

# Making His List

The former governor of Arkansas talks about his favorite Christmas gifts.

**Your new memoir, "A Simple Christmas," avoids the subject of presidential races and your decade as governor of Arkansas in favor of earlier trials, like your fervent campaign as an 11-year-old to persuade your parents to buy you an electric guitar that you had spotted in a J. C. Penney Christmas catalog. What do you think of the gifts topping this year's lists? I am afraid to ask what they are.**

**Mostly electronics — digital cameras, iPods, video-game consoles.** I'm not against gifts that entertain, but I really believe that some of the most valuable gifts that we can give are the things that help us to develop a skill and be entertaining. I'm a strong advocate for music. I think guitars are wonderful. Keyboards — there are a lot of keyboards that are very affordable these days, and they're so versatile.

**What about a drum set, which can drive parents over the edge?** All the more reason for a kid to ask for it.

**I just read that the number of people who call themselves Christians in this country — 75 percent — has declined by 10 percent in the past 20 years, because more people are becoming atheists.** I would obviously like to see an increase, but if that decrease is reflective of authenticity, I'd rather see 75 percent authentic Christians than 90 percent in which half of those don't really mean it.

**Studies have found that the rise in evangelical Christianity is driving moderate Christians to abandon the religion altogether.** Interesting.

**Have you read Sarah Palin's "Going Rogue," which is sharing valuable space with your memoir on best-seller lists?** I have not. I have not had time to read her book.

**Could someone finance a campaign through book royalties?** Probably not. You'd have to be John Grisham to do that. A political race today, even a primary, is \$150 million. The whole political system has become obscene in terms of the absurd amount of money that is required to compete. Just



put it on ESPN and call it a sporting event. Let's quit kidding ourselves.

**You've received a public drubbing for a long-ago decision to sign a clemency order for Maurice Clemmons, who was jailed in Arkansas and who shot and killed four cops in Lakewood, Wash., over the Thanksgiving weekend.** It's disgusting that people want to talk about what are the political implications rather than what are the implications for four families who have had a senseless, tragic loss. It's a blame game. If I had quietly retired as governor in 2007 and went into banking or something of that nature, I would have been, at most, a footnote in the story and probably never mentioned.

**Chris Matthews, your fellow television news host, recently raised the possibility that you might be "Hucka-was."** Who cares what Chris Matthews thinks?

**Have you contacted the families of the slain officers to express your condolences?** I want to in the appropriate time, but now it's not the appropriate time. To do something for my sake would be selfish and boorish, and I don't think there's anything that I can say to them now that would make them say: "Oh, that's great, I'm so glad. That really solves it for me."

**Will you be going home to Arkansas for Christmas?** I may have to crawl through snow and broken glass, but I'll be there.

**Are you prepared to deal with Delta reservations agents, whom you describe in your book as robotic and unreasonable? You'd think they'd be nice to ex-governors.** What does give me cachet is not that, but the number of miles that I fly a year. There's a new designation that Delta is cranking up in January called Diamond, and it's for people who are so far above the Platinum status that they are going to put in a unique category. I qualify for that!

**I'm glad you've achieved supreme status in at least one realm of life.** You know, if you can't be president, by gosh, get to the highest level of frequent-flier rewards. ♦