 in the morning to pray and share their love for God and His Son Jesus Christ. Our son, Zachary, just celebrated his 10th birthday. He continues to grow in his faith, while he uses his God-given talents and abilities to play every sport possible. His soccer season just ended and basketball practice has already begun.

Now that I have filled you in on my family, it occurs to me that we would like to have an update from you, too. A few years ago, I asked readers of my monthly letter to send us a family picture and tell us about their family. We still treasure the pictures and letters we received. With permission, many of those letters and the incidents they relate have found a place in one of our publications, like *Reunion* or *Let Freedom Ring*, or in the military exhibit at our new location in Washington.